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NOAA'S NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE, WEST COAST REGION
AND
CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

CALIFORNIA VOLUNTARY DROUGHT INITIATIVE

**YOUR HELP IS NEEDED TO SAVE CALIFORNIA'S
NATIVE SALMON AND STEELHEAD**

California is experiencing severe drought conditions, both at the state and local level. The ongoing drought has affected drinking water supplies, agriculture, municipal, and industrial supply and resulted in critically low instream flows that have severely impacted native fisheries. NOAA's National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's (CDFW) status and trend monitoring show that salmon and steelhead populations on the central California coast (San Mateo and Santa Cruz counties) are at a high risk of extinction and their abundance continues to decline. Low instream flows last summer likely led to poor survival of juvenile coho salmon and steelhead and increased their risk of extinction. The precipitation in late 2021 improved overall streamflow on the central California coast; however, due to an extremely dry period in January-March 2022, drought conditions are expected for the remainder of 2022. Your assistance can increase the survival of coho salmon and steelhead populations on the central California coast despite ongoing drought conditions. We invite you to partner with us and join our California Voluntary Drought Initiative to help protect juvenile salmon and steelhead this summer and fall.

The California Voluntary Drought Initiative is a collaborative effort designed to engage landowners, water users, and communities in watershed conservation and management actions that can help reduce the effects of the drought on our salmon and steelhead populations. These voluntary actions include:

1. implementing water conservation strategies that improve streamflow;
2. providing instream flows necessary for fish survival and persistence;
3. monitoring and evaluating the success of these measures;
4. allowing access for our fish rescue and relocation effort; and
5. enhancing floodplain inundation and groundwater recharge.

During the drought of 2012 to 2016, NMFS and CDFW entered into voluntary agreements with landowners in other watersheds to implement these actions. The participating landowners helped save water and provide flows in critical stream reaches where coho salmon and steelhead live

during summer. They also provided access to their property for fish rescues and monitoring. These collaborative efforts helped save fish from dry stream conditions and prevented large-scale fish kills. This year we would be particularly grateful for help from those who have off-stream ponds with sufficient storage to release small volumes of water (beginning in the late spring and early summer) to provide subsistence flows during the critical dry period when juvenile salmon and steelhead are most vulnerable.

There are several benefits for those who participate in the California Voluntary Drought Initiative:

1. Potential for financial and technical assistance to implement water saving or flow-enhancing activities.
2. Participants create a pathway for their community to develop cooperative solutions and regional approaches to water conservation and maintaining instream flows. These types of activities could be important for consideration by the State Water Resources Control Board if water right curtailments are needed in the future.
3. Participants will limit their liability and potential penalties under federal and state endangered species laws; and NMFS and CDFW will consider participation an important mitigating factor if any enforcement actions occur related to incidental take of an endangered or threatened species.
4. Potential for prioritized processing for water right changes (and the potential for reduced fees associated with such changes).

If you are interested in working with NMFS and CDFW and learning more about how to promote the survival and recovery of threatened or endangered salmon and steelhead species in your local watershed, please review the California Voluntary Drought Initiative found here: <https://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FileHandler.ashx?DocumentID=193837&inline>. For more information about how drought impacts salmon and steelhead along the West Coast visit: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/west-coast/climate/drought-west-coast-region>.

If you are interested in participating and for additional information, please contact BDRDrought@wildlife.ca.gov and/or calcoastalvdi.wcr@noaa.gov. Your assistance may be crucial in helping salmon and steelhead survive and recover on the central California coast.

Sincerely,



Erin Chappell
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