

# An Inconvenient Truth for Fishermen

Even with last month's announcement that fishery managers had approved the longest commercial salmon fishing season since 2005 due to a resurgence of fall-run Chinook salmon, fishermen continue to play the blame game in the Delta. Commercial fishermen recently filed suit in federal court against the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation for allowing excess water available in the system to be used by south of Delta water interests. The lawsuit calls the federal action "a charade devoid of any effective environmental review."

Even though the vast majority of California's freshwater flows are dedicated for environmental purposes, the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations continues to claim in its lawsuit that water exports are to blame for declines in fish populations. It seems that salmon fishermen love to lambast the pumps and sue farmers as much as they love to fish.

Ironically, these same fishermen, whose livelihoods are based on catching and killing fish, choose to ignore their own major role in the decline of native fish, including endangered Pacific Coast salmon runs.

The welcome turn of events leading to the return of a full salmon season is due to an increase in fall-run Chinook salmon, the run of Pacific Coast salmon that is commercially harvested and currently exists in abundance. Unfortunately, the fall-run salmon's endangered cousin, winter-run Chinook salmon, remain at risk of extinction with less than



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850 returning to spawn this past year. Any "take" or harm to that species is managed by rules set forth in biological opinions (BiOps) designed by the National Marine Fisheries Service to preserve the species. When commercial and recreational salmon fishermen harvest fall-run salmon, they also inadvertently kill or "take" a large number of these endangered winter-run Chinook salmon.

The current BiOps for Pacific Coast salmon fishing allow commercial and recreational fishermen great leeway, with **incidental take authorization that can allow for the take of 10 to 25-percent of the endangered adult winter-run salmon**. That means that commercial and recreational fishing is responsible for killing up to a quarter of the mature winter-run salmon right before they return to the Delta to spawn and create the next generation of salmon.

Meanwhile, the BiOps for the Delta export pumps, which fishermen continuously blame as the sole cause

of salmon population declines, allow for an **incidental take of only one-percent of the year's out-migrating juvenile winter-run salmon**. These are the juvenile salmon that rear in-stream then migrate out to the Pacific Ocean to mature.

Granted these permits allow for take of the winter-run salmon during different periods of their life-cycle. However, it should be lost on no one, including fishermen, that taking endangered salmon after they have reached full maturity and just before spawning is directly detrimental to the population of endangered winter-run salmon.

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The truth is that incidental take permits of endangered species are necessary for the successful operation of salmon fisheries and water deliveries in California. But blaming water exports while ignoring the take of endangered salmon by commercial harvest is ridiculous and self-serving rhetoric.

The recent report from the National Research Council pointed out that most stakeholders in the Delta are reluctant to confront a number of crucial facts pertaining to the estuary's problems, including declining fish populations. Everyone, including fishermen, must acknowledge their part in the problem before real solutions to the Delta crisis can begin to make progress.



## Delta Watch

**A Project of the Coalition for a Sustainable Delta**