

## **Salmon disaster aid making its way to the California coast**

In May, we wrote about the complete closure of the California salmon fishery following record low (about 30% of expected) returns of Sacramento River Chinook. The 2008 disaster far surpassed that of 2006, when returns were off by about 29%, leading to a sharply limited salmon season.

In years past, the salmon fishery has been open from early or mid spring through early fall (with occasional short-term in-season closures) in our area. The salmon fishery has been important to commercial and recreational fishermen (including women!), the businesses that provide goods and services needed for their activities, and their communities - including Santa Cruz.

This year's salmon fishery closure led to a federal disaster declaration, paving the way for disaster relief funds to help affected individuals and businesses adapt. The National Marine Fisheries Service estimated total net income losses for commercial and charter fishing and processing businesses in California and Oregon at \$60 million, not including the effects on fishery-support businesses. California estimated the impacts at \$255 million, with 2,263 industry-related jobs lost to the state, alone. Estimated impacts to Oregon and Washington were lower because they are less dependent on the Sacramento River stocks.

In July, following the request of the three West Coast governors, Congress appropriated \$170 million in disaster relief, about 59% less than the \$290 million requested. In September, NMFS made \$100 million of those funds available; the remaining \$70 million is expected to be available later this year. The three states are splitting the aid, with 72% going to California, 15% to Oregon and 13% to Washington.

The Pacific States Marine Fisheries Commission (PSMFC) is administering the disaster relief program. Funds are available to fishermen, buyers, fishing guides and businesses dependent on fishing, with the amount awarded based on their role in and income associated with the fishery and other criteria, and limited to no more than \$250,000. For example, charter owners are eligible for \$85 per paying salmon angler passenger in their best year between 2002 and 2007. Funds for commercial fishermen and buyers are based on the pounds of salmon they landed or received in a recent best year, multiplied by a price per pound. (Limited funds are available for licensed but inactive salmon fishermen.) Fishery-support businesses that can document that at least 30% of their business is salmon fishery-related may be awarded 50% of their salmon-related losses initially, with the remainder to follow as funds allow.

Central and northern California fishing ports have been uncharacteristically quiet since news of the salmon closure last spring. Some fishermen have headed north – as far as Alaska - to fish elsewhere; others have focused on other fisheries, although many of those are limited as well. With the first salmon relief payments arriving this month, local fishermen and others are expressing some relief, although

uncertainty about next year's salmon season remains.

For more information or to apply for West Coast salmon fishery disaster relief funds, see <http://www.psmfc.org/> or <http://www.calkingsalmon.org/>. For more information about California fisheries and fishing communities, please contact Carrie Pomeroy at [cmpomeroy@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cmpomeroy@ucdavis.edu).