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## CA Fishing Industry and Conservation Groups: Government Leaders Should Refuse Water Grab that Threatens California's Salmon with Extinction

Seeking Profits, San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors Insist on Reckless Waivers that Sacrifice the Future of California's Fishing Industry

Pacifica (March 27, 2014) – A group of wealthy agribusiness interests in the San Joaquin Valley urged **Secretaries Jewell and Pritzker** to risk the extinction of California's remaining critically endangered salmon runs by increasing pumping in the Delta to maximum levels over the next few weeks, during the peak of the salmon migration through the Delta. They ask for this increase in pumping at a time in which diverting what little water is in the system will cause maximum harm to the already critically endangered winter run salmon, threatened spring run salmon and steelhead, and to the fishing community. This request would not only violate state and federal laws designed to protect Delta water quality and salmon and other native fish that rely on the Delta for their survival, but it also asks **Governor Brown** and the Obama Administration to abandon their efforts to balance all of the various water needs equally and instead put the needs of a select few agribusiness interests above the needs of everyone else.

The request came from the San Joaquin River Exchange contractors, a group that has been allocated a generous 40% of their contract water supply this year, even though most other water contractors have received a 0% allocation of water this year from the Delta due to the drought, including much of urban southern California. But the Exchange Contractors want more. Not only are these special interests seeking to elevate their needs above all others in the State, but documents prepared by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation indicate that they are unlikely to even use the water; instead they plan to sell it to the highest bidder, reaping windfall profits at the expense of scarce public resources.

“The salmon industry is trying to dodge bullets in this drought with wild stocks getting hammered in drought-stricken rivers,” said **John McManus**, executive director of the Golden Gate Salmon Association. “Although hatcheries are trucking fish to evade the drought, the salmon fishing industry faces future shutdown due to harm being done to federally protected wild winter and spring run salmon being sucked into the Delta pumps. The future of California's salmon depends on these flows being allowed to function as nature provided and not sucked into giant pumps that spell death to natural

resources that belong to all Californians. Sharing water to address human health and safety needs is something all Californians can support, but this request is entirely different.”

**The National Marine Fisheries Service** [explained](#) earlier this week that the drought is already causing serious harm to native fish, including salmon, and “we run the risk of perhaps losing an entire year-class of salmon.” **The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service** [echoed](#) that water conditions in 2014 “could lead to the loss of an entire year class of juvenile fall Chinook salmon.” While these agencies and others have devoted substantial effort and resources over the years to restoring California’s iconic salmon runs, we must not undermine those efforts by allowing surviving salmon and steelhead to get slaughtered by unprecedented levels of pumping during the peak of their migration through the Delta.

**Kate Poole**, senior attorney with the Natural Resources Defense Council said, “We urge Governor Brown and Secretaries Jewell and Pritzker to uphold state and federal laws meant to protect water quality and fisheries, and refuse the requested waivers by the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors. Our leaders should not support water supply demands that directly undermine the law and sacrifice California’s 150-year old fishing economy and the Delta’s ecological health. We have much better solutions available than this short-sighted, self-serving water grab.”

Implementing the changes requested by the contractors would require waiving several state and federal laws designed to protect water quality and fisheries, and would require the approval of several state and federal agencies tasked with protecting public trust resources. Governor Brown promised in his drought declaration that changes to existing state law requirements would be limited to those that benefited or avoided harm to fisheries and would not result in fishermen and the north coast fishing communities bearing the brunt of the drought’s impacts. We urge Governor Brown and Secretaries Jewell and Pritzker to refuse the requested waivers and to implement water supply solutions that do not undermine the law or sacrifice one interest for another

“With reservoirs so low, next year’s spawning salmon and their eggs are at great jeopardy too,” said Dr. **Jon Rosenfield**, a fish biologist with The Bay Institute. “Loss of the salmon that are trying to make it out of the Central Valley now poses an unacceptable risk to the continued existence of winter run and spring run Chinook salmon, Central Valley steelhead and sturgeon and other species that are unique to San Francisco Bay Estuary – once they’re gone, they’re gone forever. If we can’t rely on our fish and wildlife agencies to enforce laws that protect imperiled species, then we can be sure that proposals such as the Governor’s twin tunnels will never be operated responsibly.”

“In a nutshell the government is being asked to risk our valuable native salmon stocks and sacrifice thousands of sustainable fishing jobs and the economies of fishing communities all for a small group of wealthy water profiteers” said **Zeke Grader**, of the PCFFA which represents working fishing men and women. “That is unconscionable”

“There are no quick and easy solutions to California’s current drought and it will take all interests working together to address the drought’s impacts on fish, wildlife and people. Choosing to send water to select agribusinesses at a time that could spell doom for endangered salmon will only plunge California back into the water wars that Governor Brown and the Obama Administration have worked so hard to avoid. We need to do better if we are to come together this year for the necessary fixes to California’s water system,” stated **Kim Delfino**, California Program Director, Defenders of Wildlife.

“Instead of rolling back critical environmental protections for the commercial salmon fishery, we should look for ways to support those impacted by drought just as we would support communities subjected to floods, forest fires, and earthquakes,” said **Steve Rothert**, Director of the California Regional Office of American Rivers. We must also work together toward longer-term solutions that ensure a future of healthy rivers, fishable salmon runs, and sustainable agriculture.”

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The Golden Gate Salmon Association ([www.goldengatesalmonassociation.org](http://www.goldengatesalmonassociation.org)) is a coalition of salmon advocates that includes commercial and recreational salmon fisherman, businesses, restaurants, tribes, environmentalists, elected officials, families and communities that rely on salmon. GGSA’s mission is to protect and restore California’s largest salmon producing habitat comprised of the Central Valley river’s that feed the Bay-Delta ecosystem and the communities that rely on salmon as a long-term, sustainable, commercial, recreational and cultural resource.

Currently, California’s salmon industry is valued at \$1.4 billion in economic activity annually and about half that much in economic activity and jobs again in Oregon. The industry employs tens of thousands of people from Santa Barbara to northern Oregon. This is a huge economic bloc made up of commercial fishermen, recreational fishermen (fresh and salt water), fish processors, marinas, coastal communities, equipment manufacturers, the hotel and food industry, tribes, and the salmon fishing industry at large.

Defenders of Wildlife is dedicated to the protection of all native animals and plants in their natural communities. With more than 1.1 million members and activists, Defenders of Wildlife is a leading advocate for innovative solutions to safeguard our wildlife heritage for generations to come. For more information, visit [www.defenders.org](http://www.defenders.org) and follow us on Twitter [@DefendersNews](https://twitter.com/DefendersNews).

Founded in 1981, The Bay Institute's mission is to protect, restore and inspire conservation of San Francisco Bay and its watershed from the Sierra to the sea. The Bay Institute uses a combination of scientific research, political advocacy, and public education to work toward the environmental restoration of the entire watershed that drains into San Francisco Bay. The Bay Institute's Rivers and Delta Program has spearheaded efforts to protect Central Valley salmon species. Visit us on the web: <http://www.bay.org/rivers-and-delta>.

The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 1.4 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world’s natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Bozeman, MT, and Beijing. Visit us at [www.nrdc.org](http://www.nrdc.org) and follow us on Twitter [@NRDC](https://twitter.com/NRDC).

Earthjustice, the nation's premier nonprofit environmental law organization, wields the power of law and the strength of partnership to protect people's health, to preserve magnificent places and wildlife, to

advance clean energy, and to combat climate change. Because the earth needs a good lawyer. For more information, visit [www.earthjustice.org](http://www.earthjustice.org).

Friends of the San Francisco Estuary is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization organized by the [San Francisco Estuary Partnership](#)'s Management Committee in 1991. Friends of the Estuary works to: educate policymakers, legislators, and the public on the need for adequate freshwater flows to the San Francisco Estuary; promote citizen involvement in studying, restoring and managing a healthy Estuary; and serve as a watchdog and advocate for [Comprehensive Conservation Management Plan](#) implementation, among other activities.

American Rivers protects wild rivers, restores damaged rivers, and conserves clean water for people and nature. Since 1973, American Rivers has protected and restored more than 150,000 miles of rivers through advocacy efforts, on-the-ground projects, and an annual [America's Most Endangered Rivers](#)® campaign.