



SQUAXIN ISLAND TRIBE

July 3, 2024

The Honorable Gina M. Raimondo
 Secretary of Commerce
 United States Department of Commerce
 1401 Constitution Ave., NW
 Washington, D.C. 20230

US EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT
 2024 JUL 12 PM 12: 22

Subject: 2023 Puget Sound Fall Chum Fishery Disaster for the Squaxin Island Tribe

Dear Secretary Raimondo:

The Squaxin Island Tribe is writing to formally request an economic fishery disaster declaration under Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (16 U.S.C. §1861a). This request is prompted by the adverse impacts suffered by our tribal fishers due to the poor abundance of chum salmon during the 2023 Puget Sound fall chum salmon fisheries, upon which our community relies.

The Squaxin Island tribal fisheries affected were the marine area 13D (Pickering Passage, Dana Passage, & Southern Case Inlet), 13H (Totten Inlet), and 13G (Eld Inlet) Puget Sound fall chum salmon fisheries targeting deep south Puget Sound chum runs. The scarcity of chum salmon in 2023 led to constrained fisheries and closures for conservation of Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Puget Sound State, Squaxin Island Tribe and other Puget Sound tribal fisheries. Of those fish that did return to our usual and accustomed fishing grounds, the majority were left for escapement into watersheds to ensure sustainability of the resource. This low abundance, coupled with exceedingly low market prices starting as low as \$0.25, has profoundly impacted the Squaxin Island Tribe. Secretary Raimondo, we urge you to respond promptly to this matter to allow our fishermen the opportunity to obtain disaster relief funds and support.

These chum salmon fisheries are of utmost importance to our Squaxin Island tribal community, as they have been for generations. The low returns of chum impacted our entire tribe. We are fishing people—it is central to our culture and way of life, as well as our economy. Harvest in these fisheries not only contributes significantly to annual fisher income, but also provides a ceremonial and subsistence food source for use by community members throughout the winter months. We have always relied on the water and our natural resources for our health and livelihoods. With very few chum salmon to harvest, our entire community suffered and needs financial relief to get through these difficult times. Compared to data from previous years (Recent 5-year averages for 2018-2022 fishing years), our chum fishery experienced a staggering economic loss of 99.78% in 2023, with an overall economic loss of 40.33% for all of our 2023 fisheries combined (Chinook, coho, & chum salmon). These estimates, based on harvest fish ticket data do not encompass the full extent of financial hardships faced by our fisheries during this disaster season.

As a federally recognized tribe and sovereign nation, we assert our right to request and receive disaster relief under the Department of Commerce and Congressional appropriation. We implore you, under

Natural Resources Department • 200 S.E. Billy Frank Jr. Way • Shelton, WA 98584
Phone (360) 426-9781 • Fax (360) 426-3971

your authority and in collaboration with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Fisheries and the Squaxin Island Tribe, to expedite the issuance of a Fisheries Economic Disaster Declaration as per Section 312(a) of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act.

Your prompt attention to this matter is crucial for the well-being and resilience of our Tribal Community. Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact *Ray Peters, Squaxin Island Tribe Intergovernmental & Tribal Council Liaison* by phone: 360-432-3900 or email: rpeters@squaxin.us. For inquiries regarding data from the Squaxin Island Tribes fisheries please contact *Joseph Peters, Squaxin Island Tribe Natural Resources Policy Representative* by phone: 360-432-3813 or email: jcpeters@squaxin.us.

Sincerely,

Kristopher K. Peters

Kristopher K. Peters (Jul 3, 2024 08:33 PDT)

Kristopher Peters, Chairman
Squaxin Island Tribe

Cc: The Honorable Patty Murray, US Senator
The Honorable Maria Cantwell, US Senator
The Honorable Derrick Kilmer, Congressman
The Honorable Marilyn Strickland, Congressman

Signature: *Kristopher K. Peters*

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Email: kpeters@squaxin.us