

The Honorable Barack H. Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

December 10, 2009

Re: Fair and Science-Based Management for the Sacramento River and Bay-Delta

Dear President Obama,

We are people living in the Pacific coast's cities and towns, working to keep alive livelihoods and traditions that built our communities and culture. A major portion of our economic lifeblood stems from the salmon industry, both commercial and sport. Our salmon industries depend on abundant runs of Sacramento River fall chinook salmon. Some 60 percent of the salmon caught off Oregon and 90 percent of the salmon caught off California originate in the Sacramento River system. As you know, nearly all ocean salmon fishing has been closed in California and most of Oregon for two years due to the dramatic collapse of Sacramento fall chinook salmon.

As members of Oregon and California's commercial and recreational salmon industries and communities, we are writing to respectfully ask you to defend the recently-released federal plans for the restoration of threatened and endangered salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and other native fish dependent upon the Sacramento River and Bay-Delta estuary. We call on you to support the implementation and funding of these science-based and peer-reviewed plans.

We also respectfully request that you immediately initiate a federal investigation to locate the 800,000 acre feet of Sacramento River water that is supposed to be set aside every year to keep our salmon runs healthy under Section 3406(b)(2) of the 1992 Central Valley Project Improvement Act (CVPIA). This investigation should take a close look at exactly what the federal agency responsible – the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation – has done with this 800,000 acre feet of water. Last year, a panel of independent scientists evaluated the CVPIA's Anadromous Fisheries Restoration Program on behalf of the federal Office of Management and Budget. They determined that the Bureau of Reclamation "does not dedicate and manage 800 kaf of water from headwaters storage through the Delta." Instead, they found that Reclamation's "approach seems fundamentally at odds with the intent and language of the [CVPIA]."¹

In the face of the largest salmon fishery shutdown in U.S. history, the fact that the Bureau of Reclamation has failed for seventeen years to implement Congress' directive to make this water available for salmon recovery is outrageous. If this water had been used as Congress required, we likely wouldn't have gone through the last two years of devastating fishing closures. To address this appalling failure and others, the Office of Management and Budget's panel recommended a series of reforms for the Anadromous Fisheries Restoration Program. We ask you to support the fair and common sense solutions presented by this report to help achieve the fisheries restoration mandates of the CVPIA.

As natural resource users, our use of rivers and their salmon is an open book. California and Oregon's fishery agencies maintain meticulous records to provide a transparent accounting of our impacts. It seems both logical and fair to us that federal agencies that use our rivers' water be held up to the same standards as fishermen – and take responsibility for their natural resource use.

The unprecedented closure of the salmon fishery has caused an economic disaster along hundreds

¹ "Listen to the River: An Independent Review of the CVPIA Fisheries Program," p. 42. Available at http://www.cvpiaindependentreview.com/FisheriesReport12_12_08.pdf

of miles of the Pacific Coast. An economic review by Southwick Associates, commissioned by the American Sportfishing Association, estimated losses in California alone due to the 2008 and 2009 closures of \$2.8 billion and 23,000 jobs lost in the combined commercial and recreational industries. Oregon's salmon economy is somewhat smaller than California's, but economic losses have been no less devastating to the state.

Salmon spend part of their lives in the ocean but are born and die in our rivers. We can do little to influence fluctuating conditions for salmon in the ocean, but we can have an impact on the conditions salmon encounter in our rivers. We must manage our rivers responsibly.

Conditions harming threatened runs of salmon in the Sacramento River and Bay-Delta estuary likewise harm the commercially indispensable Sacramento fall chinook salmon run. The National Marine Fisheries Service recently reported that continuing status-quo operations in the Delta would lead to the extinction of all listed salmon runs in the Central Valley. The agency has also stated that mismanagement of Sacramento River waters and pumping from the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta are primary factors in the decline of Central Valley salmon runs. These factors must be fixed or we will see our salmon go extinct, along with our way of life. The current federal plan for the restoration of declining salmon runs represents a key step towards fixing these problems.

We need your help to rectify a wrong and restore our salmon, our economy, our ports, our businesses, and our communities. While the steps we outline above cannot alone solve the complex Sacramento salmon crisis, we believe they offer an opportunity to address some of the most important, immediate problems facing the Sacramento River and Bay-Delta estuary, and the many communities dependent upon its invaluable fall chinook salmon fishery.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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Cc: California and Oregon delegations, U.S. Congress
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U.S. Secretary of Commerce
Oregon Salmon Commission
California Salmon Council
Pacific Fisheries Management Council
Governor Ted Kulongoski
Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger