



# YUROK TRIBE

190 Klamath Boulevard • Post Office Box 1027 • Klamath, CA 95548



January 15, 2025

The Honorable Gina Raimonda  
Secretary of Commerce  
United States Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20230

RE: Commercial Fishery Disaster Declaration for the 2024 Yurok Klamath River Commercial Fishery

Aiy-yu-kwee':

The importance of the Klamath River and the fishery it supports to the Yurok People cannot be overstated. Yurok people have lived along the Klamath River and relied on the Klamath River salmon fishery for survival since time immemorial. The courts have acknowledged that the Klamath River Indian fishery is "not much less necessary to the existence of the [Yurok] Indians than the atmosphere they breathed."<sup>1</sup>

Due to natural and man-made factors beyond the Tribe's control, the 2024 Klamath River Fall Chinook run was not large enough for the Yurok Tribe to conduct a commercial fishery. During 2024, the Yurok Tribe's Fall Chinook allocation was 5,147 adult fish. This is far below what is needed to meet our subsistence and ceremonial needs, considering the tribe has an enrollment of 6,502 citizens, with no fish available for commercial harvest. Furthermore, the 2024 run was projected to be a low run-size, according to the Pacific Marine Fisheries Council (PFMC) pre-season report. The pre-season forecast of natural area adult spawners was projected to be 36,511 fish, significantly below the minimum target of 40,700 fish set by the PFMC Salmon Technical Team to maximize sustained yield. Therefore, the Yurok Tribal Council voted to limit the open fishing days/times for the Yurok Fall fishery to protect the small number of fish projected to return, thereby increasing spawner escapement.

This was the ninth consecutive year our people have either been unable to receive, or received extremely low, economic opportunity from our fishery. The impacts from having extremely low fishery related commerce available for our tribal members during the past nine years has been severe. Tribal fishers, who rely on the income from the commercial season to provide for their families, have suffered a substantial loss of their annual income. Tribal businesses supporting the fishery have also lost annual income made on the fishery. This loss of economic opportunity has resulted in substantial financial hardship for our people, which has exacerbated the existing poor

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<sup>1</sup> *Mattz v. Arnett*, 633 F.2d 906, 909 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1981), 412 U.S. 481 (quoting *United States v. Winans*, 198 U.S. 371, 381 (1905)).

economic climate of the community, a significant portion of which already live below the poverty level.

Considering the failed commercial fishery during 2024 and its devastating impacts, I am requesting that you use your authority under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (MSA) to declare a commercial fishery failure for the Yurok Klamath River fishery. The ongoing causes of poor recruitment are associated with poor ocean conditions, drought, Klamath River water quality and fish disease, all of which are beyond the control of the Tribe to mitigate through our diligent conservation and management efforts. It is our understanding your determination of a commercial fisheries failure is needed for our fishing community to receive economic disaster relief under the MSA. You are the key to ensuring that the Tribe's fishers, who support the conservation of our fishery resource for future generations, are not forced further into financial destitution because of their inability to harvest a profitable number of commercial fish during 2024.

We appreciate your consideration of the Tribe's request and look forward to hearing from you.

Wok-hlew'

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joseph L. James".

Joseph L. James, Chairman  
Yurok Tribal Council

cc: Janet Coit, Assistant Administrator for National Marine Fisheries Service, NOAA Fisheries  
Scott Rumsey, Regional Administrator (Acting), NOAA Fisheries, West Coast Region