



SQUAXIN ISLAND TRIBE

June 1st, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
 Secretary of Commerce
 United States Department of Commerce
 1401 Constitution Ave., NW
 Washington, D.C. 20230

Subject: 2019 Puget Sound Fall Chum Fishery Disaster for the Squaxin Island Tribe

Dear Secretary Ross:

The Squaxin Island Tribe is formally requesting that an economic fishery disaster be declared under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. §1861a). This will allow Squaxin Island tribal fishers who were negatively affected by the complete failure of 2019 Puget Sound fall chum salmon fisheries that are relied upon by our community to be provided disaster relief. The Squaxin Island tribal fisheries affected were the marine area 13D (Pickering Passage, Dana Passage, & Southern Case Inlet), 13H (Totten Inlet), and 13G (Eld Inlet) Puget Sound fall chum salmon fisheries targeting deep south Puget Sound chum runs. The abundance of 2019 Puget Sound fall chum was so low that it resulted in early closures for conservation of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Puget Sound State commercial and State recreational fisheries. Squaxin Island Tribe and other Puget Sound tribal fisheries were adversely impacted by the extremely low abundance of chum salmon in 2019. Of those fish that did return to our usual and accustom fishing grounds, the majority were left for escapement into watersheds to ensure sustainability of the resource. Secretary Ross, we urge you to respond promptly to this matter to allow our fishermen the opportunity to obtain disaster relief funds and support.

These chum salmon fisheries, like all salmon fisheries, are extremely important to our Squaxin Island tribal community and always have been. The low returns of chum impacted our entire tribe. We are fishing people—it is central to our culture and way of life, as well as our economy. Harvest in these fisheries not only contributes significantly to annual fisher income, but also provides a ceremonial and subsistence food source for use by community members throughout the winter months. We have always relied on the water and our natural resources for our health and livelihoods. With very few chum salmon to harvest, our entire community suffered and needs financial relief to get through these difficult times.

As a federally recognized tribes and sovereign nation, we have the right to request and receive disaster relief under the Department of Commerce and Congressional appropriation. We ask that under your authority and in cooperation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries and the Squaxin Island Tribe, that you coordinate with all parties to issue a Fisheries Economic Disaster Declaration as authorized under Section 312 (a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and

Management Act. Thank you for your consideration in this matter. If you have any questions, please contact *Ray Peters, Squaxin Island Tribe Intergovernmental & Tribal Council Liaison* by phone: 360-432-3900 or email: rpeters@squaxin.us.

Sincerely,



Arnold Cooper, Chairman
Squaxin Island Tribe

Cc: The Honorable Patty Murray, US Senator
The Honorable Maria Cantwell, US Senator
The Honorable Denny Heck, Congressman
The Honorable Derrick Kilmer, Congressman