

## Testimony

By Grant Davis  
Assistant General Manager, Sonoma County Water Agency

California State Assembly Committee on Water Parks and Wildlife Committee  
**CALIFORNIA'S SALMON CRISIS: Understanding the Severity of the Crisis and the  
State's Role in Recovery**  
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Thank you Chairman Huffman and members of the Committee. I am Grant Davis, Assistant General Manager of the Sonoma County Water Agency.

My agency is a wholesale water supplier for 600,000 people in the North San Francisco Bay Region. We also operate wastewater facilities and manage flood protection programs in Sonoma County. The Russian River is our primary water source and it is also home to three endangered or threatened salmon and steelhead species.

I am very pleased that the Committee has taken the time for this in-depth examination of the salmon crisis that is now upon us. I am here today to report on progress being made in restoration of the historic coastal salmon runs and to outline some of the next steps toward success in this effort.

**#1 FISHERY RESTORATION GRANT PROGRAM.** Two of my board members were involved in development of the Department of Fish and Game Fishery Restoration Grant Program in 1997. Since that time the program disbursed more than \$147 million in state and federal funds for fishery restoration throughout California.

Realizing that federal funding would be needed for the grant program to succeed Sonoma County board members worked with colleagues in 13 coastal counties and people from the five Pacific states to develop the federal Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund. The fund generated more than \$800 million for the five states including \$100 million for California. Just last month Congress appropriated an additional \$80 million for the program in fiscal year 2009. These federal funds are disbursed in California through the Fishery Restoration Grant program.

The program helped complete a fish ladder at Healdsburg on the Russian River in 2002. That same year Chinook salmon used the fish ladder to access the 800 square miles of habitat above Healdsburg. Monitoring by Agency fishery biologists indicated more than 1000 redds, salmon nesting sites, above Healdsburg that were enabled by the fish ladder.

Another example is the removal of an inoperative agricultural dam known as the Mumford Dam in Mendocino County. My Agency with help from the state removed the fish passage barrier and installed a series of nine weirs to facilitate salmon migration. The following spring Agency fishery biologists counted more than 1000 young of the year out-migrating at Mumford.

I have many other examples but let me just make my point by saying that restoration does work. When we do the instream restoration the fish do come back.

**#2 TIME FOR A COORDINATED RESPONSE.** While voluntary programs like the Fishery Restoration Grant program are making significant progress, total restoration and delisting requires a plan and a timetable.

The Sonoma County Board realized this need in the late 1990s and initiated a federal consultation with the US Army Corps of Engineers and with NOAA Fisheries leading to release of a federal Biological Opinion on Russian River salmon issued last September. My agency spent \$35 million on this and related fisheries programs. The Board also contributed more than \$2 million to help the State develop a State Recovery Strategy for Coho Salmon.

We now have a federal document and a state recovery plan that tells us what must be done to protect and restore salmon and steelhead. Implementing the Biological Opinion alone will cost our rate payers more than \$85 million and will require federal funding in excess of \$75 million. Statewide the full implementation of the California Coho Salmon Recovery Strategy will cost more than \$5 billion. These documents represent the best science and the most solid technical answers for salmon recovery in our basin. It's time to focus on these to guide future expenditures.

**#3 THE STATE ROLE IN SPECIES RECOVERY.** We have the best chance of success in salmon recovery when we get local, state and federal programs in alignment toward the same goals. Here are some actions that the state could implement to move us in this direction:

1. Focus the fishery restoration grant program on completion of projects that are part of approved federal biological opinions or state and federal species recovery plans.

There are some who say state funds should not be used for mandated projects which is the same as saying that the most urgently needed projects cannot be supported. The state could maximize the benefit to the fishery by focusing its dollars on the priority projects identified by the best scientists. Focus the funding on biological opinion and recovery plan implementation.

2. Allocate existing Proposition 84 state bond funding. Proposition 84 includes \$45 million designated for coastal salmon restoration. These funds are urgently needed for recovery of the coastal populations. The remainder of these funds should be

allocated for restoration of the coastal salmon as soon as possible. The funds provide an essential state match to federal funds provided by the Pacific Coastal Salmon Recovery Fund. The federal program requires a 33% match for 2009.

3. Provide significant levels of bond funding for salmon restoration. From 1997 to 2007 coastal salmon restoration was specifically funded by a portion of the revenue paid to the state from tidelands oil production. Although my Agency and some of the other panelists here today had strongly supported the continuation of this funding program it was discontinued in 2007. Six statewide bond measures are now under consideration in the legislature. It is critically important that future bond initiatives include substantial amounts, \$100 million or more, for salmon restoration.

4. Support removal of fish passage barriers by Caltrans and by local governments. Road barriers at stream crossing are significant impediments to the migration of salmon and steelhead. Legislation was enacted in 2005 requiring that Caltrans and the Department of Fish and Game prioritize the removal of fish passage barriers based on the needs of the species. This law should be fully implemented and funded. Legislation has been introduced this year to move this process forward (AB 1189, Skinner).

5. Revise recreational fishing regulations. There is evidence that recreational fishing may be having impacts on listed species. Closure of the near shore ocean and tidal portions of the Russian River for recreational fishing to protect listed species at the start of their inland migration could have significant value. Sport fishing is also allowed on the river during the coho and Chinook migrations in the fall. Some listed salmon are being caught and, even if released, are most likely diverted from successful reproduction in the watershed. One of the five to ten known, returning broodstock coho salmon in the Russian River was taken by a fisherman last fall in a steelhead fishing contest held on the river. Changing recreational fishing regulations to protect listed species in the Russian River under low flow conditions could have significant benefit. The same protections are already in place for all other North Coast rivers.

6. Increase Fish and Game Warden Staffing. The Department of Fish and Game staffing for game wardens may be inadequate to protect listed salmon and steelhead in the coastal counties. The state should review the staffing levels for game wardens and current compensation for wardens to make sure adequate staffing is available to protect listed species. There are anecdotal reports of large scale salmon poaching ongoing in Sonoma County.

7. Support research on ocean conditions that impact salmon survival. Last year's unprecedented salmon "collapse" prompted state and federal managers to close both commercial and recreational fisheries for much of the West Coast. There is a pressing need to improve our understanding of the cumulative effects of both watershed stressors and ocean conditions on the survival of salmon and steelhead. State support for the Ocean Protection Council can be important for resolving this crisis.

8. Support salmon and steelhead genetics research programs. Sound genetic science is essential better evaluate ocean harvests in the mixed stock fishery in the Pacific and provide better protection for localized populations. The state can advocate at the Pacific Marine Fisheries Management Council and other venues for continued support for salmon and steelhead genetics research in federal laboratories in support of this goal.

9. Support full implementation of the State Coho Salmon Recovery Strategy. The state recovery strategy offers the best scientific plan to protect and restore coho salmon. Having state agencies review their roles in implementing the strategy and providing state support to move forward on implementation would be a solid step forward in ending the salmon crisis.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. If I can be of any assistance to you or your staff members please call.

Grant Davis  
Assistant General Manager, Sonoma County Water Agency  
PO Box 11628  
Santa Rosa, CA 95406  
707-547-1911

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