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**COMMERCE SECRETARY MINETA ANNOUNCES SALMON FISHERY FAILURE IN
ALASKA'S NORTON SOUND, YUKON AND KUSKOKWIM RIVERS**

Salmon fishing communities in the Norton Sound and the Yukon and Kuskokwim River regions of Alaska become eligible for federal relief with U.S. Commerce Secretary Norman Mineta's determination today of a commercial fishery failure in their areas.

"These fishermen have suffered a significant loss of salmon catch, which has seriously disrupted their local economies. Today's determination paves the way for Congress to assist these communities in responding to the continuing failure of these salmon fisheries," said Mineta.

Officials have not yet been able to determine the cause for the fishery failure, but believe it is due to natural causes that reduced the returns of chinook, chum, and sockeye salmon. The low numbers of returning salmon are likely to cause serious disruption in future salmon production in these western Alaska salmon fisheries.

\$15 million was appropriated by Congress last year for use in fiscal year 2001 by NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service and the Economic Development Administration to assist those affected by Norton Sound salmon fisheries failures. Today's determination of a commercial fishery failure under Section 312 (a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Conservation and Management Act will make these funds available to Norton Sound fishing communities.

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The Secretary also made a determination under section 308(b) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act which will make Small Business Administration loans available to eligible affected small businesses in all three areas. This determination also paves the way for Congress to appropriate additional disaster assistance funds to these regions.

On July 28, 2000, Alaska Governor Tony Knowles requested the Secretary of Commerce make a determination of a commercial fisheries failure for the Yukon, Kuskokwim River, and Norton Sound salmon fisheries.

The Governor also requested federal assistance from the White House. The Federal Emergency Management Agency is coordinating efforts among federal agencies that have disaster assistance authorities. To date, over \$8 million in federal funds has been released for home energy assistance, emergency food supplies, and other aid. However, assistance from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Small Business Administration and Economic Development Administration depends on a formal declaration from the Secretary of Commerce.

NOAA Fisheries, on behalf of the Secretary, had previously determined two commercial fishery failures for western Alaska salmon fisheries--in November 1997 for the Bristol Bay and Kuskokwim River regions, and in September 1998 for Bristol Bay, Kuskokwim, and the Yukon River. These commercial failures also were determined under section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act to be due to a resource disaster of unknown causes, but possibly weather-related events, that resulted in extremely low returns of salmon to the affected areas.

The past determinations resulted in a total of \$57 million in federal assistance for the affected areas. Under a grant from NOAA Fisheries, the State of Alaska provided community grants, individual loans, economic planning grants, and grants for fisheries research, education, and training to address the 1997 failure. NOAA Fisheries also provided grant funds for research into the causes of the disaster under the September 1998 determination. In addition, the U.S. Department of Agriculture gave emergency assistance to families, the Small Business Administration provided loan funds, and the Economic Development Administration provided community development grants and Trade Adjustment Assistance Act funds.

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