

July 22, 2025

Humboldt Fishermen's Marketing Association (HFMA) to Humboldt County Board of Supervisors on the Eel River--Russian River Water Diversion Agreement (WDA).

The Water Diversion Agreement provides for a water right and funding for restoration.

HFMA's main concern is that any dam removal process must be paired with a timely and comprehensive salmon reintroduction plan that leads to a dependable harvestable surplus. The goal cannot be to simply meet the minimum requirements for delisting under the Endangered Species Act (ESA), but rather, to restore salmon abundance to levels that can once again support local, high quality food production and commercial harvest.

This effort should make use of the full range of proven, science-based tools, such as hatch boxes and egg injection into the gravel. These approaches can improve early life-stage survival while supporting natural production during early phases of restoration, when combined with re-opening pre-dam access to prime cold-water spawning and rearing habitat in the headwaters, ensuring adequate Eel River water remains in the Eel for salmon, and proactive eradication of predatory pike minnow.

At one time when ¼ million native smolts a year were raised and released in the cool South Fork Eel for ten years, coded wire tag counts showed up to 11% returns! -- Whereas normally you would expect 1- 2% returns. Now we are ready and willing to work together--with you, to build on that success.

To that end, we hope you share our ultimate goal to restore the once-abundant Eel River Chinook salmon stocks to harvestable levels in order to support coastal economies, sustain fishing communities for generations to come, and ensure continued access to healthy, locally harvested seafood, as well as the other beneficial uses of our water in the Wild and Scenic Eel River system.



Commercial Fishing Position Statement on Potter Valley Project Dam Removal

The Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA) represents commercial fishing families in ports throughout California who have long depended on healthy salmon populations for their livelihoods. Fishing families from Fort Bragg, Eureka, Trinidad, Crescent City, and beyond have historically fished for salmon off Northern California, including Eel River salmon. The Chinook salmon runs of the Eel River were once the fourth largest in the continental United States, with as many as 800,000 returning adult fish in some years. These runs contributed to major ocean fisheries, supported thousands of coastal jobs, and helped shape communities built on the traditions of commercial fishing.

Today, more than 100 years after the construction of the Potter Valley Project, which blocked salmon migrations and diverted a large amount of water from the Eel River to the Russian River, the once-massive Eel River salmon runs have collapsed. The Eel River now sees only about 3,000 adult Chinook return each year, and entire ocean fishing seasons have been closed to protect what little remains. This collapse has devastated fishing economies and upended the lives of families and communities who have long depended on salmon not just for income, but for their way of life.

PCFFA opposed FERC's license renewal nearly 50 years ago because of the devastating impacts the Potter Valley Project had on what was once an abundant Eel River salmon fishery. That position has not changed. The Institute for Fisheries Resources (IFR), our counterpart in habitat restoration, fishery recovery, and legal advocacy, joins us in that position.

We continue to support the full removal of both Scott and Cape Horn Dams. These facilities are at the end of their engineered lifespan and continue to block access and cause harm to Eel River salmon and steelhead. Scott Dam lacks fish passage entirely and presents seismic safety risks. Cape Horn Dam's fish ladder is one of the longest and steepest in the state, and it routinely fails to function properly, causing injury and impeding fish passage. Both FERC and PG&E have been facing legal pressure under the Endangered Species Act due to the continued harm these structures cause.

While most parties now recognize that dam removal is necessary, many of the remaining disputes reflect ongoing efforts to retain water diversions from the Eel River to the Russian River. We understand the water needs of communities in the Russian River basin, but continued reliance on Eel River diversions comes at the expense of recovering fisheries and coastal economies. It is time to find practical strategies that meet regional water needs without further harm to the Eel River.

PCFFA's top priority is that any dam removal process must be paired with a comprehensive fish reintroduction plan that leads to a harvestable salmon surplus. The goal cannot be to simply meet the minimum requirements for delisting under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). It must be to restore salmon abundance to levels that can once again support food production and commercial harvest.

This effort should make use of the full range of science-based tools, including supplemental salmonid enhancement methods such as hatch boxes and egg injection, and, if necessary, full-scale hatchery



infrastructure. These approaches can improve early life-stage survival while supporting natural production, and they offer meaningful support during early phases of restoration

No path forward can succeed without a comprehensive reintroduction plan in place.

PCFFA is committed to working with all stakeholders, including water users in the Russian River basin, to identify and support alternative strategies that meet water needs while protecting fisheries.

Conservation, aquifer recharge, local storage solutions, curbing illegal diversions, and expanding the capacity of Lake Mendocino are all viable approaches. We are also encouraged by PG&E's recent support for microgrid development to meet local energy needs. We believe collaboration is the best path toward long-term solutions that work for both fish and communities.

Our primary goal is to restore the once-abundant Eel River Chinook salmon fisheries to harvestable levels in order to support coastal economies, sustain fishing communities for generations to come, and ensure continued access to healthy, locally harvested seafood. Achieving that goal requires the full removal of the Potter Valley Project dams and a comprehensive reintroduction plan for fish. PCFFA and IFR will not support any outcome that continues to compromise the future of Eel River salmon. If necessary, we will pursue all tools available to us through policy, partnership, and, if necessary, litigation to ensure that fishing families and coastal communities are protected.