

MIKE THOMPSON

1ST DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE:

WAYS AND MEANS



CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

March 9, 2006

Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez
Office of the Secretary
U.S. Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Ave., NW
Room 5516
Washington, DC 20230

RE: Commercial Fishery Failure Investigation for 2005 California and Oregon Salmon Fisheries

Dear Secretary Gutierrez:

I am mystified as to why NOAA Fisheries has yet to make any disaster determination for last year's salmon season off the coasts of California and Oregon. With reports that this year's season could be completely closed¹, the failure of NOAA Fisheries to make a decision has placed additional economic and emotional strain on the region's commercial and recreational fishing communities.

Last May, 37 members of the U.S. House of Representatives, and 3 members of the U.S. Senate, asked that you do everything you could to expedite the disaster determination process (see enclosures). The 2005 salmon season was cut from 27 weeks to 11 – more than 60-percent – for most of California and Oregon. Your agency's quick response was needed so Congress would have time to secure federal disaster relief funds for the affected fishing families and associated businesses.

Oregon Governor Ted Kulongoski, several counties, cities and businesses in two states, and the Klamath Water Users Alliance, also made pleas for NOAA Fisheries to quickly make a determination. **Ten months have passed and your office has yet to make a determination on last year's request.**

As biologists with the Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC) currently deliberate whether or not to cancel this year's salmon season because of continued poor salmon returns on the Klamath River, your agency's failure to address last year's fishing season is even more troubling.

¹ San Francisco Chronicle. Imagine A Year Without Local Salmon - Fears grow fishing season will be canceled to replenish chinook -- that poster food of California cuisine -- in Klamath River. March 3, 2006. p. A-1.

DISTRICT OFFICES:
1040 MAIN STREET, SUITE 101
NAPA, CA 94559
(707) 226-9898

317 THIRD STREET, SUITE 1
EUREKA, CA 95501
(707) 269-9595

POST OFFICE BOX 2208
FORT BRAGG, CA 95437
(707) 962-0933

712 MAIN STREET, SUITE 1
WOODLAND, CA 95095
(530) 662-5272

CAPITOL OFFICE:
231 CANNON HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-3311

WEB: <http://mikethompson.house.gov>

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The declining salmon numbers in the Klamath River system should not have been a surprise to NOAA Fisheries. Fish biologists warned the federal government that there would be a salmon disaster within 3-4 years after the fish kill in 2002 when up to 78,000 adult salmon died on the Klamath River². In addition, the outbreak of *Ceratomyxa Shasta* (C. Shasta) on the Klamath River has further stressed the Basin's salmon populations and may have equally devastating impacts on future salmon runs.

This letter is to request that NOAA Fisheries make a determination on last year's disaster decision by March 15, 2006. In addition, I request that NOAA Fisheries give me, and the rest of the California and Oregon delegation, a full and detailed report on how they plan to address this year's salmon season and help the fishing communities affected by any salmon fishing closures.

Sincerely,



MIKE THOMPSON
Member of Congress

Enclosures:

Cc: Chairman Frank Wolf – Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice and Commerce, and Related Agencies
Ranking Member Alan B. Mollohan – Subcommittee on Science, the Departments of State, Justice and Commerce, and Related Agencies
Chairman Richard Pombo – Resources Committee
Ranking Member Nick Rahall – Resources Committee
Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi
California Congressional Delegation
Oregon Congressional Delegation
U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer
U.S. Senator Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator Gordon Smith

² California Department of Fish and Game: September 2002 Klamath River Fish Kill: Final Analysis of Contributing Factors and Impacts. July 2004, p. 158.