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NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
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Commerce Secretary Gary Locke Extends 2008 Disaster Declaration Due to Poor Salmon Returns

Locke to Release \$53.1 Million in Disaster Funds to Aid California, Oregon Fishing Communities

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke said today he was extending the 2008 West Coast salmon disaster declaration for California and Oregon in response to expected poor salmon returns to the Sacramento River, which have led to management reducing commercial salmon fishing off southern Oregon and California to near zero. Locke also announced that he would release \$53.1 million in disaster funds to aid fishing communities.

“Salmon returns are expected to be near record lows again this year. The extension of the disaster declaration will ensure that aid will be available to affected fisherman and their families to help offset the economic impact of the closure of the commercial fisheries,” said Secretary Locke. “These funds can also aid fishing-related businesses, such as ice and bait suppliers, who may struggle with the financial effects of the closure. “

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) will formally adopt the Pacific Fishery Management Council’s full recommendations, made in April, halting virtually all commercial salmon harvests off the West Coast south of Cape Falcon, Ore. A recreational coho fishery and a limited commercial fishery will be allowed off Oregon. Salmon season formally begins May 1.

NOAA’s National Marine Fisheries Service will work with the states and the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission to distribute the \$53 million in remaining salmon aid from last year’s \$170 million Congressional appropriation to help fishing communities affected by the poor returns. Based on the economic impact, of the remaining \$53 million, Locke has allocated approximately \$46.4 million to California and \$6.7 million to Oregon.

Sacramento River Fall-run Chinook are the foundation of the West Coast’s commercial salmon harvest and in typical years 400,000 to 600,000 of them return to spawn. Under current federally approved rules for managing the ocean salmon fishery, a minimum of 122,000 Sacramento River Fall Chinook must be predicted to return to the Sacramento-San Joaquin River system before any harvest can take place.

Last year, barely 66,000 Fall Chinook returned to their spawning grounds in the system. This year, a greater number of Chinook are expected, but only marginally more than the 122,000 needed to maintain the health of the fishery. Agency biologists said the 2008 collapse was triggered primarily by climatic conditions that produced little food in the ocean, compounded by too much reliance on fish produced in hatcheries instead of the wild.

“NOAA will continue to work with the states and our partners in the region on habitat and hatchery issues that may be contributing to the difficult fishery management problems that the Sacramento River system has been experiencing,” said Jane Lubchenco, Ph.D., Under Secretary of Commerce for Oceans and Atmosphere and NOAA Administrator.

A synopsis of the final regulations is at <http://www.nwr.noaa.gov>.

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