



State of California – Natural Resources Agency
DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE
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EDMUND G. BROWN JR., Governor
CHARLTON H. BONHAM, Director



October 12, 2015

The Honorable Mike McGuire
The California Senate
State Capitol, Room 5064
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Senator McGuire:

I appreciate the opportunity you and your colleagues afforded me to present to the Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture in early July of this year. In your follow up letter you asked specific questions regarding the state of the salmon fishery during the ongoing exceptional drought in California. Additional information is presented below.

In early 2015, the Department of Fish and Wildlife (Department) estimated that 95 percent of the 2014 brood year winter-run Chinook salmon (State and federal endangered species) failed to survive. This estimate is feasible because virtually all of the out migrating population of juvenile winter-run passes through the Red Bluff Diversion Dam. The Department conducts a sampling operation at the Red Bluff Diversion Dam site that produces statistically robust estimates of salmon production resulting from upstream spawning in the Sacramento River and tributaries. The loss of the 2014 brood year of naturally spawning juvenile winter-run Chinook salmon was attributed to elevated water temperatures in the Sacramento River below Keswick Dam.

Estimating the loss of the 2014 brood year for fall-run Chinook salmon is more problematic due to many spawning tributaries located downstream of the Red Bluff Diversion Dam. Consequently the production estimates for fall-run Chinook salmon that are less robust due to the inability to capture juveniles from numerous tributaries downstream of the dam. Our best estimates of the loss of wild 2014 brood year fall-run Chinook salmon is between 95 and 98 percent due to adverse water temperatures.

While these numbers appear dismal, hatchery production for 2014 remained fairly stable. The Department and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) collectively produced 39 million smolts for the Klamath and Sacramento River systems in 2014 as compared to 41 million smolts in 2013.

In 2014, the USFWS in cooperation with the Department and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) increased production of winter-run Chinook salmon smolts at the Livingston Stone National Fish Hatchery from 200,000 to 600,000. In 2015, that production is projected to be down slightly (approximately 400,000) due to fewer adults being collected for eggs.

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The Department is also working with the Commercial Salmon Stamp Committee to increase the production of fall-run Chinook salmon for enhancement purposes from two million to four million fish this coming year. Together these efforts should provide a slight increase that would thus be available for the fishery in 2017 and subsequent years.

In the spring of 2014 and 2015, the Department in cooperation with the USFWS and NMFS trucked a combined 50 million salmon smolts to net pens in San Pablo Bay. This action avoided adverse conditions in the rivers and increased the chances of survival of smolts that will ultimately benefit commercial and recreational fisheries in the ocean and inland waters. We are also working diligently with water operation managers to provide flows of suitable quantity and quality to allow for survival of all runs of Chinook salmon and steelhead in the Klamath and Sacramento Rivers systems. Working with the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation the fish agencies negotiated a flow release schedule for the Sacramento River that will for the first time in many years attempt to stabilize the water levels in fall-run Chinook salmon spawning reaches. We have also entered into 21 Voluntary Drought Initiative agreements in Mill, Deer, Antelope, Scott and Shasta rivers with private landowners that provide for minimum flows in critical rivers and streams. Additionally we have entered into 43 Voluntary Drought Initiative agreements in the Russian River watershed to benefit Coho salmon.

The Department has executed 26 grants for habitat restoration and improvement projects to provide relief for drought stressed fisheries for a total of 3.5 million dollars. These projects are intended to offset impacts that the drought has exhibited on habitats and the populations by providing improved access to cooler water and stable flows.

We will continue to seek proposals for additional habitat improvement projects and other instream flow regimes to provide habitat for all life stages of juvenile salmonids. We are very proud of the exemplary efforts of Department staff statewide in responding to this very dire crisis for California's fisheries. We are committed to exploring all options for efforts that will provide relief for our stressed fisheries. Should you have any further question please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Charlton H. Bonham
Director

cc: California Department of Fish and Wildlife

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