

For Immediate Release: 8/24/2009

Contact:

Mike Sherwood, Earthjustice (510) 550-6700
Zeke Grader, PCFFA (415) 561-5080 x224
Christina Swanson The Bay Institute, (415) 878-2929
Sejal Choksi, SF Baykeeper (925) 330-7757 (cell)
Douglas Lovell, NCCFFF (510) 520-3146
Gary Mulcahy, Winnemem Wintu Tribe (916) 991-8493
John Merz, Sacramento River Preservation Trust (530) 345-1865
Steve Evans, Friends of the River (916) 442-3155
Sejal Choksi, San Francisco Baykeeper (925) 330-7757

California Fishing Communities, Tribes and Conservation Groups Defend Salmon, Steelhead, Green Sturgeon and Killer Whales from Industry Attack

Intervention papers filed in federal court

Fresno, CA – A broad coalition of fishing, environmental groups and tribes filed papers in federal court today defending California’s native salmon. The groups oppose legal efforts by commercial water users and large agricultural interests to overturn federal protections for salmon and other species.

On June 4, 2009, the National Marine Fisheries Service released an 800-page plan (biological opinion) to rebuild Sacramento River salmon runs. This plan replaced one issued in 2004 by the Bush administration over the objections of federal fisheries scientists that sent salmon runs into steep decline. Salmon declines under the Bush plan forced fishery managers to close North Coast salmon fishing for the first time in the history of the state.

The new salmon restoration plan clearly shows that excessive water diversions by the Central Valley Project and State Water Project operations jeopardize endangered salmon, steelhead, green sturgeon and even southern resident killer whales which feed on salmon at sea.

The 800-page salmon restoration plan set detailed prescriptions for operating the projects for the next 20 years in a manner that will avoid pushing the fish to extinction or further destroying their habitat. Within days after the BiOp was released, industrial agriculture and commercial water users filed lawsuits to overturn this plan.

Today’s intervention is in a case filed by San Luis & Delta-Mendota Water Authority and the Westlands Water District, but the fishing, conservation and tribal coalition vows to intervene in each and every challenge to the scientifically sound 2009 salmon restoration plan and to defend the species from all industry-driven legal attacks.

Read the intervention here:

http://www.earthjustice.org/library/legal_docs/salmon-biop-intervention-82409.pdf

Statements by Coalition Members:

“The National Marine Fisheries Service issued a strong, science-based roadmap of actions to protect and recover California salmon and steelhead,” said senior attorney Mike Sherwood of Earthjustice. “It’s been said before and bears repeating: fish need water. We won’t idly stand by as industrial agriculture and commercial water interests pretend that simple fact isn’t true.”

“If we expect to save the salmon and other fish of the Delta – indeed, the Delta itself – we must adhere to the best science and that is the biological opinion,” said Zeke Grader, executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations. “It’s time to tell the Schwarzenegger administration that the days of ignoring or overruling science - to placate fat cat political contributors at the expense of public resources - are over.”

“We can’t let agribusiness push for the status quo when it comes to our endangered salmon. The provisions in the biological opinion must be implemented in order to preserve and restore our once bountiful fisheries,” said Steve Evans of Friends of the River

“The fisheries supported by this intervention are extremely valuable and important components of California’s \$3 billion dollar per year recreational fishing industry. According to the California Department of Fish and Game, the state’s economy lost \$255 million dollars in revenue last year alone due to poor salmon returns,” said Douglas W. Lovell, Federation of Fly Fishers. “Many anglers consider steelhead trout iconic - the ultimate recreational fish - a reputation that draws fishers from all points of the globe to Northern California’s rivers. Fishing men and women consider it paramount to protect and restore these species.”

“Once again, certain vested agribusiness interests in the San Joaquin Valley are attacking biological science with political science. The federal resource agency responsible for protecting salmon and other at-risk species in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta has done its job - finally - and the ‘Big Stall’ is now in play. We will do every thing we can to defeat this latest assault on good science and responsible government action and look forward to a better day in the Delta soon,” said John Merz, president, Sacramento River Preservation Trust.

“We fought a long battle to get the NMFS to issue a strong plan to protect California salmon from the constant impacts of pollution, drought and diversions,” said Sejal Choksi, program director for San Francisco Baykeeper. “Now, in the face of one more threat from self-serving industry interests, we must protect our salmon again and hope that sound science prevails.”

“In 2008, CalTrout commissioned Dr. Peter Moyle at UC Davis to conduct an assessment of 32 different kinds of California’s native salmon, trout and steelhead. The results of this assessment were sobering—within the next 50-100 years, 65 percent of California native salmonids will be extinct if current trends continue,” said Curtis Knight of CalTrout. “The bold and progressive actions of the NMFS calling for fish passage and adequate flows are precisely what is needed to stave off the extinction path of salmon in Central Valley.”

“What is it with these people?” asked Gary Mulcahy, Winnemem Wintu Tribe. “Can they not see that what they have done in the past is killing – the Delta, the Salmon, Cultures, the environment, and with it – people. All for what? Greed. Yet, they want to go back to what they were doing before the new biological opinion. You cannot continue to destroy the things around you under the guise of economic growth, and expect the people to continue to believe in that lie forever. It is time to stop this madness. It is time to defeat these greedy and untruthful interests. It is time for Californians to just say NO to the big agribusiness and water agency grab for your water. We intervene to protect the salmon, the water, our culture, and the people.”

“The science could not be clearer and the urgency could not be greater,” said Dr. Tina Swanson, executive director of The Bay Institute, a plaintiff in the case that overturned the Bush-era BiOp. “Experts agree that salmon and steelhead are at risk of extinction, and that water projects operations under the old biological opinion would have made things much worse.”