

Klamath Riverkeeper

A Program of the Klamath Forest Alliance

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April 21, 2006

To: California Fish & Game Commission (**PLEASE DISTRIBUTE THIS COMMUNICATION TO ALL F&G COMMISSION MEMBERS**)

Via E-mail: sbarrow@dfg.ca.gov, fgc@fgc.ca.gov

Dear Commission Members:

Because Spring and Fall Chinook are not treated as separate species, both the State of California, the Pacific Fisheries Management Council and others have largely ignored them. Meanwhile the numbers of wild Springer spawners have fallen dramatically. Last year fewer than 100 were counted in the Salmon River – their stronghold on the Klamath side of the Klamath-Trinity River basin. Because there is a hatchery Springer run on the Trinity that is somewhat healthy and because the CDFG officials involved have not been responsive to the condition of wild Spring Chinook salmon, the Commission has allowed full sport fishing on the Klamath and Trinity during the time the Springers are present. There is no overall quota, no requirement to release wild fish, virtually nothing except the daily and weekly bag limits.

A few years back the Tribes (mostly Hoopa and Yurok), The Klamath Forest Alliance and others asked the Fish & Game Commission to close the Klamath to salmon fishing when Springers are migrating. The Commission did close it for a while down as far as Coon Creek below Weitchpec but then at some point it was quietly opened again. Even the first action was not good enough because sport anglers could still target the Springers at places like Blue Hole at the mouth of Blue Creek. While CDFG officials deny that there is substantial “take” of Springers at Blue Creek, I have personally observed it, personally know some of the guides and fishermen who fish at that location and there are reports from the Yurok Fisheries Department on the subject. Yet Mr. Manji and the rest of the folks at CDFG appear to be in denial. **TAKE OF SPRING CHINOOK HAS CONTINUED TO OCCUR ON THE YRUOK RESERVATION EVEN ON DAYS WHEN TRIBAL FISHING IS CLOSED.**

The wild Klamath Springers are needed as the brood stock to restore salmon to the Upper Basin when the dams come down or the fish ladders go up. But the way things are going there may not be enough wild Springers to accomplish the restoration. Also, if the F&G Commission will not act to protect Springers, the environmental community will likely file an emergency petition to have them listed under the state ESA. This is being discussed now by various groups including Klamath Riverkeeper.

The Commission and PFMC have set seasons and restrictions to ocean fishing which should adequately protect Klamath Springers in the ocean. Now the Commission should act to protect these fish in the Klamath and Trinity Rivers as well. The Yurok Tribe has closed all commercial fishing and has imposed a three day closure year around on subsistence fishing to protect all salmon stocks. The Hoopa are considering closures to protect Springers. When will the F & G Commission stand up and do its part to protect and restore this valuable stock?

Given the above history and the current condition of Spring Chinook, Klamath Riverkeeper calls on the California Fish & Game Commission to take the following actions as soon as possible:

1. The Commission should close the entire Klamath River to take of adult salmon during the period when Spring Chinook are migrating: April, May, June and July.
2. The Commission should close the Trinity River during the Spring Chinook migration period as far up as above Canyon Creek in order to protect wild, naturally-spawning Trinity River Spring Chinook salmon. South Fork Trinity Sping Chniook are in even more dire straits than the wild Klamath Springers. We also need to protect the New River, North Fork and Canyon Creek populations as our genetic reservoir/bank for Klamath-Trinity Spring Chinook salmon.

3. The Commission should close the Klamath below Wietchpec to salmon fishing during the Fall salmon season on the same days that the Yuroks have closed their fisheries, i.e. three days per week.
4. The Fish & Game Commission should become active in a positive way by adding their strong voice to the chorus calling for Klamath River restoration. Please consider a resolution calling for:
 1. removal or fish passage at the Klamath River dams and restoration of salmon and steelhead to the Upper Klamath River Basin, and
 2. another resolution urging the NCWQCB and SWRCB to adopt strong clean-up plans for the Shasta, Scott and Klamath Rivers. Poor water quality from and in these rivers is killing hundreds of thousands of baby salmon each year.

The Fish & Game Commission should not sacrifice restoration of Klamath-Trinity Spring and Fall salmon because a small number of guides and sport fisherman want to catch Spring salmon. Once the salmon fisheries are restored there will be plenty of opportunities for fishing. It makes sense to forgo some fishing opportunities now so that there will be more fishing opportunities for everyone later. This is what tribal fishers have done and sport fishers should do the same.

Unless the California Fish & Game Commission takes appropriate and strong action to protect wild, naturally spawning Klamath-Trinity Spring Chinook salmon it is highly likely that conflict between sport fishermen and salmon advocates on the Klamath will increase. The historic cooperation we have had on the Klamath will be threatened. In addition, failure of the Commission to address the needs of Spring Chinook salmon is highly likely to result in a petition to list Klamath-Trinity Springers as an endangered species pursuant to the California ESA. Salmon advocates have held off on taking such an action for many years. However, the dire condition of Klamath and Trinity River Spring Chinook has raised the stakes. Only your prompt and effective action can forestall a listing petition.

Wild Salmon Forever!

Felice Pace
for Klamath Riverkeeper

cc: Interested Parties