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COMMERCE SECRETARY GARY LOCKE ANNOUNCES “FISHERY FAILURE” DETERMINATION FOR ALASKA CHINOOK SALMON

WASHINGTON – Secretary of Commerce Gary Locke today determined that there has been a commercial fishery failure for the Yukon River Chinook salmon due to low salmon returns.

“Communities in Alaska along the Yukon River depend heavily on Chinook salmon for commercial fishing, jobs and food,” said Commerce Secretary Gary Locke. “I have determined that a fishery disaster has occurred due to consecutive years of low Chinook salmon returns. Alaska fishermen and their families are struggling with a substantial loss in income and revenues.”

Because of low Chinook salmon returns, the state of Alaska reduced the 2008 commercial Chinook salmon harvest to 89 percent below the recent five-year average. No commercial Chinook salmon fishery was allowed in 2009 on the Yukon River. The state also restricted subsistence harvests.

“While subsistence fishing is not a factor in determining a commercial fishery failure, for Yukon River communities the commercial and subsistence fisheries are inseparable,” said Doug Mecum, acting administrator of the NOAA’s Fisheries Service Alaska region. “These communities are very isolated and do not have the economic diversity to withstand the disastrous economic impact of extremely low or no commercial harvest coupled with a decline in subsistence harvests.”

The state of Alaska manages the Yukon River salmon fisheries and collects biological and economic information.

Although the reasons for the decline of Chinook salmon are not completely understood, scientists believe they are predominately natural. Changes in ocean and river conditions, including unfavorable shifts in temperatures and food sources, likely caused poor survival of Chinook salmon.

Chinook salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery also may contribute to low returns. However, the impacts of ocean bycatch on Chinook returns to the Yukon River is expected to be

small compared to natural causes. The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has recommended measures to minimize this bycatch and NOAA's Fisheries Service is reviewing the Council recommendations and developing proposed regulations.

Under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Act, the Commerce Secretary can make a determination that there has been a commercial fishery failure if requested to do so by the governor, or at the Secretary's discretion. The Secretary must determine that the commercial fishery failure resulted from a fishery resource disaster due to natural causes, man-made causes beyond the control of fishery managers, or undetermined causes.

[Alaska Governor Sean Parnell](#) requested that Secretary Locke determine a commercial fishery failure due to a fishery resource disaster. The Association of Village Council Presidents, the Alaska Federation of Natives, and the villages of Kwethluk and Chevak also asked Secretary Locke for a disaster determination. Their request was supported by the Alaska State Legislature and Alaska's Congressional delegation.

While appropriations were not provided specifically for this failure, the Department is prepared to expedite the delivery of resources should they become available. The Department is prepared to work with the State of Alaska and the affected communities on these issues.

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