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Media Contact: McGarvey 202/343-5634
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Prompted by a drought-related crisis in the water-short Pacific Northwest, Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus has urged the Federal Power Commission to intercede in a water use dispute which involves the spring run of salmon in the Columbia River.

In the spring, young salmon (called smolts) about 4 inches long begin a migration from freshwater where they hatch to the open sea where they mature. In the autumn, three years later mature salmon return from the ocean and swim upstream to spawn.

The Governors of the four States of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana, various fish interests including American Indians in those States, the Bureau of Reclamation, the Bonneville Power Administration, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have agreed upon an arrangement which would provide from Federal reservoirs an artificial spring freshet of 2.5 million acre-feet of water to ensure the continuation of this spring's anadromous fish run to the open sea.

The success of this effort is dependent upon those releases of water and young fish passing the five non-Federal public utility dams in the mid-Columbia River area. To date, the public utility districts (PUD's) have refused to agree to the controlled release of the 2.5 million acre-feet over their dams to save the salmon run.

"I would appreciate your consideration and issuance of a special order at your earliest opportunity requiring the PUD's to make the necessary water releases," Andrus wrote in a letter to FPC Chairman Richard Dunham.

The Secretary of the Interior explained that, "the denial of water to the run of salmon smolts would wreak serious and grave consequences on the salmon resource, particularly in 3 years when an adult class of salmon would be expected to return to the Columbia to spawn.

"If this year's class of smolts salmon do not migrate down river there simply will be no significant return of adult salmon to spawn in 1980, a consequence that scientists do not take lightly, as the Pacific Northwest fishery resource is dependent upon the annual cycle of fresh-to-salt water and later sea-to-river migration for its continuation," he said.