



NOAA

NATIONAL OCEANIC AND
ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE



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Secretary Locke Extends Disaster Declaration for California Salmon Fishermen

U.S. Commerce Secretary Gary Locke announced today an extension of the disaster for California salmon fishermen due to the low numbers of spawning Chinook salmon returning to the Sacramento River and the subsequent reduction in commercial fishery revenues. Today's announcement continues the disaster declaration made in 2008 for the fishery.

"Low Chinook salmon returns to the Sacramento River predicted again this year are causing significant economic hardship to commercial fishermen and their families in California," Locke said. "Many fishermen are finding it extremely difficult to make a living during the limited fishing season this year."

Sacramento River fall-run Chinook are the backbone of commercial and recreational salmon fishing in California, and the return of adult fish every fall to spawn in the river system is essential for the population's survival. This year, the fishing season for California Chinook salmon fishermen was again significantly restricted to allow for enough Sacramento River fall-run Chinook salmon to reach the spawning grounds. Commercial revenues this year are projected to be 81 percent lower than average revenues from 2003-2005, the period before the decline.

NOAA Fisheries released a report in March 2009 that found the main cause of the unprecedented decline of returning salmon was unfavorable conditions in the ocean that affected the size of the population. Contributing factors included degradation of river and estuary habitats and lower genetic diversity and resilience of hatchery-dependent fish populations.

Fishery managers estimate a healthy population size would require returns in the range of 122,000 to 180,000 spawning adults. As recently as 2002, the number of adult salmon returning to spawn reached 769,900, but returns in recent years have been dramatically lower. Last year, NOAA Fisheries forecasted 122,100 adult fish to return, however, only 39,500 fish actually returned. In 2010, management measures will allow only a limited commercial fishing season in order to attain returns of about 180,000 adult fish.

In June, Governor Schwarzenegger sent a letter to Locke requesting a continuation of the declaration of a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster. Under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, the Commerce secretary can determine whether there is a commercial fishery failure if requested to do so by a governor, or at the secretary's discretion.

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