



Pacific Fishery Management Council *NEWS RELEASE*

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RECORD LOW SALMON FISHERIES ADOPTED

SEATTLE, Wash – The Pacific Fishery Management Council today adopted the most restrictive salmon fisheries in the history for the West Coast, in response to the unprecedented collapse of Sacramento River fall Chinook and the exceptionally poor status of coho salmon from Oregon and Washington. The recommendation will be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service for approval by May 1, 2008.

“This is a disaster for West Coast salmon fisheries, under any standard,” said Council chairman Don Hansen. “There will be a huge impact on the people who fish for a living, those who eat wild-caught king salmon, those who enjoy recreational fishing, and the businesses and coastal communities dependent on these fisheries.”

The Council adopted a complete closure of commercial and sport Chinook fisheries off California and most of Oregon and allowed only a 9,000 fishery for hatchery coho only off Central Oregon. Salmon fisheries off California and Oregon typically have been large – involving seasons that span from May 1 to October 31 and averaged over 800,000 Chinook caught per year from 2000 to 2005.

“The reason for the sudden decline of Sacramento River fish is a mystery at this time,” said Council Executive Director Don McIsaac. “The only thing that can be done in the short term is to cut back the commercial and recreational fishing seasons to protect the remaining fish. The longer-term solution will involve a wide variety of people, agencies, and organizations. But for now, unfortunately, those involved in the salmon fisheries are paying the price.”

Fisheries north of Cape Falcon will also be severely restricted. Although Chinook quotas in this area are similar to 2007 and Chinook stocks are generally more abundant, depressed natural coho stocks are constraining access of commercial fisheries to Chinook stocks. Sport fisheries, many of which depend primarily on coho, are even more restricted. Coho quotas are less than 20 percent of the 2007 season for non-Indian fisheries and about 50 percent of 2007 levels for treaty-Indian fisheries.

Background

The closures south of Cape Falcon, in northern Oregon, are due to a sudden, unprecedented decline in the number of Sacramento River fall Chinook returning to the river this year. The stock is the driver of commercial and recreational salmon fisheries off California and most of Oregon. The minimum conservation goal for Sacramento fall Chinook is 122,000 – 180,000 spawning adult salmon (this is the number of salmon needed to return to the river to maintain the health of the run). As recently as 2002, 775,000 adults returned to spawn. This year, even with all ocean salmon fishing closures, the return of fall run Chinook to the Sacramento is projected to be only 54,000.

Social and Economic Impacts

“The salmon fishing culture that has been a cornerstone of the coastal communities has reached a low ebb point in 2008 for the collective three West Coast states,” said Mark Cedergreen, Council Vice Chairman. “This was the responsible thing to do, but it will hurt, particularly south of Cape Falcon, Oregon.”

The economic implications of the low abundance of Sacramento River fall Chinook salmon will be substantial for commercial, recreational, marine and freshwater fisheries. In California and Oregon south of Cape Falcon, where Sacramento fish stocks have the biggest impact, the commercial and recreational salmon fishery had an average economic value of \$103 million per year between 1979 and 2004. From 2001 to 2005, average economic impact to communities was \$61 million (\$40 million in the commercial fishery and \$21 million in the recreational fishery).

©The record low seasons are devastating news to beleaguered salmon fleets on the west coast. California and Oregon ocean salmon fisheries are still recovering from a poor fishing season in 2005 and a disastrous one in 2006, when Klamath River fall Chinook returns were below their spawning escapement goal. The catch of salmon in 2007 in these areas was also well below average, as the first effects of the Sacramento River fall Chinook stock collapse was felt.

Causes

The reason for the sudden collapse of the Sacramento fall Chinook stock is not readily apparent, although both natural and hatchery-produced fish have been similarly affected. However, it is clear that overfishing did not cause the depressed condition, as the parent spawning populations were all above the goal. The National Marine Fisheries Service has suggested ocean temperature changes, and a resulting lack of upwelling, as a possible cause of the sudden decline.¹ Many biologists believe a combination of human-caused and natural factors will ultimately explain the collapse, including both marine conditions and freshwater factors such as in-stream water

¹ http://swr.nmfs.noaa.gov/news/030308.salmon_decline.final.pdf.

withdrawals, habitat alterations, dam operations, construction, pollution, and changes in hatchery operations.

The Council has requested a multi-agency task force led by the National Marine Fisheries Service's West Coast Science Centers to research about 50 potential causative factors and report back to the Council at the September meeting in Boise, Idaho.

Process

The Council reached this decision after several weeks spent reviewing three season options. The review process included input by federal and state fishery scientists, fishing industry members, public testimony, and three public hearings in coastal communities. The Council received additional scientific information and took public testimony before taking final action. The decision will be forwarded to the National Marine Fisheries Service for approval and implementation into federal regulations.

In addition, the coastal states will decide on compatible freshwater fishery regulations at their respective Commission hearings.

Press Packet and Briefing Materials Available

A press packet with contacts, background information, a map of affected areas, and acronyms is available on the Council website at http://www.pcouncil.org/newsreleases/sal_presspacket.html.

Council Role

The Pacific Fishery Management Council is one of eight regional fishery management councils established by the Magnuson Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 for the purpose of managing fisheries 3-200 miles offshore of the United States of America coastline. The Pacific Council recommends management measures for fisheries off the coasts of California, Oregon, and Washington.

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On the Web

Pacific Fishery Management Council: <http://www.pcouncil.org>

Options for 2008 salmon management:
<http://www.pcouncil.org/salmon/salcurr.html#saloptions08>

Schedule of hearings: <http://www.pcouncil.org/events/2008/salproc08.html#hearings>

Geographical points used in salmon management:
<http://www.pcouncil.org/facts/geosalmon.pdf>

Online press packet: http://www.pcouncil.org/newsreleases/sal_presspacket.html