

# Committee on Resources

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## Jimmy Smith

### TESTIMONY

“ The Endangered Species Act 30 Years Later: The Klamath Project”

Dear Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you Mr. Chairman for the honor to appear here today. My name is Jimmy Smith. I am a member of the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors. Prior to my election, I was a commercial fisherman and owner of a 46' Salmon Troller and Dungeness Crabber, operating out of Humboldt Bay. My nearly forty years of ocean fishing prompted interest in the complete life cycle of salmon. To that end I studied and trained in salmon management in the off season.

I am proud to say, I worked with former Congressman Bosco and a number of sport and Tribal fishermen, business owners and elected officials to generate language for P.L. 99-552, the Klamath River Restoration Act. The intent then, as today, was to restore fish and wildlife in the Klamath River Basin. Even during the early 80's, as those discussions occurred, Tribal Elders stated clearly “water is the key.” Sadly, we have not been able to stop the decline of important fish species in the Klamath system. Although the Endangered Species Act has weighed in as a tool to protect and aide in the recovery of the Klamath's fish populations, it has not reversed the deadly trend. The battle for water and protections will continue.

I recognize and respect the concerns expressed by the farmers. Humboldt County believes in protecting its agricultural lands and the ranchers and farmers so important to our economy. We are working diligently with the state to secure Williamson Act standards to maintain tax incentives to keep agricultural lands intact. The same respect is extended to the landowners in the Klamath Basin. In fact, the fishermen and the coastal constituencies support economic assistance for Klamath Basin farmers who suffer from drought or are contributing water to fish and wildlife. I know some of those people, and have hunted on their lands. It is common knowledge that other important species are dependent on the farm lands in the Klamath Basin.

Wintering herds of mule deer and antelope forage on agricultural lands when winter snows force them out of the mountains. Eagles concentrate here because of the abundant waterfowl populations, also supported by the farmers. It is acknowledged that the Klamath landowners have a bond with the land; they are essential food producers and are known for being fiercely independent. Similar in every regard to the commercial fishermen. We all share the pain for protecting listed species. California fishermen must avoid Coho salmon, but in spite of zero harvest, the Coho are still in trouble. In fact, fishermen have been denied access to huge areas of ocean and abundant Central Valley Chinook stocks, to eliminate incidental contact with listed Coho. Most certainly, Coho protections and low numbers of Klamath Chinook continue to have profound impacts to Humboldt County's economy. Of great concern is the loss of about 50% of the California salmon fishing fleet since 1995, which is 1,320 vessels; at an average \$40,000 income, discounting idle vessels, that's a \$40,000,000 annual loss. Of equal importance is the economic devastation dealt to the recreational fisheries and the once thriving service industries. The Tribes are also suffering irreparable harm with continuous cuts to their commercial, subsistence and ceremonial salmon harvests. Throughout history Coho and Chinook have been able to withstand El Ninos, floods and droughts, although their populations suffered in the short-term. They cannot however, be expected to support fishing economies when babies die in the river by the hundreds of thousands and adult spawners meet sudden death as in 2002. The thousand plus fishing businesses that perished over the last nine years are testimony to those losses. Prior to 1995, California lost an additional 4,000 vessels with staggering ramifications to support businesses and related employment. As an example, Humboldt Bay has only one fish processor left and three once thriving boat repair yards are gone forever. Although these losses are not wholly attributable to the Klamath salmon failure, it is the most significant factor in the economic decline.

This year fisheries managers again reduced fishing opportunity to protect projected low returns of Klamath

River Chinook. The very token Humboldt and Del Norte Counties quota was reduced by 40%. These and other stringent regulations are in effect because of dismal returns last year. These returning adults are what are left after approximately 300,000 young salmon died in the Klamath River in 2000. This year young fish are again dying by the thousands before they can complete their journey to the ocean.

The regulations are clear and immediate, more closures, reduced harvest, huge economic impacts from Central Oregon to San Francisco; and never a penny in assistance. Not even recognition that economic disasters continue to occur on the coast with alarming regularity. Although the ESA lacks perfection, it is not to blame for the conflicts occurring in the Klamath Basin. Protections are needed to assure survival of Klamath fish.

#### WHAT COURSE DO WE SET?

1. Investigate and agree on the cause of juvenile and adult salmon mortalities.
2. Increase flows in the Klamath and Trinity Rivers. Support Humboldt County's request for the Bureau of Reclamation to give the 50,000 acre feet, as promised in the 1959 Contract Agreement. Humboldt has agreed to use the water to prevent fishery disasters. Releases could be structured under the guidance of federal, state and Tribal fishery managers.
3. Support water banking and increasing storage capacity.
4. Expand our relationship with knowledgeable local government officials. Leaders like County Supervisors Joan Smith and Marcia Armstrong have proven backgrounds and a willingness to work with agriculture, tribes and fisheries interests. Exchange ideas, especially areas of documented success.
5. Maintain and fully fund the Klamath Task Force and the Klamath Management Council. Even though they make serious fishery management and restoration decisions, they make recommendations based on sound science with open process.

I stand by to help in any way that I can. Thank you for this generous opportunity to speak today.

Sincerely,

Jimmy Smith, 1st District Supervisor  
County of Humboldt

JS/kr