

There will be no salmon at the 59th Klamath Salmon Festival

August 3, 2023



With a heavy heart, the Yurok Tribe announces that salmon will not be served at the 59th Annual Klamath Salmon Festival because the Klamath River's forecasted fish run is one of the lowest on record.

"This decision reflects our sacred responsibility to take care of the Klamath River's fish stocks. In addition to not catching fish for the festival, we are not going to harvest any salmon this year to protect the overall fish population," said Joseph L. James, the Chairman of the Yurok Tribe. "The festival is still happening and we are doing everything possible to make it the most memorable event yet. I encourage everyone to come out to support local vendors and have a good time with family and friends."

The family-friendly event is happening on Saturday, August 19 on Klamath Boulevard in Klamath, CA. The 59th Annual Klamath Salmon Festival theme is "Celebrating Dam Removal and the Healing of the Klamath River." This year's festival includes the following components: cultural and basket-weaving demonstrations, a parade, Stick Game and Softball Tournaments, kids' activities, Ney-puey 5k Run/Walk, an axe-throwing competition, a petting zoo, Rez Chopped, delicious food and quality gift items made by more than 100 local vendors and live music by Object Heavy. Object Heavy offers a unique fusion of vintage style hard hitting soul with modern funk and gospel influences. The Ney-puey 5k Run/Walk begins at 8:00am.

The Color Run/Fun Walk starts at 9:30am. The event proper starts at 10am with a parade down Klamath Boulevard in Klamath. The Abalone Grill and Redwood Casino open at 10am too. The Salmon Festival typically draws around 3,500 attendees. To date, 10 food vendors have signed up for the festival. The Tribe is seeking additional food vendors to ensure attendees are able to acquire lunch without having to wait too long in line.

Here is why there is no salmon at the event

Chinook salmon runs are in decline on the Klamath River and throughout the West Coast. The precipitous downturn of the Klamath's once prolific salmon population is linked to a combination of factors, including: dams, habitat loss, excessive water diversions, disease outbreaks, fish passage barriers on tributaries, water quality issues and environmental damage caused by past logging and mining operations.

Last week, the Yurok Tribe opted to cancel the 2023 subsistence and commercial fisheries as a conservation measure. Since 2015, the Tribe has closed the commercial fishery every year, except one, to preserve fish runs. During all but one of the last eight years, the Tribe's extremely limited subsistence harvests also did not come close to satisfying the needs of the Yurok people. In many years, the subsistence quotas amounted to less than one fish per member of the Tribe. The extended closure has negatively affected the Tribe in multiple ways. Many Yurok families depend on the fishery to make ends meet and keep nutritious food on the table. The closest grocery store is a one to three-hour trip from the reservation's population centers. There are less obvious impacts too, such as the loss of family time spent on the river participating in a traditional custom.

Despite the downturn of the s salmon runs, there is genuine cause for optimism. Construction crews are currently dismantling four dams on the Klamath River in what will be the largest salmon restoration project in world history. By the end of 2024, the Klamath will flow free for the first time in more than a century and salmon will have access to approximately 400 miles of previously blocked salmon spawning habitat. The Yurok Tribe's Fisheries Department and Yurok Tribe Construction Corporation are involved in multiple aspects of the dam removal project.

In addition to dam removal, meaningful habitat restoration work is happening in the Klamath's bigger tributaries, which serve as spawning grounds for adult salmon and nurseries for baby fish. For example, the Yurok Fisheries Department and Yurok Construction Corporation, along with the Trinity River Restoration Program and Hoopa Valley Tribe, are currently implementing a large-scale restoration project on the Trinity River, the Klamath's largest tributary.

Located in the footprint of a former mining operation, the collaborative restoration project will increase critical floodplain habitat during early juvenile salmon rearing by more than 50% within a 40-mile segment of the Trinity. More projects like the Oregon Gulch initiative are needed to bring the Klamath Basin back into balance.

*The Klamath Salmon Festival is a pet-free event.

