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Gutierrez Announces Klamath River "Fishery Resource Disaster," Immediate Steps to Help Fishing Communities

WASHINGTON - U.S. Secretary of Commerce Carlos M. Gutierrez today announced that he was taking several steps, including declaration of a fishery resource disaster, to help West Coast fishing communities in Oregon and California impacted by fishing restrictions necessitated by several years of drought and reduced salmon stocks in the Klamath River basin. The Commerce Department's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) oversees the nation's oceans based fishing industry and fisheries resources.

"Fishermen and their families in Oregon and California are being hit hard from several years of drought conditions which have led to a low abundance of fish and severely restricted catch. Today, I am declaring a fishery resource disaster, which will pave the way for relief to our fisherman, their families and their communities," said Gutierrez. "We will move quickly to implement both a short and long term effort to find ways to help. Today's announcement is not the end of the process, but the beginning. In all of our efforts, we will be guided by compassion, common sense, and a careful application of the law and federal regulations."

Today's announcement opens the door for the Small Business Administration (SBA) to provide low-interest Economic Injury Disaster Loans. At the Secretary's direction, NOAA is working with the States to accelerate the data collection necessary to determine whether there has been a commercial fishery failure. The Secretary also pledged that if the data supports a failure declaration, he is prepared to issue one expeditiously. Secretary Gutierrez is also encouraging the States of California and Oregon to allocate funding provided by Commerce through the Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery fund to activities that will benefit the affected region, and has committed to work with the States to ensure that they have the necessary flexibility to do so.

"I want to thank all the Members of Congress and Governors who

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have been involved in this issue, and look forward to continuing to work with them on behalf of the fishing community and on our shared goals," Gutierrez added. "I would also like to thank the local communities and groups that have been involved in the Administration's ongoing collaborative process that continues to address the long term restoration needs of the Klamath River basin. Through cooperative conservation we can develop lasting solutions that will maintain the diverse economies that this river has long supported. I am heartened by the support that inland farming communities, such as the Klamath Water Users Association, have given to the small rural fishing communities of coastal Oregon and California ."

Gutierrez's announcement includes the following steps:

- Declaration of a fishery resource disaster under the Interjurisdiction Fisheries Act (IFA), allowing fishermen to become eligible for SBA Economic Injury Disaster Loans.
- Request that the Governors of Oregon and California, who fully recognize the severity of the problem, closely review their pending 2006 Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund grant applications and determine how best to use existing resources and speedily disburse monies to projects that can help affected fishermen. NOAA will provide maximum flexibility on such grant requests. The States of California and Oregon each received nearly \$6.5 million in 2006 under this program.
- Dispatch high level officials to the Klamath River communities, beginning the week of July 10, to expedite the collection of economic impact data, a critical step to determining whether the disaster will result in a commercial fishery failure under the Magnuson-Stevens Act and the IFA.
- Direct that the Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration (EDA) make fishery impacted communities a funding priority for FY'07 Economic Adjustment grants.

Background/Historical Context:

A lengthy 5-year drought in the Klamath Basin has led to significantly reduced precipitation and streamflows in the basin. These conditions have degraded important spawning habitat, increased infestation of harmful parasites, and thus have not provided the conditions necessary for healthy salmon populations.

The Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act provides a mechanism for the Secretary of Commerce to assist states in managing interjurisdictional fisheries. It is designed to promote research and enforcement of fishery resources, develop Fishery Management plans, and restore resources damaged by a natural resource disaster. The Secretary is also working within his authority prescribed by the Magnuson-Stevens Act (MSA) which provides for the conservation and management of fishery resources within the U.S. Exclusive Economic Zone.

The Department of Commerce, through the NOAA Fisheries Service is responsible for protecting and preserving our nation's living marine resources and their habitats through scientific research,

management and enforcement. NOAA Fisheries Service provides effective stewardship of these resources for the benefit of the nation, supporting coastal communities that depend upon them, and helping to provide safe and healthy seafood to consumers and recreational opportunities for the American public.

Link to: [Declaration Concerning the Klamath River Fall Chinook Salmon Fishery](#)

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