

APR 15 2010



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
1315 East-West Highway
Silver Spring, Maryland 20910
THE DIRECTOR

The Honorable Jim Costa
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Costa:

Thank you for your cosigned letter regarding predation of smelt, salmon, and steelhead by striped and largemouth bass in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. The issues you raise with regard to predation on salmon and steelhead, the anadromous fish populations for which NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) has stewardship responsibilities, are of great concern to NMFS.

The Draft Recovery Plan for the Evolutionarily Significant Units of Sacramento River winter run Chinook salmon, Central Valley spring run Chinook salmon, and the Distinct Population Segment of Central Valley Steelhead (2009), and other documents, stress the need for a multifaceted approach to anadromous fish population recovery. As noted in your letter, reduction of predation on salmon and steelhead by non-native species is one of the priority factors identified in the draft Recovery Plan.

Past and current NMFS actions serve to reduce the impact of striped bass, largemouth bass, and other predatory species. These actions include the following:

15. In 2001, based on NMFS' concern for striped bass predation on winter-run and spring-run Chinook salmon, the California Department of Fish and Game agreed to suspend stocking of striped bass in the San Francisco Bay-Delta region.
16. As a result of coordinated efforts between NMFS and other interested and affected parties, modifications to the Red Bluff Diversion Dam are underway that will permanently alter operations and thereby reduce predation on anadromous fish by striped bass at the site.
17. The Reasonable and Prudent Alternative in NMFS' 2009 OCAP Biological Opinion addresses predator control actions including: interim operational restrictions on the Red Bluff Diversion Dam, the Clifton Court Forebay, and improvements in the primary and secondary louvers at the fish handling facilities (such as increasing the efficiency of the louvers and decreasing predation at the release sites).
18. Since 2001, NMFS consultations under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) for Central Valley levee repairs have focused on modifying designs for the purpose of increasing habitat complexity for juvenile salmon and steelhead, and reducing striped bass habitat.
19. NMFS consults under the ESA with Federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, on options for altering in-stream structures and operations, including the channel margin habitat associated with Delta levees, thereby decreasing conditions favorable for striped bass.
20. NMFS also works with state and private parties to develop Habitat Conservation Plans under section 10 of the ESA, and frequently comments on other section 10 permit applications related to conservation of living marine resources, including anadromous species. Most of the

THE ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR
FOR FISHERIES



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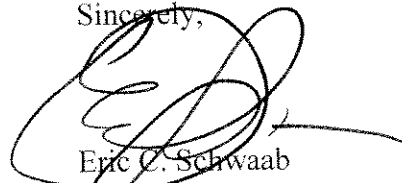


options identified by NMFS would directly or indirectly reduce predation on salmon and steelhead.

21. At the March 3, 2010, California Fish and Game Commission meeting, NMFS requested that the Commission consider regulations to reduce, to the extent practicable, the adverse effects of non-native predators on federally listed anadromous fish species in California, especially in the Central Valley. The Commission subsequently directed its staff to coordinate with scientific staff of the Fish and Game Department to consider existing information about predation effects on listed species, and to develop potential options and fishing regulation recommendations.

I appreciate your interest in the recovery of Central Valley salmonids and the ecosystems on which they depend. If you have further questions, please contact John Gray, Director of NOAA's Office of Legislative Affairs, at (202) 482-4981.

Sincerely,



Eric C. Schwaab
Assistant Administrator
for Fisheries