Indian Affairs - Office of Public Affairs

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The Department of the Interior and the State of California today announced all fishing for fall chinook salmon and steelhead trout will be closed at midnight Sunday, August 27 in the Klamath River below the Highway 101 bridge, and severely curtailed above the bridge.

The emergency closure is necessary because of the limited return, compared to previous years, of adult fish of both species. Indians and non-Indians alike expressed grave concern for perpetuation of these valuable commercial and sport fish if a sufficient number of adults is not permitted to ascend the Klamath and Trinity Rivers to reproduce.

"Population estimates for the years 1976 and 1977 suggest the Klamath River chinook salmon population approximates 200,000 fish." said Interior Solicitor Leo M. Krulitz. "To perpetuate this run, biologists estimate that 115,000 adult fish must return to the spawning grounds annually. Available data for this year suggest that probably less than 10 percent of that expected number of fish have entered the river."

"Although catch statistics for the Indian commercial fishery are unavailable sketchy information on all catches for previous years suggest that the river harvest this is considerably lower than in years past."

At least two explanations are possible for the apparent low numbers of fish accounted for in the Klamath River this year. First, the run may be delayed or reduced as a result of some environmental factor in the ocean.

There is some indication that this may be the case as anadromous fish runs are the late or smaller in a number of other major west coast rivers.

Second, an increase in the ocean harvest, possibly enhanced by the delayed entry into the river, might reduce the number of fish available to enter the river, of particular interest is the fact that the California ocean harvest of chinook salmon was considerably higher in 1978 than for the same period in 1977, especially for the area around the Klamath River.

The available data are inadequate to determine whether the run has been delayed or if the population is below anticipated levels.

"There is no question that the number of fish which has entered the river is much below the number at this time in the past years. However, the cause for the poor return is of less importance than the biological consequences for the resource," Krulitz said.

Consultation with qualified Indian fishermen and California State personnel has resulted in substantial support for the need to close all fishing below the Highway 101 bridge, the area of greatest fish vulnerability, and to close all commercial fishing and sports fishing for salmon above the bridge.

Commercial fishing is considered to have a greater impact on the resource than taking fish for ceremonial or subsistence purposes. For that reason, Indian subsistence fishing will continue to be

allowed five nights per week above the bridge.

"All of these decisions reflect tremendous cooperation and substantial meant by all parties concerned," said the Solicitor.

The closure will be in effect until sufficient number of all chinook salmon have passed the Highway 101 bridge check point to guarantee conservation of the fishery.