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Chefs Urge President Obama to Restore California's Iconic Wild King Salmon

San Francisco wharf tour and reception highlights value of Sacramento River runs

San Francisco, CA – Bay Area sustainable food luminaries joined chefs and food industry leaders across the nation today to urge President Obama to protect one of America's last great remaining natural food sources – the wild salmon of California's Sacramento-San Joaquin Basin. The group also announced a May 6th "working wharf" tour and salmon reception at Fishermen's Wharf in San Francisco to highlight the economic and culinary benefits we all can enjoy if we continue to build on hard-won protections for these iconic fish.

"For more than 25 years, I've proudly promoted sustainably caught fish as part of a sound strategy to protect our oceans," said Paul Johnson, founder and president of Monterey Fish Market in California. "If we want to have wild Sacramento salmon around for our kids and their kids, we've got to keep these protections in place, and work harder to restore the Sacramento-San Joaquin Basin."

The group applauded the leadership the President and First Lady Michelle Obama have provided to improve America's food safety and promote healthful, nutritious, local food. They urged continued leadership in this area by ensuring the future of healthy, abundant, self-sustaining and harvestable populations of wild salmon in the Sacramento-San Joaquin system.

"Salmon and salmon fishing is a huge part of what built Fisherman's Wharf and why it remains such a special place today," said Alan Fairhurst, executive chef at Scoma's on Fisherman's Wharf in San Francisco. "We could no more do without salmon than we can do without our DNA. Salmon is part of who we are and we must protect the river they call home."

As recently as 2002, the Sacramento produced nearly 1.5 million fall chinook, or king salmon. In 2009, it produced barely more than 39,000. Although there are other contributing factors, major reasons for the collapse include salmon eggs dying in low, warm water and the young salmon that do hatch dying in huge numbers as a result of excessive freshwater export pumping from the Sacramento Bay-Delta. Experts agree - fishermen are not to blame for the massive collapse.

For the last several years, fishing closures and cutbacks driven by the Sacramento-San Joaquin system have strangled ocean fisheries and fishing communities from California to Washington. In 2008 and 2009, the collapse of Sacramento runs caused an unprecedented shutdown of the commercial salmon fishing season along one thousand miles of coastline, resulting in economic disaster for communities along the coast and spikes in the cost of salmon that put this delicious, wholesome food out of reach of many accustomed consumers. The 2010 salmon season was heavily restricted. While 2011's forecast shows welcome improvement, many coastal businesses still face economic ruin – if science-based salmon restoration efforts are derailed by political pressure from water interests and their allies in Congress.

“If salmon-fishing bans continue, our customers accustomed to ordering fresh, wild salmon will continue to find it scarce,” said Laura Anderson, owner of Local Ocean Seafood in Newport, OR. “Farmed salmon, which lacks the health benefits of wild-caught fish, degrades our coastlines and harms the health of the natural species, is just not an acceptable alternative – to us or our customers.”

Federal agencies began implementing peer-reviewed, science-based plans to restore the Sacramento-San Joaquin’s threatened and endangered fish populations in 2008. These plans also provide considerable benefit to the non-endangered, commercially valuable Sacramento fall chinook salmon demanded by consumers. Benefits have begun to show in 2011, as the young Sacramento king salmon protected during the 2008-2009 outmigration are now returning with an estimated adult abundance of 729,893.

Fresh, West Coast troll-caught king salmon is a popular, healthy mainstay on restaurant menus and in seafood display cases throughout the nation.

May 6th Fisherman’s Wharf Tour and Reception

Sustainable seafood industry representatives will host two Sacramento king salmon restoration events at San Francisco's Fisherman's Wharf on Friday, May 6th.

The "**Working Salmon Wharf**" Tour conducted by members of the local fishing industry, will begin at 10am at the Fisherman’s Wharf Crab Hall on Al Scoma Way near the corner of Jefferson Street. The tour will highlight the jobs creation and food production benefits of a restored Sacramento salmon population.

The “**Celebration of Wild Salmon**” Reception will take place from 3pm to 5pm at Scoma's Restaurant on Pier 47 and feature wild-caught salmon supplied by local fishermen. It will highlight the culinary and economic benefits of healthy, wild-caught Sacramento king salmon. The invite-only reception will also feature cocktails, sustainable seafood leaders and special guests.

For questions regarding the May 6th events, please contact Jim McCarthy at 541-941-9450.

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