

P R E S S R E L E A S E

Karuk Tribe • Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations

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TRIBE, FISHERMEN PETITION CALIFORNIA TO ADOPT FIRST-OF-ITS-KIND MANDATE FOR RIVER FLOWS

The Karuk Tribe and PCFFA calls on Waterboard to Mandate Flows, Avert Extinction Event

Happy Camp, California – Today, the Karuk Tribe and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA) filed a petition with the California Water Board asking it to set and enforce a minimum streamflow standard for the Scott River. The Scott River, a tributary to the Klamath, is home to several species of salmon and steelhead trout. Notably, the Scott supports most of the remaining ESA listed Southern Oregon-Northern California Coho left in the world.

This Petition is brought under the Petition Clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution and article I, section 3 of the California Constitution, both of which permit citizens to petition the government for redress of grievances. Upon receipt of such a request, the agency has 30 days to either schedule the matter for a hearing or deny the petition in writing, with reasons given for any such denial. If adopted, this would be the first permanent year-round stream flow regulation has been established in this manner.

“The fate of this population of coho salmon depends on whether or not we keep water in the Scott River,” said Karuk Tribe Council Member and traditional dip net fishermen Troy Hockaday. “If we don’t act immediately, we could see this run of coho salmon disappear from the earth in a few short years.”

A temporary order is in place now which stems from a similar petition that cited Governor Newsom’s temporary drought declaration in 2022. The current effort is aimed at making the flow protections permanent. The flows themselves are based on the best available science including recommendations by California Fish and Wildlife biologists.

“Even in wet years like this one, summer flows in the Scott are much lower today than they were in the driest of summers before the expansion of groundwater pumping which began in the 1980s,” noted PCFFA Director Glenn Spain. “Dewatering streams like the Scott is a key factor in the decline of California’s salmon fisheries and it has cost commercial salmon fishing families thousands of jobs.”

Since 1980, a dramatic increase in unregulated groundwater pumping has left the Scott River bone dry in long stretches in most summers, creating a crisis for salmon and the communities that depend on them for culture, subsistence, and jobs. The water is used almost exclusively to grow alfalfa.

Scott Valley water rights were defined in a 1980 adjudication, but most of the Valley was not included in the decree and thus most of the water use there is not regulated at all. “The adjudication failed to include most of the land in the valley where all the new wells were drilled,” explained Spain. “If you visit the Scott River in the late summer, you will find a dry riverbed surrounded by emerald green fields of alfalfa. Farmers literally pump the river dry, leaving fish stranded in puddles.”

“Look at what is happening to California’s fisheries right now,” said Karuk Council Member Kenneth Brink, “the recreational and commercial fishing seasons are completely shut down and tribes are choosing not to fish for their own subsistence because our salmon runs are at their breaking point. California must act aggressively to protect what’s left of our native salmon runs before it’s too late.”

Recently, California Fish and Wildlife Commission funded \$20 million in restoration projects in the Scott and neighboring Shasta River. “We applaud California’s effort to fund restoration projects and we earnestly thank participating landowners,” said Karuk Chairman Russell ‘Buster’ Attebery. “But at the end of the day, we must have water in the river for any of this restoration to work.”

The Karuk Tribe is committed to restoring the fisheries that sustained their ancestors for countless generations while commercial fishermen want to protect their jobs.

“The Klamath Basin is one of the most ecologically diverse places in America,” said Attebery. “It is a complex system that requires care and balance that has not been seen in a long time. The fish have taken care of us through good times and bad times since time immemorial,” concludes Attebery. “We are obligated to do the same for them.”

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EDITORS NOTES

Link to [petition](#)

Link to [pictures](#) courtesy Karuk Tribe

