

“This is such an important issue that everone should read this.”

Andy Martin, Editor, Siskiyou Daily News. February 16, 2003

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What caused salmon deaths?

The Klamath Basin issue on the California-Oregon border, where water was held back from more than 1,400 farmers and ranchers in 2001, made national news.

The water had been shut off when a court ruling based on the Endangered Species Act (ESA) forced farmers and ranchers to do without their irrigation water to protect sucker fish and threatened coho salmon. The water was eventually restored in 2002 after it was determined that the shutoff was unnecessary due to "insufficient scientific data as determined by the National Academy of Science." This region was left in economic chaos as families and their way of life have been forever impacted.

Many environmental organizations were enraged when, on March 28, 2002, the water was once again flowing for agriculture use. Some of these same organizations had been responsible for the water having being kept from the area to begin with. Those groups include, Glen Spain of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA), Oregon Natural Resources Council, Wilderness Society (of which California's Democratic U.S. Sen. Dianne Feinstein's husband Richard Blum is on the "2001 Governing Council"), Northcoast Environmental Center, Sierra Club, Golden Gate Audubon, Institute for Fisheries Resources and known radical Felice Pace of the Klamath Forest Alliance.

In California's Del Norte County, near the mouth of the Klamath River, lies the fishing town of Crescent City. Most fishermen interviewed for this story stated that they are not blaming farmers and ranchers for the fish kill. In fact, those interviewed are supportive of the farmers and ranchers. They did however express anger towards Glen Spain and PCFFA for claiming to represent them in this or any issue. Spain has apparently used the names of other fishing organizations without permission in an effort to further his reputation within some environmental organizations. Jon Brunsing, Del Norte Fishermen's Marketing Association, stated in a May 29, 2001, letter, "We are no way affiliated with the PCFFA or spokesperson Spain. It has been brought to our attention that the PCFFA is using our name on their logo and we have asked them to remove it."

On Sept. 19, 2002, out of an estimated 100,000 salmon, approximately 33,000 salmon died and were discovered within the first 20 miles of the lower Klamath River. Some environmentalists and Native Americans blamed the Klamath Basin farmers and ranchers. Others blamed government entities for restoring the water while still others claim the fish were deliberately poisoned.

While alleagations and rumors have run wild with regard to the 33,000 dead fish. it is

ultimately the responsibility of the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) and/or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to investigate such incidences, use only accurate data, scientific evidence and report those findings. Unfortunately, we have not seen that happen.

A good example of inaccurate "scientific data" and incorrect reports relevant to this issue surfaced during the Klamath Basin crisis. Jennifer Ludlow, research engineer of the Institute for Natural Systems Engineering, Utah Water Research Laboratory at Utah State University was a presenter at the Klamath Basin Fish and Water Management Symposium held at Humboldt State University in Arcata on May 21, 2001. Ludlow's presentation centered on impacts to coho salmon as it related directly to river flow activity. She stated during an interview immediately following the symposium that she was the person in charge of compiling data for Dr. Tom Hardy of Utah State University, author of the "Hardy Flow Report."

When questioned specifically about the Hardy Flow Report, Ludlow stated, "There were problems. We used some incorrect data and that is being looked at now." When asked, if this data was sufficient to change the substance of the report, Ludlow responded, "Yes, it very well could." Ludlow went on to state that the report might be available within two weeks but that the study itself would not be made available to the public. When Ludlow was asked about the reasoning for this, she stated, "We have to turn it over to the justice department."

On May 29, 2001, Hardy himself arranged a conference call between his office, myself and Doug Tedrick of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) in Washington, D.C. Tedrick works in conjunction with Secretary of Interior Gale Norton to coordinate Hardy's efforts on the river flow/coho issue. Nothing was accomplished as a result of the call.

Nearly a year to the day later on March 28, 2002, a ceremony was held in Klamath Falls, where Secretary of the Interior Norton herself opened the headgates to restore the water. In tow with Norton were Secretary of Agriculture Ann Veneman, Oregon's Sen. Gordon Smith, a Republican, and Tedrick. When confronted about Ludlow's statements at that time Tedrick confirmed them saying, "Apparently, she misunderstood your question. Yes, there was inaccurate data used in the report -- but it was not our data."

California Fish and Game report

DFG issued a "preliminary analysis" of the fish kill released on Jan. 3, 2003, which sites low, warm water as the cause of "gill rot" in the dead fish.

The DFG report also states, "Soon after the fish kill manifested itself, claims were made that toxic substances may have been the cause. The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Staff collected samples from five locations on Sept. 26, 2002, to determine if any toxic substances were present at concentrations toxic to fish. These scans test for a broad spectrum of organic compounds including organochlorine

pesticides, PCBs, and Glyphosate."

According to the DFG report, the fish started dying on Sept. 19, 2002, and the water samples were taken on Sept. 26, 2002. The samples were taken seven days after the discovery of the dead fish. The question arises -- would concentrations of chemicals still be present in the alleged test areas after this length of time.

Sarah Foster of Worldnetdaily interviewed biologist David Vogel. Vogel worked for 14 years at the Fishery Research and Fishery Resources Divisions of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service before starting his own environmental consulting firm, Natural Resources Scientists, in 1990 and is sharply critical of the report -- not only its conclusions, but also its methodology. He said he has not prepared a point-by-point analysis and rebuttal, but will do so in the near future. Vogel said he was "shocked" and "astounded" at the department's conclusion that the fish kill was due to insufficient water.

"Let me put it this way -- if it is (the cause), you certainly can't use Fish and Game's report to make that conclusion," said Vogel, adding that the most "striking feature" of the report is that "the Department of Fish and Game is building a strong case for its lack of scientific objectivity."

Native American concerns

One of the major concerns by the Hoopa Tribe is the fact that the U.S. government, Bureau of Reclamation (BOR), is and has been diverting as much as 90 percent of the Trinity River water to the Sacramento River. This water would usually flow into the Klamath at Weitchpec, but instead is being diverted and utilized in the Central Basin of California.

According to Tom Patton a hydraulic engineer for the BOR, the percentage of water being released from the Trinity Reservoir and diverted to the Sacramento was 73 percent during the fish kill. Government officials assured Hoppa tribal members that the amount released would be 50 percent.

They and numerous others believe that amount would ensure the spawning chinook and coho salmon would receive enough cooler water to survive.

One person concerned about the Trinity River water usage is U.S. Forest Service wildlife biologist Tony Hacking from Orleans. While expressing his views he was critical of the large amount of water the government drains from Trinity Lake into the Sacramento. Hocking stated, "The water pumped from the Trinity never gets talked about."

Hoopa native Duane J. Sherman monitors Native American fishing rights, the Trinity River diversion, water levels, water temperature and now the death of the 33,000 fish. Sherman served as a tribal council chairman for a short time at the age of 28. Tribal

elders challenged his youthful ideas and outspoken views, which resulted in the end of his chairmanship. However, his credentials are a tribute to his tenacity and goals. Sherman was a corrections officer for the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department, worked as a tribal police officer and was the youngest member of the tribe to serve as a tribal council member for four years at the age of 21. He currently attends Humboldt State University and is working on his masters in sociology and intends to obtain a law degree.

When asked if the fish would have died if the Trinity River diversion water had been flowing in the river, Sherman stated, "The Trinity is 15 degrees colder than the Klamath and if the Trinity had been flowing as we were promised, the fish would not have died." When asked if he blamed farmers and ranchers he responded with, "No -- but something different needs to be done and soon."

Danielle Vigil-Masten, administrative assistant to the Hoopa Valley Tribal Council, echoed Sherman's words and agreed with his statement that the fish would not have died. Other tribal members also expressed this sentiment.

Native American Donald D. Valenzuela, a Yurok and tribal manger of the Resighini Rancheria in Klamath, blames the farmers, ranchers and George W. Bush for using some of the water for crops. The t-shirt he wears says, "Bush Kills. Over 10,000 Dead Salmon." When asked about the government's diversion of the Trinity River water to the Sacramento River, Valenzuela shrugged it off as being insignificant.

Contaminated water and drugs

The DFG report states, "No substances were found at concentrations toxic to fish and therefore, were not a factor in the 2002 fish kill." However, that may not be the case. According to the Del Norte Sheriff's Department, the Humboldt County Sheriff's Department and Larry Hand of the California Conservation Corps (CCC), a CCC crew run by John Buttons discovered several large glass flasks used for cooking methamphetamine on Ohpah Creek, a tributary of the Klamath River just 21 miles from the mouth of the river. The flasks were found in the summer of 2002 and were left on Simpson Timber Company land above the Ohpah Creek Ranch. It now turns out the flasks were part of what is known as a "meth dump." That is where the unused residue and cooking utensils from labs are discarded. A Humboldt County Sheriff's Department official used a recent dumpsite at Colusa, to explain, "Mexican nationals had dumped their old chemicals and supplies into an irrigation canal."

Many law enforcement officers confirm massive environmental damage has occurred at marijuana growing locations, including on the Shasta River. Detective Mark Merrill of the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Department explained that marijuana growers use such compounds as rat poison, insecticides and pesticides to kill unwanted animals that penetrate their operations.

Shasta County Sot. Tim McDonald and numerous other law enforcement officials

confirmed Merrill's statement. All emphasizing that, "The chemicals end up in creeks and watersheds," which ultimately ends up in rivers such as the Klamath. In addition there are months of human waste, paper, food cans, propane canisters, food wrappers as well as other forms of garbage that are found strewn about.

According to the Drug Enforcement Division of the Kansas Bureau of Investigations, such items as, common cold tablets containing, ephedrine or pseudoephedrine, acetone, alcohol (isopropyl or rubbing), toluene, engine starter (either), drain cleaner, (sulfuric acid), Heet (methanol/alcohol), table salt, car batteries (Lithium), sodium methyl, propane tanks (Anhydrous ammonia), Red Devil Lye (Sodium Hydroxide), matches (red and yellow phosphorus), muradic acid, hydrochloric acid, phosphine, iodine, acetone, freon, hexane, white gas, laundry soap and diesel fuel are all used in the production of meth. The chemicals are then cooked in such items as Pyrex dishes or large glass flasks like the ones found on Ohpah Creek. Coffee filters are then use to filter the items cooked.

Several members of the DFG stated they were familiar with the chemicals listed and stated, "Of course they could kill fish. The fish did have gill rot, but there is the possibility they may have survived. If there was any of these chemicals in the river at any level, it would have stressed the fish and yes, it could have been a factor in the kill."

When asked, J. Scott Foott of DFG, the specimen examiner who did the pathology report of the dead fish, agreed that if there were chemicals in the water at any level it could have been a factor in the kill. He also stated, "It depends how badly they were infected. Yes they may have survived." He also emphasized that, "The water temperatures were similar to other years -- there was a series of contributing factors."

All law enforcement offices interviewed have stated there is a serious problem with drug activities, however as a result of insufficient funding and manpower it is impossible to do the necessary work. With California Gov. Davis' \$34.6 billion deficit, his new budget cuts and hiring freezes, law enforcement statewide (to the delight of drug producers) have had additional cuts in drug enforcement money.

According to Siskiyou County Sheriff Rick Riggins, they don't yet know what the budget impact will have on his department or drug enforcement efforts. "There are several positions here that depend on state funding and we won't know until March exactly what will happen," Riggins said.

Two persons interviewed claimed there are five meth labs between Weitchpec and the river mouth. One of the labs is known to both civilian and law enforcement as the "Crystal Palace." When asked, one Siskiyou County law enforcement official said, "If the truth were know, there are probably 50 labs." A member of the Humboldt County Drug Task Force said, "We know there are numerous marijuana gardens along the lower Klamath but we are unable to do anything because of lack of cooperation from locals and because of finances." The entire 41 miles of river between Weitchpec and

the river mouth has no roads and is completely isolated from any civilization.

There are dozens of documented cases of Mexican and Asian drug cartels using remote areas to both grow marijuana, and manufacture meth. These cases include the Klamath River area. This has resulted in concerns for the safety of all users; either national forests and/or Bureau of Land Management lands or those who simply explore for recreation. All of these activities have been intensely compromised by these organized criminal drug activities. Shasta Interagency Narcotics Task Force Commander Russ Reeves (retired) refers to the groups involved in growing operations as "cells" because he says, "Many of these foreigners that work the fields, are so low in the scheme of things they do not even know who they work for." He further stated that much of the money obtained from marijuana growing is used to finance illegal meth operations. Reeves went on to say, "These same meth producers then ship their product to other states. We have been successful in tracking some of that."

John Martinez, until recently, was employed by the Karuk Tribe in Happy Camp for nearly four years. Martinez has tried to expose those who have taken to illegal activities on and off tribal lands. He has successfully documented information about such illegal activities on the Klamath River but when he and others have spoken up they found themselves without help from anyone. According to Martinez, they have been the victims of character assassinations, death threats, gunshots at homes and threats of being set up. "I feel that if I did not leave my job immediately I would further jeopardize my safety and those close to me," Martinez stated. "I believe my safety is still in danger for having exposed potential illegal drug-related activities."

Several community leaders and teachers along the Klamath River have confirmed the upswing in drug usage within their communities. On several occasions these same people have gone to the Karuk Tribal Council and asked for help. Some have contacted council members personally, only to find the help they were seeking, not available. Some claim they have traveled to Medford, Ore., to meet with federal authorities -- once again they discovered their efforts have been in vain. According to Gary Lake, a Karuk Tribal councilman, community leaders and residents have come to the council and ask for help on drug related issues.

Lake stated, "As a private citizen I report it to law enforcement myself and nothing has been done." Lake confirmed much of what Martinez had previously stated. He also said, "I have been threatened many, many times myself."

All of this raises a big question. Could the illegal marijuana and meth producers dumping chemicals, poisons and waste above the fish kill into creeks, watersheds and river be accountable for the dead fish or at least have magnified the impact of the gill rot?

Public safety

A law enforcement official from the Del Norte Sheriff's Department stated. "There have

been armed boats traveling up and down the river (Klamath), but we have not been able to determine why." Deputies from across Northern California, California Highway Patrol and U.S. Forest Service Law Enforcement Agents are quick to affirm the danger. Forest Service Law Enforcement Officer Michael Irvine of Fort Jones underscored his concerns and pointed to organized crime who he feels are responsible for the risks the general public now face when visiting public lands. California Highway Patrol Officer Keith Ericson echoed the words of Irvine when he said, "The danger on public lands is a very big concern as a result of marijuana grow operations." According to Darrell Plemons, chief of operations for the Tehama County Sheriff's Office, "The situation (drug activity) has increased over the last few years to a dangerous epidemic."

Conclusion

environmental extremists, government entities and some members of the press tell the can public that salmon populations are declining. What they fail to mention is that this took place during the third largest fall chinook salmon run ever recorded.

These same environmental groups and their financial backers with huge bankrolls continue to use national media to further their social and political objectives at the cost of rural American farming and ranching families. In addition, information is now surfacing that proves some of the marijuana operations on the Salmon River in Northern California are linked to individuals attached to so-called environmental organizations. The Salmon River also flows into the Klamath River near the town of Happy Camp.

It is understood that both the DFG report and this story fail to establish what actually led to the fish kill. However, the chemical allegations have undeniable merit.

While someone from the California Department of Fish and Game has given a "preliminary analysis" of the fish kill and national media creates the illusion that farmers and ranchers in the Klamath Basin are to blame for the deaths of these fish. Journalists who likely have not visited the area, have also failed to bother to entertain other possibilities?

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