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The Attorney General, Secretary of Commerce and Secretary of the Interior today announced they will serve for the Carter Administration as a task force to work on the Washington state salmon fishing controversy.

The controversy involves the development of salmon fishing in the context of Indian treaty rights and the economic problems of non-Indian fishermen. The task force will seek to develop discussions that will lead to long-range protection, management and enhancement of the salmon fishing industry.

The task force was set up after discussions among interested parties and at the urging of the Washington state Congressional delegation.

Attorney General Griffin B. Bell said: "It is our understanding from the Congressional delegation and Governor Ray that the climate is right to bring the parties together to discuss problems and achieve progress." Federal regional officials and Indian tribal representatives concur in this assessment. Significant progress has been achieved already on the Columbia River, where a five-year management agreement has been approved.

Secretary of the Interior Cecil D. Andrus added: "This task force will work with all parties to improve the fisheries resource and this is in the long-term interest of both treaty and non-treaty fishermen."

Secretary of Commerce Juanita M. Keeps commented: "The Department of Commerce is responsible for the development and conservation of the salmon resource under its fisheries management and economic development mandate." She noted that Commerce funded a $3.5 million economic relief package for the fishing industry in 1975.

The task force will work on two levels. The primary responsibility for discussions will rest with a regional field team representing the task force, headed by the United States Attorney in Seattle. The Secretaries and the Attorney General also designated the following persons as their representatives in Washington, D.C.: Peter Taft, Assistant Attorney General of the Department of Justice; Leo Krulitz, Solicitor of the Interior Department; Robert L Herbst, Assistant Secretary of the Interior; and Anne Weller, Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce.

The task force will participate in the field discussions as necessary and coordinate federal reviews of fisheries enhancement and economic development programs developed during the field discussions.

The Secretaries and the Attorney General also announced a set of guiding principles for the task force:

1. The optimum use of the fisheries resource, including federal assistance for fisheries enhancement.
2. A healthy commercial and sports fishery that will provide an opportunity for all who depend on salmon fishing for their livelihood to earn a good living.
3. A utilization of the fishery consistent with recognized treaty fishing rights reserved under the Stevens Treaties of 1854 and 1855.

4. Development of management systems that will ensure that the salmon fishery is preserved and developed so as to satisfy points one through three.

In a meeting with task force representatives, the Washington state Congressional delegation agreed to withhold legislative action on this subject pending efforts of the task force.

The regional field team will begin discussions immediately. The task force is not intended to deal directly with 200-mile fisheries management issues.

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