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HOOPA VALLEY TRIBE COUNTS DOWN TO DEADLINE FOR FEDERAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE KLAMATH RIVER FISH

Hoopa, Calif. – With a deadline of Jan. 30 looming, the Hoopa Valley Tribe of northern California is hoping federal agencies are going to recommend Klamath River fish ladder passage plans to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) that will trump plans like trucking fish around dams on the river. Tribal fish biologists have noted trucking, a plan recommended by the dams’ owners, PacifiCorp, will confuse spawning fish. PacifiCorp has been negotiating for a 50-year license to keep their four aging hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River, but are opposed to building new fish ladders that would open up more of the river for endangered fish populations.

“The owners of the dams apparently don’t understand that you cannot just take a salmon for a ride, dump it in the river above the dams and expect the salmon to begin spawning in an unfamiliar area,” said Clifford Lyle Marshall, Chairman of the Hoopa Valley Tribe. “Federal biologists from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) have spent months demonstrating the need for fish ladders, and now we need them to complete the final step on Jan. 30. They must tell FERC that fish ladders are needed before the dam re-licensing permits can be approved.”

Since the turn-of-the century fish passage along the Klamath River has been blocked at Iron Gate Dam in northern California. This deprives salmon (an endangered species), steelhead, lamprey and other migratory fish access to hundreds of miles of habitat. The dams are a major reason why salmon runs have declined to their lowest levels ever, forcing closure of ocean salmon fisheries, according to Hoopa fish biologists.

Federal agencies, under the Federal Power Act, proposed last year fish passage prescriptions and in-stream flow conditions be included in a new FERC hydropower license to PacifiCorp. PacifiCorp disputed the need for fish ladders at a hearing in Sacramento this summer. At that hearing Judge Parlen McKenna ruled in favor of the federal plans for fish passage noting, “If access was

provided through a properly designed, operated, and maintained fish way, anadromous fish would migrate past Iron Gate Dam, and enter the upper Klamath River basin.”

Under the Federal Power Act, the federal agencies must file final versions of their fish passage prescriptions and instream flow conditions by Jan. 30. PacifiCorp remains opposed to dam removal or fish ladders, saying they are too expensive. They have lobbied Interior Secretary Dirk Kempthorne to overrule his biological staff and set aside fish requirements, according to a tribal spokesperson.

The Hoopa Valley Tribe maintains the fish will continue towards extinction unless the barrier of the dams is neutralized. “It’s really going to boil down to federal agencies telling FERC what they know. They know that these dams are killing the fish and should not be re-licensed until PacifiCorp commits to a plan allowing more spawning habitat,” said Marshall.

The Hoopa Valley Tribe has used decades of experience in restoration of Trinity River fisheries to help develop restoration measures for the Klamath. The two rivers join at the northern edge of the Hoopa Valley Reservation. The Trinity River, which bisects the Hoopa Reservation, is the largest tributary of the Klamath River, which runs through the Yurok Reservation to its terminus in the Pacific Ocean.