



For immediate release: March 14, 2024

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Coalition Asks Gov. Newsom to Amend Salmon Strategy to Add Flows Needed By Ailing Salmon

New reservoirs, diversions, pollution, and lack of water for salmon threaten key restoration actions

Sacramento, CA - Today, on the International Day of Action for Rivers, a large coalition of California's Tribal organizations, environmental non-profits, and fishing interests released a letter to California Governor Gavin Newsom. In the letter, the coalition asked for flow protections and pollution controls to be added to Newsom's newly released Salmon Strategy. The groups said that while they appreciate the focus on dam removal and restoration, California's salmon and fishing industry are facing an unprecedented crisis. As the climate gets hotter, the need for California to do more than just reach for low hanging fruit intensifies. Specifically, California needs to regulate agriculture and protect and restore clean water in its rivers for both fish and people.

"The fact is, salmon and salmon-dependent people face an unprecedented crisis. Operating river flows under Trump's water plan and California's archaic water laws during the last drought caused the loss of the majority of our remaining salmon and it impacted California's drinking water quality." explained Regina Chichizola from Save California Salmon.

Chichizola said that because of the situation commercial fishing is shut down nearly every year and Tribes cannot access salmon and other culturally significant species. She said the coalition is especially concerned about the Bay-Delta which is facing a water quality crisis and is, unfortunately, where many Californians get their drinking water. "We really do appreciate the important restoration actions outlined in Newsom's Plan, but we also need the Governor to ask California's agriculture industry to do their part by not polluting and dewatering our rivers and the Delta."

The letter comes just weeks after California released dire salmon numbers for 2023 and predictions for 2024, and only a couple of months after California approved CEQA review documents for the

controversial Delta Tunnel and Sites Reservoir, which would divert much more water from the Sacramento River and Bay Delta. The group says they are glad that Governor Newsom finally responded to the state's salmon crisis with a much needed strategy, but it falls short of doing what will make it successful for California: controlling agricultural water use and pollution. If the state's strategy is to succeed, it must include adequate instream flows because fish can't use dry and polluted rivers and estuaries. The letter also points out that the lack of agricultural regulation impacts the state's drinking water. This is important because the current, yet centuries-old water rights system in California prioritizes large landowners over cities and the environment.

"Newsom's Salmon Strategy needs to address California's inequitable water rights system and the long-time challenges facing the San Francisco Bay Delta estuary. We cannot operate flows under the Trump era water plan and a racist water rights system that allocates over 5 times more water than exists and expect it to restore water quality." said Bill Martin, Sierra Club California Water Committee Co-Chair. "Both urban and agricultural water users need to do their part to conserve water and reduce reliance on the Delta."

In addition to highlighting the lack of focus on instream flows, the letter also asks the state to control agricultural use of fungicides and pesticides that kill salmon and pollute the state's drinking water. The coalition says many of California's almond farms and ranches get clean water while farmworkers and salmon only get the polluted water they leave behind.

"We know that the Governor cares deeply about Tribal communities and the human right to clean water. We look forward to working with him to address the deficiencies in this plan" said Chichizola.

The letter to the governor can be found at: <https://www.californiasalmon.org/letter>

A sample letter for the public is at: <http://tinyurl.com/SalmonLetter>

Photo credit: Will Harling: Mid-Klamath Watershed Council

