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For More Information and Interviews Contact:

Bill Jennings, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, 209-464-5067. deltakeep@me.com

Tom Stokely, Save California Salmon, 530-524-0315, tgstoked@gmail.com

Emergency Water Plan to Save California Salmon from Extinction ***Fisheries Advocates Send River Plan to State Water Board to Mitigate Immediate Threat***

The Sacramento River's iconic salmon runs are in imminent danger of extinction due to drought and irrational water policy. To avert a catastrophe, fisheries advocates have submitted an emergency water management plan to the State Water Resources Control Board.

Drafted by the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance (CSPA), the California Water Impact Network (CWIN), and Save California Salmon (SCS), the plan will significantly reduce salmon-killing high temperature water releases from Shasta and Trinity reservoirs. It will also protect carryover storage in the event of another dry year.

The crisis, building for some time, has accelerated dramatically in recent days. On May 21, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife reported that endangered winter-run Chinook salmon were dying below Keswick Dam near Redding from releases of warm water taken from the top of Shasta Reservoir.

Salmon need cold, clean water to survive. But the water released in May by the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation to supply a small number of agricultural irrigators exceeded 61° F. This water temperature was far above the 56°F standard protective of spawning salmon and the 53.5°F needed to protect salmon eggs. The releases occurred despite calls from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and the National Marine Fisheries Service to keep river temperatures at or below 56°F.

The situation is particularly dire because the Sacramento River's salmon were already at the tipping point. According to the CDFW, Sacramento River mainstem winter-run, spring-run and fall-run Chinook salmon (1970-1974 v. 2015-2019) have declined 91.0, 99.9 and 79.7 percent, respectively. Fall-run salmon are the largest run on the Sacramento River and the mainstay of California's commercial and sport salmon fisheries.

CSPA Executive Director Bill Jennings said, “Despite excessive April-May water deliveries, Shasta Reservoir still has sufficient cold water to save the salmon. Unfortunately, the Bureau has unreasonably delivered exorbitant amounts of water to Central Valley agribusiness. The State Water Board has failed to meaningfully act to stop this unfolding disaster. The Board must limit the Bureau’s agricultural water deliveries to protect the needs of fisheries and urban areas.”

In response, a coalition of conservationists and fishery advocates have submitted an alternative water operations plan to the State Water Resources Control Board. The plan will protect Chinook salmon spawning and rearing in the Sacramento, Trinity and lower Klamath Rivers. The plan will also maintain an extra half-million acre-feet of water in Shasta and Trinity reservoirs should next year also be dry.

“It’s a myth that sending Trinity water to the Sacramento River helps the Sacramento winter-run Chinook,” says Tom Stokely, the co-director of Save California Salmon. “Trinity water heats up a lot as it moves through Whiskeytown Reservoir. It is a liability for Sacramento River salmon. Our plan keeps warm Trinity water out of the Sacramento River. It also conserves 50% more water in Trinity Lake. That water will help save salmon on the Trinity and lower Klamath rivers.”

To review the full CSPA/CWIN/SCS Proposed Temperature Management Plan go to:
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/waterrights/water_issues/programs/drought/sacramento_river/

The California Sportfishing Protection Alliance is a 501(c)(3) non-profit public benefit conservation and research organization established in 1983 for the purpose of conserving, restoring, and enhancing the state's water quality, wildlife and fishery resources and their aquatic ecosystems and associated riparian habitats. <https://calsport.org/news/>

Save California Salmon is dedicated to restoring rivers through restoring flows and salmon habitat, removing dams, and improving water quality throughout Northern California. We are also dedicated to fighting new threats to our rivers such as new dams, diversions and pipelines and empowering people to fight for rivers and salmon. We are dedicated to protecting and restoring the salmon Klamath, Trinity, Sacramento, Eel, and Smith. Rivers. <https://www.californiasalmon.org/>

The California Water Impact Network promotes the equitable and environmental use of California's water, including instream uses, through research, planning, public education, and litigation. <https://www.c-win.org>