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**COMMERCE SECRETARY BROWN AND OMB DIRECTOR PANETTA ANNOUNCE
EMERGENCY ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PACKAGE FOR WEST COAST SALMON
FISHERMEN AND COMMUNITIES**

On behalf of President Clinton, Commerce Secretary Ronald H. Brown and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Director Leon Panetta today announced a financial assistance package totalling \$16 million as a result of Secretary Brown's declaration of a fishing disaster because of the collapse of salmon stocks in the Pacific Northwest.

The assistance package includes \$12 million in emergency assistance funds and \$3 million made available from the President's Northwest Economic Adjustment Initiative. In addition, the Commerce Department's Economic Development Administration will make available up to \$700,000 to support economic diversification including tourism promotion in the region.

"Being responsive to the needs of fishermen and their communities is our top priority in meeting the demands of this crisis," said President Clinton, "Working with the Northwest Congressional delegation, we are taking active steps to help offset the economic effects caused by the reductions in the salmon fishery."

"This emergency assistance package addresses both the short-term goal of providing economic relief and allowing fisherman to diversify their activities, and the long-term goal of restoring salmon populations and diversity," said Secretary Brown.

"The importance of salmon to the economic and cultural development of the Pacific Northwest cannot be underestimated. Salmon are integral to the health of the ecosystem," said Director Panetta. "We believe the Administration's proposed assistance package will address the needs of fishermen, tribes, and communities, and at a level appropriate to the estimated impact."

The new funds come from previously appropriated monies in the Department of Defense Appropriations Act of 1993 (P.L. 102-396). The availability of these funds were made contingent upon the President submitting an official budget request to the Congress and designating the entire amount of the request as an emergency requirement. The Secretary of Commerce, under the authority of the Interjurisdictional Fisheries Act of 1986, has determined that a fishing disaster exists.

The federal emergency assistance package is designed to help the salmon fishermen and local communities address the economic losses prompted by the shutdown of the ocean salmon harvest this year. The shutdown is due to environmental conditions such as the recent El Nino climate phenomenon, which brings on ocean warming, to the extended drought in the region, and to the degradation of the salmon habitat. Preliminary estimates indicate that nearly 8,400 jobs (full-time equivalent) may be affected in the region due to the recent crisis and precipitous declines in salmon stocks over the recent years.

Due to the extremely low levels of salmon, the Commerce Department issued regulations on May 1, that drastically reduce catch levels and areas open to salmon fishing from last year. Overall, salmon stocks are in deep decline with several stocks listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. Spring chinook adult salmon returns for 1994 are 40 percent of the previous record low. Coastal coho salmon stocks are expected to be at or below record low levels this year. Current salmon stock assessments estimate the stocks will recover no earlier than three to five years.

The disaster relief funds will be administered by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration in conjunction with the States. Funds may be used several ways -- including issuing cash grants to fishermen to meet mortgage and equipment obligations, a program to reduce the harvest capacity through a permit buyout system, and a plan that would provide short-term jobs to dislocated fishermen to conduct habitat restoration activities, modeled after the "Jobs in the Woods" program created as part of the President's Forest Plan.

The Administration also proposes the use of existing resources to provide debt restructuring and working capital loans through the Small Business Administration and job retraining through the Department of Labor.

A series of community meetings with fishing industry representatives will be held in California, Oregon, and Washington, beginning June 1, to better define the needs of affected fishermen, refine economic impact data and permit buyout information. The meetings are designed to provide an opportunity for those affected to help describe the scope and magnitude of the economic impact of fishing restrictions that have resulted from unprecedented declines in salmon runs.

The Administration has proposed a comprehensive investment initiative in the President's FY 1995 budget to build sustainable fisheries. This initiative, which would be administered by NOAA is designed to build healthy fisheries across the nation and is estimated to produce billions in overall economic gains and thousand of jobs in the coming decade. Part of this initiative is specifically devoted to taking an aggressive approach to salmon management. The goals of this initiative are to greatly increase the nation's wealth and the quality of life of millions of Americans through sustainable fisheries and a healthy fishing industry that provides safe and wholesome seafood, as well as appropriate recreational opportunities.

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