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Fish and Game Commission



*Wildlife Heritage and Conservation
Since 1870*

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January 19, 2023

The Honorable Jessica Pyska, Chair
County of Lake Board of Supervisors
255 North Forbes Street
Lakeport, CA 95453

Sent via email to Jessica.Pyska@lakecountyca.gov

Re: Support for county actions to support Clear Lake hitch

Dear Chair Pyska and members of the board:

On behalf of the California Fish and Game Commission (Commission), I am writing to follow up on the Clear Lake hitch emergency summit convened last month in Lakeport, and to express support for the Lake County Watershed Protection District's participation in additional actions that may be central to emergency protection of Clear Lake hitch.

At the request of the Commission, the emergency summit was organized jointly by the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) and several Clear Lake tribal governments (Big Valley Rancheria, Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake, Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians, Robinson Rancheria of Pomo Indians, and Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians). The goals of the summit were to describe the current status of Clear Lake hitch populations; identify actions needed to stabilize hitch populations in key tributary streams; and identify mid- and long-term actions necessary to prevent loss of this species central to the traditional cultures of Clear Lake tribes.

The summit was well-attended and included participation by tribal leadership, technical staff and citizens, as well as representatives of agencies with authority to address the emergency needs, including the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, California State Water Resources Control Board, California Department of Water Resources, and Lake County Watershed Protection District.

Among the key findings from the summit was the need for minimum flows (approximately 34 cubic feet per second) and depth (approximately 0.5 feet) to allow for spawning in tributaries to Clear Lake in the February to July time frame, prioritizing those where spawning has occurred most recently (e.g., Adobe and Kelsey creeks).

Summit participants also identified several key actions the Lake County Watershed Protection District Board of Directors could consider taking in the near-term to promote survival of Clear Lake hitch – actions that the Commission supports:

- formally acknowledge the emergency status of the Clear Lake hitch;
- address water withdrawals for frost protection via a local ordinance;
- maximize enforcement of illegal diversions;
- manage spring flows from Highland Springs Dam to support spawning conditions in Adobe Creek;
- consider spring groundwater management responses to enable spawning, including reductions in withdrawals near spawning streams and groundwater pumping into critical stream reaches;
- prioritize removal of barriers to fish passage; and
- explore a range of voluntary actions (e.g., extraction forbearances) that current water users can implement.

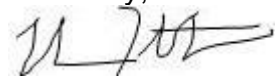
In 2014, the Commission listed Clear Lake hitch as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA). The Commission remains committed to ensuring the species' persistence, despite continued declines since its listing. Consistent with state listing under CESA, multiple tribes and state agencies have coordinated with our primary partner, CDFW, to monitor Clear Lake hitch status, and to design and implement projects to support the remaining populations of the fish in an effort to prevent extinction.

Understanding and appreciating that the Lake County Watershed Protection District has participated in some of the monitoring and implementation efforts, the Commission encourages the district to continue that participation and to take a strong leadership role by identifying additional supportive actions to sustain Clear Lake hitch.

The Commission recognizes that, as we submit this letter, weather conditions have created the potential for better stream flows in the near term, but also recognizes that climatic conditions can change as they did in water year 2022. We must all remain vigilant in the face of a variety of possible outcomes, including continuing drought.

Thank you for your continued work on this important matter. Commissioners are encouraged by the potential for effective interagency collaborations to successfully address the emergency situation facing Clear Lake hitch, and we look forward to working with you, CDFW, and other agencies to achieve the goals of this effort.

Sincerely,



Erika Zavaleta
Vice President

cc: Scott De Leon, Director, Lake County Department of Water Resources
Scott DeLeon,
Director, Lake County Department of Water Resources

Marina Deligiannis, Deputy Director, Lake County Department of Water Resources

Wade Crowfoot, Secretary, California Natural Resources Agency

Geneva E.B. Thompson, Assistant Secretary for Tribal Affairs, California Natural Resources Agency

Charlton Bonham, Director, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Chad Dibble, Deputy Director, Wildlife and Fisheries Division, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

Karla Nemeth, Director, California Department of Water Resources

Cindy Messer, Lead Deputy Director, California Department of Water Resources

Patrick Pulupa, Executive Officer, Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board

Honorable Philip Gomez, Chairman, Big Valley Band of Pomo Indians

Honorable Agustin Garcia, Chairman, Elem Indian Colony Pomo Tribe

Honorable Sherry Treppe, Chairperson, Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake

Honorable Darin Beltran, Chairman, Koi Nation of Northern California

Honorable Jose Simon III, Chairman, Middletown Rancheria of Pomo Indians of California

Honorable Beniakem Cromwell, Chairman, Robinson Rancheria Band of Pomo Indians

Honorable Shawn Davis, Chairperson, Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians