

PFMC Recommends Closure of 2023 Ocean Salmon Fisheries

April 6, 2023



Today, the Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) acted unanimously to recommend a full closure of California's commercial and recreational ocean salmon season.

Options put forward by the PFMC last month for public review, which were developed by industry representatives, all proposed closure of both commercial and sport ocean salmon fisheries off California. This action follows recent projections showing Chinook salmon abundance off California is at historic lows.

After reviewing the Council's recommendation, it is expected that the National Marine Fisheries Service will take regulatory action to enact the closure, effective in mid-May. In addition, the California Fish and Game Commission will consider whether to adopt a closure of inland salmon fisheries at its teleconference on May 17.

"This decision, while difficult, is intended to allow salmon to recover in order to provide future fishing opportunities, said California Department of Fish and Wildlife Director Charlton H. Bonham. "Salmon are an iconic species in California. We treasure them for their intrinsic, cultural, recreational and commercial values. The state is committed to ensuring long-term survival of our salmon runs and supporting our struggling fishing communities. We are looking into all possible options to bring relief as soon as possible to

fishing businesses to addresses costs incurred to maintain their commercial licenses and lost revenue when the season is entirely closed.”

Prolonged and historic drought, severe wildfires and associated impacts to spawning and rearing habitat, harmful algal blooms, and ocean forage shifts have combined to result in some of the lowest stock abundance forecasts on record for Sacramento River Fall Chinook and Klamath River Fall Chinook. The low ocean abundance forecasts, coupled with low 2022 returns, led the PFMC to recommend full closure of California’s commercial and recreational ocean salmon fisheries.

In part, the low returns and abundance forecasts are due to difficult environmental factors faced by these salmon on their initial journey out to the ocean three years ago. Following a drought sequence, the 2016-2017 Sacramento and San Joaquin numbers were less than 135,000 returning fall-run Chinook. Three years later, after rains, it was over 200,000. Similar rebounds happened after 2010 had above average rainfall. Salmon returns three years later more than doubled from around 163,000 to around 448,000. These patterns indicate that salmon returning three years from now will benefit from the ample precipitation California has experienced this year.

“This closure is painful,” said Director Bonham. “We deeply appreciate the fishing community in California voicing support for this serious step to help these stocks recover. We have worked with our commercial and recreational partners over the years to rebuild other fisheries following closures and now some of those, like some groundfish populations, are providing opportunities for fishing for the first time in years.”

More information regarding the PFMC actions can be found on the PFMC website at www.pcouncil.org.

Following the PFMC’s recommendation of a full closure, Governor Gavin Newsom announced his administration's request for a Federal Fishery Disaster Declaration to support impacted communities. Read Gov. Newsom’s news release.