

Karuk Tribe of California

PRESS RELEASE

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GOVERNOR'S DISASTER DECLARATION NO HELP TO SALMON DEFICIENT TRIBE *Karuk Tribe Needs Salmon, not loans*

Orleans, CA – Yesterday Governor Schwarzenegger proclaimed a State of Emergency in 10 Counties providing disaster loan guarantees for salmon fishermen. Although encouraged by the action, Karuk Tribal members will not see much benefit from the package.

“I don’t need a loan, I need a fish to eat,” lamented Karuk Fishermen Ron Reed.

Karuk Indians have fished and managed the Klamath River for thousands of years. Salmon, lamprey eel, steelhead trout and other fishes serve as the cornerstone of Karuk culture and diet. However, in recent years the number of returning fish has plummeted leaving the Karuk without their most important food source.

The Karuk Tribe is the second largest in California with over 3,400 members. “Last year we caught less than 200 fish...that’s not enough to provide food for our ceremonies and dances much less feed our members,” commented Reed.

Tribal leaders such as Vice Chairman Leaf Hillman praise Governor Schwarzenegger’s effort to help commercial fishermen, but ask, “who will help Indians who depend on subsistence fishing? We need disaster relief but more importantly, we need disaster prevention.”

The Karuk Tribe has repeatedly called for the removal of four dams on the Klamath River that restrict salmon from accessing over 350 miles of spawning grounds and degrade water quality. Recently Siskiyou County informed residents that the reservoirs behind the dams harbor toxic algae blooms and warned residents to avoid swimming in the reservoirs in hot summer months.

The dams are owned and operated by Portland Oregon based PacifiCorp, a subsidiary of Mid American Energy which in turn is owned by billionaire investor Warren Buffet. Buffet served as a consultant to Schwarzenegger during his run for office. According to Hillman, “If the Governor wants to bring the salmon home to California, put commercial fishermen to work and food on the table of Indian families, he should let Warren Buffet know that his dams must be removed.”

Ironically last year, Hillman was a finalist for the Buffet Award for Indigenous Leadership for his efforts to restore the Klamath River.

The dams are currently being relicensed by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, a process that could result in their removal. Several agencies such as NOAA as well as the Pacific Fisheries Management Council have recommended removal.

Hillman concludes, “PacifiCorp’s Klamath dams are poor producers of electricity, provide little flood control, and no water diversions for agriculture or drinking. All they do well is kill fish and breed toxic algae. We urge Governor Schwarzenegger to stand us and demand the dams be removed so our salmon can come home.”

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