

Testimony by Rep. Mike Thompson (CA-1)

S. 1825 – Pacific Salmon Recovery Act

May 14, 2002

253 Russell Senate Office Building

Senator Boxer and Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on S. 1825, the Pacific Salmon Recovery Act. I appreciate the Subcommittee's continuing leadership on the fishery issues of the Pacific Northwest. I am also grateful to you Senator Boxer, and Senators Craig and Crapo who introduced the bill, Oregon Senators Smith and Wyden who were original co-sponsors, and the other Members of both the full and Subcommittee who have co-sponsored this legislation.

I want to thank the witnesses who have taken the time to testify on this measure, many of whom traveled thousands of miles to be with us today. In particular, I would like to thank Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations from Portland, Oregon and Bob Hight, Director of the California Department of Fish and Game for their continuing dedication to this issue.

Salmon and steelhead trout have long been a critical component of the culture and economy of the Pacific Northwest. The port towns of the West Coast grew up around the salmon industry and the harvesting of salmon and other fish have served as the financial backbone for many of these communities.

However, times have been tough for these communities, as the fisheries have declined. While salmon are still an integral part of the culture of my district, decades of water diversions, dam building, overfishing, and urban development have had a terrible impact on the rivers and streams of the Pacific Northwest. By the late 1990s, West Coast salmon populations had declined to only 10% of what it had been in the 1800s. California's Trinity River system alone has lost more than 80% of its King Salmon and more than 60% of its Steelhead Trout over the past 50 years. In the Central Valley, 70-90% of historical spawning and rearing habitat has been lost.

According to the American Fisheries Society, at least 214 Pacific Coast anadromous fish populations are "at risk," while at least 106 other historically abundant populations have already become extinct. Twenty-six distinct population segments of Pacific salmon and sea-run trout are listed as either endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). California alone accounts for 10 of those endangered listings.

With the commercial harvesting of coho salmon completely illegal in my state and other species not far behind, hundreds of our fishing families have been forced out of business. Many of our local economies have subsequently suffered. As recently as 1988, sport and commercial salmon fishing in the Pacific region generated more than \$1.25 billion for our regional economy. Since then, salmon fishing closures have contributed to the loss of nearly 80% of our region's job base, with a total salmon industry loss over the past 30 years of approximately 72,000 family wage jobs.

The fleet of commercial fishermen off the North Coast of California has dwindled from 3,243 vessels to 725 in since the 1980's. These boats used to catch upwards of 82,000 coho salmon. Today, fishing for coho is forbidden due to its listing as an endangered species, and has closed most commercial fishing operations between Coos Bay, Oregon to Bodega Bay, California.

The impact on commercial fishermen has also translated into lost jobs in other fisheries reliant industry. As recently as July of 2001, Eureka Fisheries Incorporated laid off 140 people in the small Northern California towns of Eureka and Crescent City because they don't have enough fish to process to run their plants. Salmon landings at Fort Bragg, Eureka and Crescent City declined from 4.8 million pounds per year during 1976 to 1980 to approximately 58,000 pounds today.

As an example, commercial salmon fisherman Dave Bitts from California's North Coast has had to spend May through August for the last ten years at least 300 miles away from his home port

to fish for salmon. That's because the salmon season has been virtually closed in the Klamath Management Zone, which covers nearly half of the California coastline. Mr. Bitts has to travel to San Francisco and south to fish for salmon, placing not only significant strain on his family life but also his pocketbook. In effect, fishermen like Mr. Bitts sacrifice their home port harvest each year to ensure enough fish migrate up the Klamath River to spawn and reproduce. Unfortunately, the efforts to ensure healthy habitat and spawning beds for the salmon is not reciprocated upstream, as the number of salmon that make it out of the river are nowhere near reaching a sustainable level for harvest.

The Klamath River system was once the third most productive salmon fishery on the Pacific Coast. According to a California Department of Fish and Game report, only remnant populations survive in the Klamath's principal tributaries today, and spring-run Chinook have been extirpated. This situation is directly attributed to the dismal water quality in the Klamath River where its deterioration is largely attributable to upstream sedimentation and agricultural runoff. Without adequate and consistent funding for salmon habitat restoration upstream - like what is outlined in S. 1826 - the efforts by salmon fishing communities to restore these species will continue to be futile.

These dire circumstances aren't limited to the commercial fishing industry, either. It crosses all spectrums from a multi-million dollar timber industry, to recreational fishing, processing plants, ice factories, conventional family establishments, restaurants and tourism. Examples include:

- **Simpson Timber Company:** Due to the listing of the endangered Coho salmon, this major employer and industrial timberland owner has spent millions of dollars over the last four years putting together an aquatic habitat conservation plan to help reduce the amount of sediment which runs into the rivers and streams to protect the Coho.
- **National Association of Homebuilders:** The strict prohibitions of building because of

the endangered and threatened salmon in the Pacific Northwest and California has dramatically changed development activities in virtually all the states, and the costs of these actions are borne by the builders and homeowners.

- **Association of California Water Agencies:** California's water supplies are subject to frequent disruptions due to enforcement actions under the Endangered Species Act for salmon.

In 1998, the governors of the California, Oregon, Washington, and Alaska made a joint appeal to create a \$200 million fund for coastal salmon restoration with funds to be divided equally among the participating states. The Administration responded in the FY 2000 budget with a request for \$100 million. Under the initial House budget, the salmon recovery program was zeroed out. Funding was restored in conference with the Senate but, when the final package went to the President that October, only \$9 million was included for California.

This year, the Administration's budget request includes \$110 million for the Pacific Salmon Restoration Fund. Unfortunately, only \$90 million goes to the states and tribes in need. While the Administration's request is critically important, I believe our efforts need to be expanded.

Last summer, a bill that I introduced in the House, H.R. 1157, the Pacific Salmon Recovery Act passed overwhelmingly by a vote of 418-6. All the members of the Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Alaska delegations as well as most of California's members voted for this bill. This bill authorizes \$200 million in federal assistance to the five Pacific states of Alaska, Washington, Idaho, Oregon and California for the restoration of salmon and anadromous trout habitat, as requested by the four governors. More important, it guarantees equal funding among the five states and would require broad conditions under which the money must be spent while allowing maximum flexibility to each state in setting priorities.

At a minimum, use of the funds must be consistent with the goal of salmon recovery, establish

specific goals and timelines for activities funded, and include measurable criteria by which such activities can be evaluated.

The bill also requires that activities carried out with funds from this program be scientifically based, cost-effective, contribute to the protection or restoration of salmon, and not be conducted on private land except with the consent of the owner of the land.

Other provisions include tight restrictions on agency overhead costs, a requirement to provide public participation in the grant-making process, and assigning priority to those species that are listed under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The money allotted to California last year was extremely important, but there is no reasonable justification for our state receiving less than an equal share of available funds. With a dozen endangered species listings to contend with, California is in as much need as the other Pacific coastal states. Successful passage of the Senate bill is essential to ensure that these much-needed funds are distributed to the states. Taking preventive action like habitat restoration, as this bill would do, could save the communities the additional devastating economic and social effects of additional endangered species listings. The House and Senate bills require that the funds for salmon restoration be distributed equally among the participating states, and this is critical to ensure continued funding.

Early efforts at the state level have begun the process of reversing the decline of our salmon economy. Private landowners, conservation groups, and industry have committed to the lengthy process of repairing the damage done. It is now time for the federal government to increase its commitment to salmon restoration.

For instance, a joint project in my district between Trout Unlimited and Mendocino Forest Products has seen significant success in helping repair a river in Mendocino County by

upgrading and decommissioning 8.75 miles of roads not used by the timber industry. This work prevented an estimated 28,855 cubic yards of road-related sediment from being delivered to the South Fork. As an example, a standard dump truck you see doing roadwork has a 10 cubic yard capacity. Their work also entailed upgrading the remaining roads in the basin to withstand major storm events in addition to supporting traditional timberland usage.

Because of this project, we are in position to restore Coho salmon to a restored sub-basin. Until now, reintroduction efforts in the Garcia River have usually involved putting fish back into the same conditions from which they disappeared and hoping that something will be different and that the fish will take to their changed surroundings.

We will never return to what was once “business as usual.” However, by stabilizing and restoring our salmon numbers through habitat recovery, we can lessen the regulatory pressure on industry and reduce the risk of new surprises. We must demonstrate our support for state, local, and private efforts to halt the decline of Pacific Salmon by fully funding the federal contribution of salmon restoration efforts. This is why I support S. 1825.

I urge you to pass the Senate’s Pacific Salmon Recovery Act. Doing so will enable all Pacific Northwestern states to participate on more projects like the one described, and protect the land, water and economy of the entire region. Making this investment today will ensure that these once strong rivers will have a healthy salmon and fish future.