



California Advisory Committee On Salmon and Steelhead Trout

February 21, 2012

Report to the Legislative Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture

Dear Chairman Chesbro and Members of the Joint Committee,

The California Advisory Committee on Salmon and Steelhead Trout, (CAC) is your volunteer, public committee that oversees administration of the Fisheries Restoration Grants Program. Once again, the CAC is somehow on the Governor's list of advisory committees to be chopped. We went through this last year, and Chairman Chesbro, you sent a letter then explaining why eliminating the unpaid CAC would not be a cost saving to the State.

Started as an ad hoc "stakeholder" group 40 years ago, and codified in 1983, the CAC meets quarterly with Fish and Game staff to share a wealth of experience and give input on salmon and steelhead issues from the broad perspective of commercial and recreational fishing, public, educational, science, and tribal viewpoints. It is your public advisory committee on restoring California's heritage of salmon and steelhead for the years to come. The CAC is unique in making recommendations both to the Fish and Game Director *and* to the Joint Fisheries and Aquaculture Committee. One of the CAC's legislatively mandated responsibilities is to recommend to the Director half of the volunteers who review grant proposals for the Grants Program and to help keep it a publicly credible program. And our Steelhead Subcommittee directs the use of monies collected through the Steelhead Report Card.

Over several decades, the CAC has focused the public's attention on the restoration needs in salmonids' freshwater habitat. We have brought about changes in grant funding priorities, examined recovery planning, and stumped for adequate funding and staffing for Fish and Game so they can administer millions of dollars yearly into on-the-ground habitat restoration and jobs. Inspired by the fish, CAC members dedicate hundreds of hours of their time to this effort year after year. Believing it is important for the public to be involved, they help direct the use of taxpayer dollars to where they will do the most possible good for protecting and restoring salmon and steelhead.

The CAC is redundantly on the chopping block in the Governor's budget process to remove redundant programs. The CAC actually saves the taxpayer money by efficiently directing use of public money toward a more robust salmon resource, by acting as liaison between the public, the Department, and the Legislature, and by staying informed and keeping others informed. We are asking the Joint Committee to write a letter to the Governor and the Resources Agency explaining why the CAC should not be cut.

In an additional item, the CAC would like to see a strong federal plan for recovering Southern Oregon/ Northern California coho salmon. After 14 years, National Marine Fisheries Service has decided it must hurry and get something out, regardless of how good or bad a plan it is. The draft plan is so fundamentally flawed that it should be thrown out and not fixed. It is counter to biological principles to use a model without informing it with available existing data on where viable coho populations currently and actually live. The model projects "intrinsic future populations" in places other than where good or restorable habitat exists, without ground-truthing. The problem is that this empty model will be used to limit where restoration dollars can be applied, as is already being done by NMFS' influence in narrowing the "focus" of places and types of restoration considered, thereby eliminating from consideration good projects in what are locally known to be productive watersheds.

We are concerned that these hypothetical and erroneous priorities will override the local and regional knowledge of watershed groups and practitioners who live and count fish in their home streams. Instead of putting limitations on where and what kind of restoration projects can take place, it would be better to leave the field more open, and judge projects on their merits as they are submitted

We ask that the Joint Committee and NMFS see that the draft Soncc coho recovery plan is not finalized until all the issues and conflicts are addressed.

Thank you.

Vivian Helliwell, Chair
California Advisory Committee on Salmon and Steelhead