DECLARATION OF DISASTER
AFFECTING THE WEST COAST SALMON FISHING INDUSTRY

Although salmon stocks along the Pacific Coast experience annual fluctuations in abundance, the 1994 level has reached a record low.

The ocean salmon fisheries off the coasts of Washington, Oregon, and California are dependent almost entirely on chinook and coho salmon. For chinook salmon, catches from these ocean fisheries plunged from a high of 2,121,999 chinook in 1988 to an ocean catch of 532,999 in 1993. For coho salmon, the decline has been even more dramatic, with an ocean catch of 5,334,255 coho in 1976, dropping to a record low catch of only 292,000 coho in 1993, a 95 percent decline.

Salmon fisheries in the ocean waters off Washington and northern Oregon are closed in 1994. Remaining salmon fisheries in the ocean waters off central and southern Oregon and California are at reduced levels and closed to fishing for coho salmon. It is predicted that 1994 ocean salmon landings will amount to only 393,400 chinook and 0 coho. Although fishing seasons for inside fisheries have not been completely finalized, they are expected to be the most restrictive ever imposed in many areas.

In 1994, the abundances of both chinook and coho stocks are expected to be some of the lowest on record, with the abundances of many coho stocks the lowest on record and not expected to meet spawning escapement goals even without any ocean salmon fishing. Most chinook stock abundances also are predicted to be at very low, even record low, levels of abundance due to a combination of natural disasters which have recently occurred.

The natural disasters triggering this resource disaster include an extended period of drought, floods, and warm ocean conditions. Shorter-term environmental problems which have compounded existing problems include an extended drought in California, less than normal snowpack throughout the western United States, drought followed by extensive flooding in the State of Washington, and finally, an extreme El Nino ocean warming event during 1992-1993 which is believed to have been responsible for extremely poor survival.

Additional long-term factors include habitat degradation of freshwater and estuarine habitat, overfishing, and over-reliance on hatcheries to maintain dwindling wild stocks.

The Pacific Fishery Management Council estimated that as late as 1988, there were about 5,300 commercial salmon troll vessels fishing off the West Coast, compared with about 2,300 vessels in 1992, a decline of 57 percent.

The National Marine Fisheries Service's Northwest Region conducted an analysis of economic models which suggest that the 1992 West Coast salmon industry involved 8,400 full time equivalents. However, much of the employment is part time so that the total number of jobs impacted is much greater. Commercial salmon fishermen earned $33.8 million while marine recreational anglers spent $79.5 million on West Coast salmon in 1992. In 1992, 140 West Coast processing plants processed 72 million pounds of finished salmon products worth approximately $170 million. These plants employ over 2,000 people for the processing of salmon and other West Coast fish.

Therefore, in light of the foregoing facts, I hereby determine that a fishery resource disaster arising from series of natural disasters exists in the salmon fisheries of the West Coast. Persons engaged in commercial salmon fisheries who have suffered uninsured losses will be eligible for grants under appropriate limitations, terms, and conditions to be established as provided in section 308(d) of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries of 1986, as amended.

Ronald H. Brown
Secretary of Commerce

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