May 14, 2020

The Honorable Wilbur Ross
Secretary of Commerce
United States Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20230

Re: 2019 Green River Commercial Fisheries Disaster for Muckleshoot Indian Tribe

Dear Secretary Ross:

I am writing to formally request that you declare an economic fishery disaster under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act so that disaster relief assistance can be provided to our fishers. Muckleshoot fishers were adversely impacted by the extremely low runs of salmon in the Green River in 2019.

For example, the 2019 Green River commercial coho harvest was only 17.3% of the most recent six-year average (excluding 2015), and the 2019 commercial Green River chum harvest was only 10.9% of the most recent six-year average (excluding 2015). Similarly, the harvest in 2019 pink fishery, an odd-year only fishery, was only 1.3% of the previous six-year average (excluding 2015). The chinook fishery harvest, which has been closed in years before 2017 due to rebuilding the stock, was only 26.1% of the previous two-year average (2017 & 2018).

The salmon from the Green River fisheries, like all salmon, is extremely important to our Muckleshoot people and always has been. The lack of chinook, chum, coho and pink impacted our entire tribe. We are fishing people—it is central to our culture and way of life, as well as our economy. We have always relied on the water and our natural resources for our health and livelihoods. With very little chinook, chum, coho or pink to harvest, our entire community suffered and needs financial relief to get through these difficult times.
As a federally recognized tribe and sovereign nation, we have the right to request and receive disaster relief under the Department of Commerce and Congressional appropriation. We ask that under your authority, and in cooperation with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries and the Muckleshoot Tribe, that you coordinate with all parties to issue a Fisheries Economic Disaster Declaration as authorized under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Sincerely,

Jaison Elkins
Chairperson
Muckleshoot Indian Tribe

cc: The Honorable Patty Murray
    The Honorable Maria Cantwell
    The Honorable Kim Schrier

Attachment
WHEREAS, due to undetermined as well as natural and/or manmade causes beyond the control of fisheries managers to mitigate, likely including unfavorable ocean conditions such as the vast expanse of unusually warm marine water, nicknamed "the blob," that occurred in 2015 and 2019, the Muckleshoot Indian Tribe's fisheries, particularly the Green River pink, coho, and chum stocks, fell to calamitous lows in 2019; and,

WHEREAS, the Tribe's Green River coho harvest was 82.7% below normal in 2019, consisting of 5,593 fish caught; and

WHEREAS, the Tribe's Green River chum harvest was 89.1% below normal in 2019, consisting of an unprecedented low of merely 1,717 fish caught in 2019; and

WHEREAS, the Tribe's Green River pink harvest was 98.7% below normal for this odd-year only fishery, consisting of 448 fish caught; and

WHEREAS, these extreme declines and other fishery declines are creating dire economic crises for the Tribe's members who are commercial and subsistence fishers and for the Tribally-owned fish buying company, Muckleshoot Seafood Products;

WHEREAS, the Secretary of Commerce is authorized to declare a fishery resource disaster under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act and the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act and to provide economic assistance to the affected fishing community provided monies are appropriated by Congress;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Muckleshoot Tribal Council:

1. declares a fishery resource disaster for the above-referenced 2019 Green River chum, pink, and coho fisheries; and
2. authorizes the Chairman of the Tribe, or in his absence, the Vice-Chairman to request that the Secretary of Commerce declare a fishery resource disaster relating to said fishery resource failures and failures for other species as warranted by the data and to request that Congress and/or the Secretary of Commerce provide economic assistance to aid affected Muckleshoot fishers and Muckleshoot Seafood Products and/or to fund projects that are designed to restore the affected fisheries and/or prevent similar failures in the future and/or to otherwise assist the affected commercial fishers and/or ameliorate the economic and social effects of the above-referenced fishery failures.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Chairman of the Tribal Council or, in his absence, the Vice-Chairman, is hereby authorized to sign all letters and negotiate and execute all contracts, agreements and amendments thereto on behalf of the Tribe without further adoption of a resolution in the securing and performance of this activity throughout its duration provided that such authorization does not exceed the specific intent and terms of the aforementioned document and/or activity, and is executed in compliance with all applicable Tribal, federal and other ordinances, laws, regulations, policies and procedures.

CERTIFICATION

As Secretary of the Muckleshoot Indian Tribal Council, I hereby certify that the above resolution was duly adopted at a _regular_ meeting of the Tribal Council on the 13 day of December, 2019, held on the Muckleshoot Indian Reservation, Auburn, WA, at which a quorum was present by a vote of _5_ for, _0_ against and _0_ abstentions.

[Signatures]

Tribal Council Secretary

Tribal Council Chair/Vice-Chair

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