



County of Del Norte
Board of Supervisors
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March 26, 2024

Tina Bartlett
Northern Regional Manager
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
601 Locust Street
Redding, CA 96001

Re: Hatchery Chinook Harvest on the Smith River

Dear Ms. Bartlett:

The Del Norte County Board of Supervisors wishes to express its support for the Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation's (TDN) previously transmitted request for consideration of a hatchery-origin Chinook salmon harvest allowance in the Department's 24/25 rulemaking. As TDN has stated in their letter to the Department dated January 25, 2024, this omission in the 23/24 regulations may have resulted from the emergency closure of California's ocean and in-stream salmon fisheries. TDN has stated this restriction "does not work towards the management or conservation goals" of their staff or their tribally owned Rowdy Creek Fish Hatchery, and that the hatchery supported fishery has importance beyond the Tribal community. This Board echoes that sentiment and implores the Department to consider ways to resolve this matter in future years, beginning with the 24/25 season as proposed by TDN.

More specifically, TDN has proposed the concept of allowing the retention of marked hatchery-origin Chinook, similar to the current ability to retain marked hatchery-origin steelhead despite the restriction on the retention of wild steelhead on the Smith River. This Board believe that this concept makes a tremendous amount of sense. As has been noted by TDN staff, preventing the harvest of hatchery-origin Chinook presents a distinct genetic concern by not removing hatchery-origin fish from the system before they are allowed to spawn with wild fish and that allowing the retention of hatchery Chinook is consistent with the hatchery's goals related to rearing and releasing Chinook.

The Department should consider the many unique factors that exist for the Smith River, including the fact that hatchery-raised and released Chinook salmon exist within the system. As noted by TDN in their aforementioned letter, it has been over a decade since the Department and Commission prohibited wild steelhead retention while permitting hatchery raised steelhead be retained. Not allowing for the retention of hatchery Chinook while allowing for the retention of hatchery steelhead simply isn't sensible given the experience for how this fishery can be successfully managed. In

addition, the Smith River chinook escapement is not reliant on PFMC/NOAA regulations as this is a separate fishery and entirely controlled by the State. With returns recorded over 22,000 for the 2023 Fall run, it is imperative to reopen the 2024 season.

As a rural and geographically isolated community, many residents of Del Norte County are reliant on the Smith River for their livelihood such as fishing guides, merchants, and restaurants. As noted in their letter, the Smith River also plays a vital role in the lives of the Tolowa Dee-ni' for the resources it provides. Salmon fishing is a major attractant for visitors to our community and many sectors of our economy rely on this tourism such as grocery stores, gas stations, motels, RV parks, restaurants, etc. The effect on the individuals and small business owners has been and will continue to be devastating, particularly when coupled with our community's recovery from last summer's 94,693-acre Smith River Complex Fires. As such, the Board of Supervisors respectfully requests the Department's consideration of TDN's proposal and now this Board's request for resolution to this matter.

Respectfully,

Dean Wilson, Chair

Cc: Honorable Jeri Lynn Thompson, Chair, Tolowa Dee-ni' Nation Tribal Council
Honorable Mike McGuire, Member of California State Senate
Honorable Jim Wood, Member of California State Assembly
Chuck Bonham, Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Melissa Miller-Henson, Executive Director, California Fish and Game Commission