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**TWO FISHING PLANS, PRODUCED UNDER NEW FEDERAL GUIDELINES, WILL ALLOW LIMITED HARVEST OF PUGET SOUND'S CHUM, CHINOOK**

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), an agency of the Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), has accepted two fishing plans that allow Washington State and all 17 Puget Sound treaty Indian tribes a limited harvest of Hood Canal summer chum and Puget Sound chinook salmon. Both fish are protected under the federal Endangered Species Act. The harvest will be allocated to both recreational and commercial fishermen.

The plans, written by the state and the tribes, will be in effect until at least April 2003. They have strict limits on how much salmon can be taken and require Washington and the tribes to carry out what the federal fisheries agency described as "crucial" sampling and monitoring.

The plans affect well over two dozen runs of Puget Sound chinook and summer chum returning to Hood Canal and the Strait of Juan de Fuca. Puget Sound chinook make up by far the largest single group of federally protected salmon.

"What we have here is a strategy that benefits both fishers and fish," said Donna Darm, acting regional administrator NMFS in Seattle.

Darm said the plans' strict harvest limits, along with the wealth of information that will come from the state and tribes over the next two years, will help fishery scientists better understand the sound's salmon populations and improve the fishes' chances of recovery.

"Our most important obligation is to protect these wild salmon, especially when they're returning to spawn and every adult fish is crucial," Darm said.

Because the plans' harvest rates take into consideration the number of adult chinook and chum not just in the sound but those that have traveled all along the West Coast, including Canada and Alaska, every salmon fishery is accounted for, Darm said.

"This is a remarkably enlightened approach to salmon management," Darm added. "It's broad; it's comprehensive; it's progressive."

Fishery scientists said the plans allow hatchery-fish harvests to be maximized, as long as acceptable targets for wild fish, which sometimes intermingle with the hatchery stocks, aren't exceeded. The scientists estimate that new harvest rates for wild fish will actually be cut 30 to 50 percent, compared to previous years, because managers have better information on the size and reproductive potential of wild populations.

The plans are a result of the agency's more progressive approach to how the Endangered Species Act is implemented, the fisheries service said. Under a set of regulations - known as 4(d) rules -- put in place earlier this year, exceptions can be granted to the federal law's general prohibition against killing or harming protected salmon if the approved activity makes a contribution to salmon conservation.

The agency has encouraged states, tribes and local entities to produce conservation plans that will take advantage of the new rules. Such plans, when approved, can simplify fishing permits, integrate efforts to recover salmon and substantially reduce red tape, the agency said.

Copies of the plans can be found at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov>.