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NOAA's Fisheries Service Releases Disaster Aid to West Coast Salmon Fishing Industry

NOAA's Fisheries Service announced today that it is making \$100 million of disaster-relief aid available to West Coast salmon fishermen.

"The salmon fishery has been a mainstay of the West Coast's ocean fishing revenues for many years," said U.S. Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez. "This year's closure left thousands of fishermen and dependent businesses struggling to make ends meet. This disaster aid package of \$100 million will help them get back on their feet."

The agency will provide the money in the form of a grant to the Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission. The commission will distribute the money, based on the agreements reached with the states, to fishermen and related businesses affected by this year's closure of the ocean salmon fishing season off California, Oregon, and Washington.

The unprecedented collapse of Sacramento River Fall Chinook, combined with the exceptionally poor status of Coho salmon from Oregon and Washington, led officials to close all commercial and sport Chinook ocean fishing off California and most of Oregon this year. Only a small hatchery-origin recreational Coho fishery off central and southern Oregon remained open, which also affected Washington fishermen.

The governors of all three West Coast states requested a federal disaster declaration as a result of the closures. The declaration, issued by the Secretary of Commerce last May, paved the way for Congress to appropriate a \$170 million disaster-relief package in July.

The remaining \$70 million of Congressionally appropriated disaster-relief money is expected to become available later in the year as the \$100 million is spent.

The grant developed by the Pacific States Marine Fishery Commission, in consultation with representatives of the West Coast governors, provides relief to affected commercial fishermen, wholesalers, processors, charter boat owners and recreational guides and businesses dependent on fishing.

Officials plan to mail application forms this week to commercial fishermen with permits. Businesses affected by the salmon closure can download application forms from the commission's Web site at <http://www.psmfc.org>. Applicants must be licensed state permit holders or have purchased a state business license or permit in 2007.

NOAA understands and predicts changes in the Earth's environment, from the depths of the ocean to the surface of the sun, and conserves and manages our coastal and marine resources.