

Proposed legislation would fund \$60-million in disaster aid for salmon fishers

by Bend Weekly News Sources

West Coast Representatives, Senators Urge House and Senate to Fund Disaster Aid for Salmon Fishers

U.S. Congressman Peter DeFazio and several other representatives and Senators yesterday introduced legislation in the House and Senate that would provide \$60.4 million in disaster aid for the commercial salmon fishers and communities hard hit by the virtual closure of the coastal salmon fishing season. They also sent a letter to House and Senate leadership requesting their assistance in getting the disaster aid via any legislative vehicle possible. "There is no question that salmon fishers have suffered immensely from the widespread shutdown of this year's fishing season," DeFazio said. "The Secretary of Commerce declared a commercial fishery disaster almost five months ago. It is past time for Congress to provide disaster assistance so that these families can pay their bills and put food on the table. We are asking congressional leadership to work with us to ensure this important legislation is passed, and passed immediately. Congress must not continue to delay aid." Cosponsoring the Senate bill were U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith of Oregon and U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer of California. Along with DeFazio, cosponsors of the House bill were Oregon Representatives Darlene Hooley and David Wu, and California Representatives Mike Thompson, Sam Farr, Lynn Woolsey, Lois Capps, Anna Eshoo, Tom Lantos, Zoe Lofgren, and Doris Matsui. Commerce Secretary Carlos Gutierrez declared a fishery disaster last August after the salmon fishing season suffered unprecedented and widespread closures, curtailing the ability of many in the commercial salmon fishing community to earn a living. Early salmon run data indicate that the fishing season will likely remain closed for the 2007 season, reinforcing the need to pass disaster aid legislation. The text of the letter to House and Senate leaders follows:

January 4, 2007
The Honorable Harry Reid
Senate Majority Leader
S-221 Capitol
Washington, DC 20510
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
H-204 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515
The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Senate Minority Leader
S-208 Capitol
Washington, DC 20510
The Honorable John A. Boehner
Republican Leader
H-107 Capitol
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senate Majority Leader Reid, Senate Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, and Republican Leader Boehner: We request your assistance as quickly as possible in appropriating \$60.4 million in disaster aid to commercial salmon fishermen, tribes and related businesses affected by the commercial fishery failure of 2006 – the largest commercial salmon fishery disaster in U.S. history. Last year, the Department of Commerce all but eliminated the commercial salmon fishing season for more than 1,000 commercial salmon fishermen in California and Oregon due to poor salmon returns along the Klamath River. Early salmon return data indicate that fishing will likely remain closed for the 2007 season, further compounding the economic impact to our fishing communities. The impact upon the coastal areas dependent upon this industry has been devastating. Despite the Secretary of Commerce declaring a commercial fishery failure on August 10, 2006 and personally making calls to House and Senate Appropriations Committee chairmen, the 109th Congress was unable to appropriate funds before adjournment. Issuing these disaster funds is a top priority for our constituents and is supported by the governors of Washington, Oregon and California, our county boards of supervisors, the Klamath Water Users Association and the California Chamber of Commerce. We are also steadfastly committed to instituting comprehensive legislation that will restore the Klamath River basin so commercial salmon fishermen, tribes, farmers and related businesses do not have to suffer these types of disasters again. We look forward to working with you and your staff to get these necessary disaster funds appropriated as quickly as possible through a Continuing Resolution, or any other legislative vehicle.

Sincerely,
Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress
Ron Wyden
U.S. Senator
Gordon Smith
U.S. Senator
Dianne Feinstein
U.S. Senator
Barbara Boxer
U.S. Senator
Mike Thompson
Member of Congress
Sam Farr
Member of Congress
Lynn Woolsey
Member of Congress
Lois Capps
Member of Congress
Anna Eshoo
Member of Congress
Tom Lantos
Member of Congress
Zoe Lofgren
Member of Congress
Doris Matsui
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