

Karuk Tribe • Ridges to Riffles • Yurok Tribe • PCFFA

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FEDERAL PLAN THREATENS WEST COAST SALMON FISHERY

-Next Week, Klamath flows will be the lowest in 20 Years

-Yurok Tribe and Fishermen Prepare Litigation

Klamath Basin, CA – Despite the wet winter, the Department of Interior has announced plans to cut Klamath River flows up to 30% below the minimum mandated by the Endangered Species Act to protect listed coho salmon. River flows will drop below 750 cubic feet per second (cfs) for the first time in decades. This could prove disastrous to juvenile coho salmon along with other species including Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, and Pacific lamprey. The Yurok Tribe and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations have already filed a 60-day Notice of Intent to sue the federal government.

“We know from experience that flows this low lead to massive fish kills. It happened in the fall of 2002 and the spring of 2004,” said Yurok Vice Chairman Frankie Joe Myers. “This plan is reckless and it disregards the best available science.”

In 2002, similarly low flows led to the infamous Klamath Fish Kill when tens of thousands of adult salmon died as they tried to make their way to their spawning grounds. In 2004, similarly low flows caused a massive juvenile fish kill which in turn led to a collapse of the entire [west coast salmon fishery](#).

“Thousands of fishing industry jobs are at stake,” said Glen Spain, Pacific Northwest Director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations. “This plan could lead to another fisheries disaster that will cost local coastal communities hundreds of millions of dollars in lost revenue.”

Work begins this year on the removal of the lower four Klamath dams. While this will provide some relief to beleaguered salmon runs, fish still need adequate flows to survive. Klamath River flows are largely a function of how Upper Klamath Lake is managed further upstream from the dams. Upper Klamath Lake is a natural lake that was drained, rerouted and dammed in the early 20th century to allow federal regulators to divert water from the Klamath River to the 225,000-acre Klamath Irrigation Project.

Upper Klamath Lake is also home to two species of ESA listed sucker fish, known as koptu and c’waam. Department of Interior officials claim that the cut in flows is necessary to meet Upper Klamath Lake levels needed for the recovery of these species. However, current weather forecasts suggest there

will be enough water to meet ESA requirements of both suckers and coho salmon without cutting river flows.

“This is an uncalled-for risk to the health of the river and west coast fisheries,” said Amy Cordalis, Director of Ridges to Riffles and attorney for the Yurok Tribe. “Salmon runs desperately need a good water year. Mother nature is providing that but federal agencies are taking it away.”

Cordalis notes, “For millennia suckers and salmon thrived together in the Klamath. The problem is the water management choices that Interior is making, not the competing needs of different fish species.”

“The Department of Interior should be focusing on Klamath Basin-wide restoration plans, including the upper basin marshes and lakes, not proposing plans that threaten the future of one of America’s greatest salmon fisheries,” said Karuk Chairman Russell ‘Buster’ Attebery.

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