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Punishing Fisherman Ignores The Big H: Habitat

OLYMPIA (April 4, 2006) – The expected decision this week by the Pacific Fisheries Management Council to close salmon fisheries south of Cape Falcon in Oregon represents a failure to protect and restore salmon habitat, not a failure of fisheries management, said Billy Frank Jr., chairman of the Northwest Indian Fisheries Commission.

“A lot of misplaced anger will be directed at the Pacific Fishery Management Council when it cuts salmon harvest this year,” said Frank. “But, it won’t be the secretaries of Commerce and Interior or the chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality – those responsible for the collapse of Klamath River chinook stocks – sitting across the table who will be listening to the heartbreaking testimony in Sacramento.”

In 2002 chinook returning to the Klamath River were met with low water levels and warm temperatures. Water that would have supported the salmon was instead diverted for agriculture. Thousands of adult chinook died before they were able to spawn resulting in this year’s crash of the run.

“Fishermen are being punished because of mistakes in salmon habitat management,” said Frank.

Only through widespread cooperation – such as the Shared Strategy for Puget Sound – can the fate of the Klamath River be avoided in the State of Washington. Shared Strategy is a grassroots, cooperative conservation effort that has that has developed a restoration plan for

Puget Sound chinook that is now being reviewed by the federal government.

“If we ignore the importance of protecting salmon habitat, the closures, restrictions and resulting economic shockwave that is beginning down south will head this way,” said Frank. To save our region from the fate of Oregon and California, we must make sure the mistakes of the Klamath River aren’t repeated here, Frank said.

“Harvest and hatcheries are powerful management tools, but it’s the Big H – habitat – that brings salmon back year after year. We’re not in that mess down there because of harvest,” said Frank. “If we lose sight of the importance of salmon habitat in Puget Sound, like they have on the Klamath and Columbia rivers, we will soon be looking at fishing closures in our backyard.”

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