



California Salmon Strategy: Overview and Update

Agenda Item at a Glance

- Salmon are a type of fish that is native to California. They are important to California's natural environment, culture, and economy. California's salmon are struggling to survive because of drought, climate change, and other challenges. The Salmon Strategy is the way the State of California is taking action to protect salmon and places where they live.
- Making sure that salmon continue to survive in California is important for California's lands, waters, and animals; fishermen and women; Tribes; and others.
- This is an informational item, important to those who want to know what the State is doing to make sure that salmon in California can survive.
- At this meeting, staff from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, called "CDFW," the Department of Water Resources, called "DWR," and the State Water Resources Control Board, called "Water Board," will present information to the Commission. Tribes and the public will have an opportunity to make comments to the Commission before the Commission discusses this agenda item.

Introduction

California's salmon populations are struggling to recover from years of drought, climate disruption, and other environmental and human-made challenges. California's salmon populations are vital to the state's ecology, economy, and cultural heritage. The [Salmon Strategy](#), launched in January of 2024, is a State initiative that addresses the critical decline in salmon populations due to factors like drought and climate change. The [California Salmon Strategy for a Hotter, Drier Future: Progress Report](#), released in March of 2025 by the California Natural Resources Agency in partnership with the Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), Department of Water Resources (DWR), and the State Water Resources Control Board (Water Board), details advancements made since the Salmon Strategy's launch. The progress report highlights significant progress on 71 action items designed to restore salmon populations and habitat, with roughly 67% of actions actively in development and 26% already completed.

The progress report captures key achievements over the past year, including the removal of outdated dams like those on the Klamath River and the advancement of habitat restoration through initiatives like the Salmon Habitat Restoration Prioritization Initiative (SHaRP), which has allocated over \$30 million for projects. The progress report also notes progress in establishing minimum flow requirements for crucial rivers, implementing new tracking salmon technologies to monitor populations, and fostering collaboration among State agencies, Tribal

partners, and non-governmental organizations. These efforts underscore California's commitment to creating resilient and thriving salmon populations for the future.

This agenda item will provide an overview of the Salmon Strategy and an update on implementation efforts.

Background

Salmon are widespread across California, swimming through California's rivers into the Pacific Ocean and then returning several years later to start a new generation. Four major species of salmon still exist in California – Chinook, Coho, Pink, and Chum. Chinook and Coho are the predominate species in the state. The Chinook have different "run types," which means the time of year those returning fish swim back up rivers from the Pacific Ocean. Historically, salmon populations returning to California rivers were estimated to be in the millions, annually. Current populations are a fraction of that and depend heavily upon hatcheries.

Pacific salmon are a keystone species. Scientists consider keystone species to be those that have a disproportionately large effect on the broader natural environment relative to the specific species abundance. Salmon are one of nature's "force multipliers," super-charging benefits across entire ecological communities. They are food for other species. Their bodies enrich habitats through cycling nutrients from ocean to rivers. Restoring habitat for salmon benefits many additional aquatic species. Creating passage for salmon past barriers helps lamprey and sturgeon and a suite of other aquatic species too. Centering restoration around salmon makes sense. A salmon stronghold may be a watershed, or multiple watersheds, in a region where the protection and restoration of that stronghold help create climate refugia for the long term. A network of highly resilient, ecologically important watersheds and habitats creates spill-over effects across a broader landscape, improving its capacity to sustain salmon and other aquatic species. Protection and restoration of this network drives partnerships, prioritization, funding investments, on-the-ground project implementation, and monitoring.

This item advances Goal Three of the Commission's [Strategic Plan](#), which calls for utilizing the Commission's public forum to explore water management issues. Objective 3.2 tasks the Commission with evaluating and discussing progress toward implementing the Salmon Strategy.

Meeting Overview

At the June meeting, Erik Ekdahl, Chief Deputy Director at the Water Board, Marc Commandatore, Statewide Restoration Initiatives Branch Manager at DWR, and Sheena Holley, Salmon Strategy Implementation Coordinator at CDFW, will provide an update on the implementation of Governor Newsom's California Salmon Strategy for a Hotter, Drier Future. The Commission will hear public comment and have an opportunity to ask questions of the presenters to help the Commission and the public understand and evaluate the progress being made.

This is an informational item.

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