

Federal drought relief money to help state save salmon run

By Carolyn
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California will get a big chunk of federal drought relief money directed at Western states, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said Friday, in part to pay for refrigerating water at a Shasta fish hatchery where water levels are so low, and what's left is so warm, that federally protected salmon cannot survive.

Appearing at a news conference in Sacramento with Gov. Jerry Brown, Jewell said \$29 million in federal money will help managers monitor the state's hydrology, move water to where it is most needed, and conserve and recycle water. Brown said he will hold off on mandatory water rationing because the state appears to be doing "pretty well" with its current voluntary restrictions.

The extra money will also go to wildlife refuges, improved monitoring of endangered fish, and several watershed and habitat restoration projects, including the Livingston Stone Hatchery at Lake Shasta, where 600,000 juvenile winter-run Chinook salmon were released this week to help increase the odds that some of the fish will make it down the Sacramento River to San Francisco Bay and out to sea.

Jewell said the "very, very severe" drought is "wreaking havoc on ranchers, farmers, municipalities and certainly the environment." Acknowledging pressure from farmers suffering from reduced water allocations, Jewell said she "does look at where my food comes from." At the same time, she said, climate change is leading to higher temperatures and more evaporation, requiring more crop irrigation even as water supplies shrink.

The rains that reached San Francisco on Friday, while very welcome, will put "tremendous pressure" on water managers to pump more water from rivers just when the winter-run Chinook need that water to get to the bay, she said.

Wildlife managers believe only about 5 percent of the winter-run Chinook survived this year because the Sacramento River was depleted by drought.

John McManus, executive director of the Golden Gate Salmon Association, said he was heartened by the federal support, but added it is unfortunate that refrigeration is needed at a fish hatchery. McManus said he can't remember when managers have ever run out of cold water at the Shasta reservoir.

"Our biggest concern right now is the fate of juvenile winter-run salmon struggling to stay alive as they wash down the Sacramento River this week and next, and hopefully through the delta and on to the bay and ocean," McManus said, calling them "the only hope" for the 2014 generation of salmon.

State water concerns aren't going away, the governor said at the news conference.

"We will try to find a balance" between farms and the environment, Brown said. "We've got our hands full."

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