

Karuk Tribe

P R E S S R E L E A S E

For Immediate Release: April 10, 2008

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Algae Toxins found in Yellow Perch and Freshwater Mussels
Findings indicate need for warnings against eating fish from PacifiCorp Reservoirs

Orleans, CA – A new report issued by the Karuk Tribe shows that the flesh of a popular game fish in PacifiCorp's Klamath reservoirs is contaminated by the algal toxin microcystin. The report concludes that the public should be warned by health officials to not eat fish from the reservoirs during summer months when algae blooms are most pervasive.

The report is based on toxicological analyses performed by the California Department of Fish and Game under contract to the California Water Resources Control Board. The funding for the study was provided by US Environmental Protection Agency.

Since the discovery of the toxic blue green algae *Microcystis aeruginosa* in PacifiCorp's Iron Gate and Copco reservoirs in 2001, the reservoirs have seen some of the highest recorded levels of the toxic algae in the world. *Microcystis aeruginosa* produces the toxin microcystin which is known to cause liver damage and promote tumor growth.

The report titled *Microcystin Bioaccumulation in Klamath River Fish and Freshwater Mussel Tissue: Preliminary 2007 Results* shows that during summer months when the algae blooms persist, microcystin is present in fillets of yellow perch from Iron Gate and Copco reservoirs as well as freshwater mussels in the Klamath River. Microcystin levels in freshwater mussel samples exceeded the allowable seasonal intake level for children by as much as 66 fold. Toxin levels in yellow perch exceeded the allowable seasonal intake level for children by as much as 10 fold. Acute, or one-time intake levels, were also exceeded for many of the samples.

Fishing for the non-native yellow perch in the reservoirs is popular among anglers while river mussels are an important traditional food for the Karuk and other Tribes.

The most disturbing result was the finding of microcystin in the fillets of perch as well as the livers. Toxins commonly accumulate in the livers of organisms but until now it was unclear if the toxin would be found in the muscle tissue which is the part of the fish normally consumed by sport fishermen.

The report concludes that, "In light of these bioaccumulation data, public health advisories should include warnings for the ingestion of fish and freshwater mussels."

According to numerous studies, the algae blooms are brought on by the presence of PacifiCorp's Klamath dams. By creating warm shallow reservoirs, the dams create the perfect conditions for the algae *Microcystis aeruginosa* to thrive.

Last summer, the Northcoast Regional Water Quality Control Board posted warnings urging swimmers and boaters to avoid contact with the reservoirs and the Klamath River all the way to the ocean due to high levels of the algal toxin. Recently the US EPA reversed an earlier decision and moved to list the Klamath River as “impaired” by toxic algae.

“PacifiCorp’s dams kill our salmon and poison our People,” according to Karuk Vice-chairman Leaf Hillman. “We need PacifiCorp and Warren Buffett to understand that we can’t take it any longer. We will do everything in our power to remove these dams and fix our river.”

“While Buffett is fighting poverty and disease in the third world with his philanthropy, his dams are creating poverty and disease here on the Klamath along with threatening the jobs of fishermen along 700 miles of coastline,” stated Regina Chichizola from the Klamath Riverkeeper.

PacifiCorp is currently seeking to renew their license to operate the dams. However, before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission can issue a new license, the water boards of California and Oregon must issue clean water permits. The Karuk Tribe hopes that the toxicology data is considered by the states as they review PacifiCorp’s application for a clean water permit.

“This is another issue we plan to raise with Mr. Buffett as his shareholders meeting next month,” concludes Hillman.

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Editors’ notes:

Pictures of the sampling sites, a copy of lab results, and previous press releases are available online at <http://www.karuk.us/press/press.php>

Link to CA Energy Commission economic study: <http://www.energy.ca.gov/klamath/>

Link to California Coastal Commission sediment study that concludes that dams can be removed safely: http://www.klamathwaterquality.com/CCC_KHP_Dams_Out_9_22_06.pdf