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To the editors:

Please consider this submission for publication as a Guest Opinion or LOE. Thanks.

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Short-sighted Klamath Fisheries Managers Dis Spring Chinook Plan
by Felice Pace

This week the Klamath Fisheries Management Council (KFMC) considered but failed to endorse a management plan for Klamath River Spring Chinook salmon. Like its larger 'uncle" – the Pacific Fisheries Management Council – the KFMC is dominated by interests which depend on salmon harvest. These interests fear the impact a plan to conserve and restore Spring Chinook would have on ocean and in-river commercial and sport salmon quotas.

The position of the KFMC is understandable. Who can fault someone for wanting to protect the income of her family and his industry? But the failure of the KFMC to muster the resolve to take on Spring Chinook conservation and restoration is short sighted. That's because it is likely to lead to renewed calls, petitions and litigation to list Klamath River Spring Chinook under provisions of the California and Federal Endangered Species Acts. Such actions will raise tensions among constituencies that have made common cause in recent years on water management and dams. They may also result in a listing of Springers as endangered.

Skeptics will point out that federal fisheries officials have already considered whether Spring Chinook should be listed and concluded that – in the Klamath River – they are not a species or a distinct population because they are not sufficiently different than the more numerous Fall Chinook salmon. But this federal decision is based on political not real science and will not hold up under scrutiny. For example, federal fisheries managers refused to list Klamath Springers because they said there was not evidence of genetic differences from the Fall Chinook. But, in fact, genetic studies showed more difference between Spring and Fall Chinook in the Klamath as compared to Spring and Fall Chinook in the Sacramento River. But Sacramento Springers were found to be a distinct population and were listed under provisions of the federal ESA. The federal fish bureaucrats' decision on Klamath Springers is, therefore, arbitrary and can be successfully challenged.

Is that what the members of the KFMC want to see? If not, they must bite the bullet and actively support real Springer conservation before the Pacific Fisheries Management Council.

The members of KFMC who are unwilling to support meaningful Spring Chinook conservation are among the same interests calling for removal of Klamath River dams to restore salmon to the Upper Basin. Springers are by far the main species which would benefit from restoration to the Upper Klamath River Basin. The calls for dam removal are weakened when interests refuse to support conservation and restoration when it affects their personal, member or industry bottom lines. The implications of KFMC inaction will not be lost on managers and stockholders of

Scottish Power – owner of the Klamath River dams and may well come back to haunt KFMC members.

In summary, the failure of KFMC members to support real Spring Chinook conservation is short-sighted and wrong headed. The individual members are all players with the Pacific Fisheries Management Council – the group which sets the salmon conservation agenda coast-wide. These interests need to look further ahead and actively support voluntary Springer conservation. This will result in reduced salmon harvest in the short run but far greater harvests in the future when Springers are restored.

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