# Felice Pace

**Two good salmon seasons do not indicate recovery**

The projection of a second good year for Klamath River Fall Chinook Salmon is good news for everyone. Yet the rush by some to declare that two good runs means salmon are out of danger on the Klamath River is just not true.

For one thing, 323,582 Fall Chinook returning to the Klamath (the PFMC/NMFS 2012 estimate) does not represent recovery. Recovery would be something on the order of an average in-river Fall Chinook run size of 500,000 sustained over a decade. Furthermore, Klamath Spring Chinook and Coho remain severely depressed.

Spring Chinook were once the largest run on the Klamath and should be once again. But Klamath Springers are not properly managed. PFMC/NMFS are supposed to do a management plan for Klamath Spring Chinook. But because commercial, sport and tribal fishermen don't want a management plan, PFMC/NMFS have not completed one. Spring Chinook remain far from recovery in the Klamath River Basin.

By now folks should also know that - due mostly to stream dewatering as a result of increased agricultural water use - Coho Salmon in the Shasta and Scott Rivers are on the brink of extinction. Basin-wide Coho remain at high risk.

Good ocean conditions are the main reason for relatively large California salmon runs in 2012 and 2013 (projected). When the decade-long shift in ocean currents occurs again, however, good ocean conditions and the larger runs will shift north. Sacramento and Klamath salmon runs will then once again be much smaller.

We can't control ocean currents or how much snow falls in the mountains each winter. What we humans can control is our own water use. In the Klamath, as in most western river basins, agriculture consumes roughly 80% of the water diverted from streams and rivers. Irrigation engineers tell us agricultural water use can be cut between 10% and 40% if irrigators use modern irrigation technology.

This year spring runoff in the Klamath River Basin is depressed as irrigation season begins. That means less water in our rivers and streams as baby Chinook make their way from natal spawning grounds to the ocean. Less water in our streams means more baby salmon will be stranded and die in dewatered stream sections. More fingerlings will also die from fish diseases in the heavily polluted Klamath River. How many fingerlings make it to the ocean will - along with ocean conditions and ocean fishing regulations - determine how many salmon return in 3 years.

Larger Klamath Salmon runs will only be sustained when and if we as a society end the dewatering of our streams during spring outmigration and improve water quality basin-wide in order to prevent fish disease epidemics.

*Felice Pace moved to the Klamath River Basin in 1976. He has worked for Klamath Salmon recovery since 1986. Felice edits a blog about Klamath fish and water issues at www.KlamBlog.blogspot.com.*