

## Broad Coalition Proposes Solutions to the California Salmon Crisis

*“Unless people do a complete paradigm shift, there will be no more salmon. If we don’t put water for fish as the top priority, we will lose our wild salmon. We can’t live without the salmon. We won’t be here when the salmon are all gone.”*

***Caleen Sisk-Franco, Spiritual Leader of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe***

*By Dan Bacher*

A panel of representatives from fishing, tribal and environmental groups held an historic news conference in Sacramento on Friday, March 14, to discuss proposed solutions to the huge crisis in California Delta fisheries and the unprecedented collapse of the Central Valley chinook salmon runs.

The event took place during the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) meeting at the Double Tree Hotel. Over 14 newspaper, television and radio reporters from throughout the state and U.S. attended the conference, while 6 others joined the event via phone.

Representatives of the Winnemem Wintu Tribe, Miwok Tribe, commercial fishing groups, recreational fishing groups and environmental organizations packed the room in support of measures to restore Central Valley chinook salmon and Delta fish populations after decades of mismanagement by the state and federal governments.

The coalition proposed immediate, practical and necessary measures that will begin to rebuild salmon stocks. They believe these solutions could help prevent future fishery disasters for California and Oregon.

These solutions were led by the urgent need to reduce the destructive impacts of export pumping and diversions in the Delta and to improve water quality in the Delta and on Central Valley rivers.

Other solutions proposed included improving access to blocked salmon habitat; improving habitat in Central Valley rivers and streams by enhancing flows, providing cooler temperatures and restoring functional floodplains; reducing the impacts of hatchery operations on fish of native origin; and providing effective governmental leadership.

State and federal fishery managers have already closed early commercial and recreational salmon seasons that begin May 1. The PFMC crafted three options for salmon season, including two proposals for a complete closure of salmon fishing south of Cape Falcon, Oregon and other option with an extremely limited "token" season, in the afternoon after the conference.

"We're facing a total salmon closure for first time since commercial salmon fishing began on the San Francisco Bay and Delta in 1848," said Zeke Grader, executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA). "There are many factors that went into our salmon decline, but none as significant as the loss of freshwater flows to the Delta and San Francisco Bay which are essential for maintaining the biological function of this estuary and sustaining native salmon and other fish populations."

Grader said we need to focus on keeping our commercial and recreational salmon fishermen and businesses solvent while concentrating on fixing the Bay and Delta, restoring flows and with them the fish.

"The regulators here - the PFMC - are not to blame for this fiasco, they were simply the messengers," stated Grader. "The fault rather lies with the failure to regulate the diverters and protect the flows needed to maintain the greatest estuary on the west coast of North and South America and the great salmon runs that inhabited and migrated through it."

Grader, pointing to graphs showing declines in Central Valley salmon runs and increases in water exports, said salmon populations have declined in direct relation to the level of exports from the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta.

Grader also released the outline of the PCFFA's strategic plan for the recovery of California salmon stocks and restorations of watersheds supporting the fish.

Since 2006, PCFFA, in conjunction with NOWWE and Porgans and Associates, have been actively engaged in developing a Strategic Plan of Action (POA) designed to recover salmonid species, restoring and monitoring watersheds, via satellite, radio telemetry and video surveillance. The groups plan to publish a series of White Papers over the course of the next several months.

"The 2008 and 2009 fishing seasons are toast," said Dick Pool, president of Pro-Troll Fishing Products and a three-term Director of the American Sportfishing Association. "We must now start working on programs to restore salmon for the 2010 and 2011 seasons and beyond."

He pointed out the economic devastation caused by the salmon collapse and urged the federal and state governments to take both immediate and long term actions to restore the once robust Sacramento River fall Chinook salmon run.

"The sportfishing industry is reeling from the unparalleled destruction of one of the premiere fisheries in the country," said Pool. "The cause has nothing to do with fishing. Water policies dictated by corporate agricultural interests supported by the state and federal water agencies have destroyed the migration and spawning habitat needed by these fish."

The economic contribution of sportfishing to California is very large, since there are 2.4 million sport fishermen in the state, according to Pool. The activity generates \$2.4 billion in retail sales with an economic impact of \$4.9 billion. It also generates \$1.3 billion in wages and salaries and supports 43,000 jobs in the state. All of these are threatened if the fishery declines are not reversed.

"I urge every fisherman and those who care about natural resources, to log onto [Water4Fish.org](http://Water4Fish.org) and join the grassroots political effort to demand a turn around," said Pool. "Our leaders have let us down terribly and we have every right to demand changes. The campaign recently passed 50,000 participants, but we need thousands more before we can get the changes we need."

While salmon anglers face unprecedented closures this year, Caleen Sisk-Franco, spiritual leader of the Winnemem Wintu (McCloud River) Tribe, said the tribe lost their salmon fishing over 75 years ago when Shasta Dam was built. The Winnemem Wintu, who held a war dance in September 2004 to stop a proposal by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to raise Shasta Dam, have been leaders in the battle to restore the California Delta.

“The dam blocked over 200 miles of cold water tributaries, including the McCloud River where we lived for thousands of years,” she noted. “Our lives changed when we could no longer catch wild salmon on the McCloud – and so will yours when salmon are no longer available.”

“Unless people do a complete paradigm shift, there will be no more salmon,” Sisk Franco said. “If we don’t put water for fish as the top priority, we will lose wild salmon. We can’t live without the salmon and we won’t be here when the salmon are all gone.”

Bill Jennings, executive director of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, pointed out the increasing decline of water quality in the Delta and Central Valley rivers, the result of a complete failure of the state of California to monitor and enforce water quality laws.

“There is an unprecedented and appalling decline in water standards under the Schwarzenegger administration,” said Jennings. “The bottom line is that we can’t restore salmon if we use our waterways as sewers and dumps and don’t enforce the Clean Water and Porter-Cologne Acts.”

Jason Rainey, representing the South Yuba River Citizens League, said that while some fishery managers have only pointed to poor ocean conditions as responsible for the dramatic decline in 2007, many factors above sea-level have been negatively affecting salmon populations and some of these have not yet improved.

“In the Yuba watershed we can increase both the number and the fitness of juvenile salmon that migrate to the Feather and Sacramento River. Providing access to habitats blocked by dams, enhancing river flows through hydro project relicensing, and restoration of floodplains and riparian habitat will make a substantial difference in restoring our salmon runs,” he stated.

David Nesmith, Environmental Water Caucus facilitator, was the moderator for the news conference.

“Fish need water,” Nesmith summed up. “We must leave more clean, cool water in the Delta and our rivers so salmon can live.”

Fishing and environmental organizations represented at the event included Friends of the River, Recreational Fishing Alliance, NOWWE, Porgans and Associates, Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations, Water4Fish.org, American Sportfishing Association, California Striped Bass Association, Earthjustice, South Yuba Citizens League, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, Coastside Fishing Club and Institute for Fishery Resources.

## **Practical and Necessary Actions to Solve the Salmon Crisis**

### **Reduce impacts of export pumping and diversions in the Delta.**

- Limit total exports through Delta to a maximum of 4.5 million acre-feet per year and eliminate pumping during periods of peak smolt migration.
- Require mitigation for all direct or indirect losses of salmon.
- Construct state of the art screening and salvage operations at water diversions and pumping facilities including state and federal projects.

### **Improve water quality in the Delta and on Central Valley rivers and streams.**

- Eliminate the Central Valley agricultural waiver to pollution discharge.
- Reduce urban pesticide loading in urban storm runoff
- Enforce federal and state clean water laws.

### **Improve access to blocked salmon habitat.**

- Remove destructive and obsolete dams, especially on the Klamath River and Battle Creek.
- Remedy passage and entrainment problems, especially on the Yuba River and Butte Creek.
- Keep the gates up all year on the Red Bluff Diversion Dam.

### **Improve habitat in Central Valley rivers and streams by enhancing flows, providing cooler temperatures and restoring functional floodplains.**

- Implement the American River flow standards and fully implement restoration flows on other rivers such as the Trinity and San Joaquin.
- Increase cold water habitat below salmon-blocking dams.
- Systematically provide for restored functional floodplain habitat including mitigation for levee projects that limit salmon rearing habitat.

### **Reduce impacts of hatchery operations on fish of native origin.**

- Mark 100% of hatchery fish released.
- Implement "Integrated Hatchery Programs" and the standards of the Hatchery Science Review Group.
- Truck all hatchery fish to acclimation pens below the delta.