

Lingering drought heightens worries of extinction for salmon

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

Another deadly summer of drought has heightened fears of extinction in the wild for an iconic California salmon, federal officials said Wednesday.

Officials with the National Marine Fisheries Service said preliminary counts indicate that hot, shallow waters caused by the drought killed most of this year's juvenile winter-run Chinook before they made it out to the Pacific Ocean.

It "doesn't look very good," said Garwin Yip, a federal fisheries spokesman.

If a final count this winter confirms the bad news, it would mean a second straight summer in which 5 percent or less of the young fish survived California's drought.

Since the fish spawn on a three-year cycle, the die-off would make management of next year's water critical for the salmon's survival in the wild.

The development suggests failure for a second year in a row for federal efforts to manage water flows from Lake Shasta, a main reservoir in the state's water system, to keep salmon and other species alive.

"Droughts are always hard on salmon, but water management decisions made it worse this year," said John McManus, executive director of the Golden Gate Salmon Association.

The juvenile salmon depend on water temperatures in the mid-50s, and were unable to survive in the warmer temperatures produced by shallower than usual water.

Chinook salmon are a mainstay of the state's commercial fishing industry. California's fishing industry and environmental groups are vying with the state's farmers for diminishing water supplies in the driest four years on record.