Testimony of Scott Gudes, American Sportfishing Association
Before the House Subcommittee on Water, Power and Oceans
Regarding H.R. 4419

November 30, 2017

Chairman Lamborn, Ranking Member Huffman and members of the subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Scott Gudes. I serve as the Vice President for Government Affairs for the American Sportfishing Association (ASA). ASA is the U.S. sportfishing industry's trade association. The association is made up of over 800 companies that manufacture and sell fishing tackle (rods, reels, terminal tackle, electronics, etc.), and related apparel and gear, as well as sportsmen and conservation groups, state fishery representatives, and the sportfishing media. Our membership includes a number of businesses, and conservation groups in Pacific Coast states that depend on healthy runs of Pacific salmon.

The perspectives I provide to you today are shared by Golden Gate Salmon Association (GGSA) and the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations (PCFFA). PCFFA is composed of West Coast commercial fishing interests, while GGSA consists of California recreational and commercial fishing interests, as well as other members of the salmon fishing industry. My testimony today will focus on issues related to salmon runs, as well as the recreational and commercial fisheries, jobs and communities that depend on these remarkable fish. This is an issue on which recreational and commercial fishermen and businesses share common ground.

Background

The construction and operation of federal dams on Western Rivers, such as the Sacramento, San Joaquin, Columbia and many others, have resulted in severe impacts to salmon runs, and consequently recreational and commercial fishing, fishing jobs, and the communities that rely on these salmon runs. In California's Central Valley – a watershed that I will return to in my testimony – dam construction has resulted in the loss of more than 90 percent of historical spawning habitat. In addition, the resulting alteration in water flow has contributed to the elimination of 98 percent of Central Valley riparian and floodplain habitat.[1] This loss of spawning and rearing habitat, and needed flows, have played a dramatic role in the decline of salmon, including the Endangered Species Act listing of Central

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1 http://www.westcoast.fisheries.noaa.gov/publications/recovery_planning/salmon_steelhead/domains/california_central_valley/cv_chin_stlhd_r_plan_fs_071614.pdf

Valley winter and spring run Chinook salmon and have resulted in a great deal of harm to commercial and recreational fishing.

For example, because of the impacts of water projects, in combination with a drought, California's salmon fishing industry was entirely shut down from 2008 to 2009. Simply put, for these two years, it was illegal to catch salmon in California. Because the Sacramento River is the most important salmon run south of the Columbia River, this decline led to dramatic impacts in dozens of California ports, and additional impacts in Oregon, and Washington, where significant numbers of Sacramento River fish are caught.

In addition to leading to restrictions on an historic fishery that is highly valued by the public, the decline of salmon represents an economic tragedy. Before the 2008-2009 closure, in California alone, the salmon fishery supported an economy worth $1.5 billion annually and 23,000 jobs. If California salmon runs were restored to historic levels, estimates are that these numbers would rise to $5.7 billion annually and 94,000 jobs.

Unfortunately, in the past several years, because of water management impacts and exacerbated by a long drought, salmon numbers have declined again with significant impacts on fishing seasons and harvest for the commercial and recreational and commercial fishing industries.

The recreational and commercial ocean fishery is highly regulated, to ensure that an adequate number of adult salmon return to spawn every year. Salmon are anadromous, and spend their early lives in fresh water and then much of their lifespan in the ocean. As a result, the key to restoring a thriving California and West Coast salmon fishery is how we manage and restore California's Central Valley rivers.

Pacific salmon represent one of the most iconic and historic recreational and commercial fisheries in the nation. Their wild Atlantic salmon cousins have largely vanished in the U.S. due to river obstructions, pollution and habitat degradation. To ensure that Pacific salmon stocks remain viable and don't follow the history of Atlantic salmon, great care should be taken to restore salmon habitat and ensure that water management actions in the Central Valley – and elsewhere - do not worsen conditions.

Concerns re. H.R. 4419

While we appreciate the bill's intentions to increase water availability, ASA and our partners in the region have several concerns regarding H.R. 4419.

First, Section 8 would authorize a proposed raise of Shasta Dam on California's Sacramento River. This proposed project was analyzed in a draft U.S. Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act report dated November 24, 2014. This document states that the preferred alternative "will result in additional losses of salmonid rearing and riparian habitat." It then analyzes several serious impacts on salmon that could result from the proposed dam raise, including: reduced juvenile rearing capacity, reduce access to juvenile habitat in floodplains and flood bypasses, degraded riparian habitat, degraded habitat in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, and decreased flushing flows that allow juvenile salmon to pass safely downstream, through the Delta and to the ocean. The Service concluded that it "is unable to support the adoption of any of the proposed action alternatives."

In addition, California law prohibits the issuance of any state permits for a Shasta Dam raise. This, from our perspective, is appropriate, given the potential impacts on salmon. As a result, ASA, GGSA and PCFFA do not support a federal authorization to raise Shasta Dam. Indeed, the final feasibility report for the proposed Shasta Raise concluded that the Secretary of the Interior could not provide a recommendation to proceed with the proposed Shasta Dam raise.[2]

It is important to note that one of the objectives of the proposed Shasta raise is to increase the survival of anadromous fish. Clearly, this project would fail to achieve that objective. However, without thorough analysis of this project, the potential impacts identified by the Fish and Wildlife Service might have been overlooked. This brings me to our next concern.

Second, the bill would limit the analysis and review of new proposed surface storage projects. Future environmental reviews and feasibility studies would be limited by a schedule, such as a three-year deadline and a $3 million cap on Federal cost for feasibility studies.

Surface storage projects can cost billions of dollars and can result in many complex impacts. Salmon fishermen experience these impacts every year. We believe that, in many cases, such deadlines and a cap on costs may well result in inadequate and incomplete analyses – and further harm to salmon and the fishing industry.

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[2] https://www.usbr.gov/mp/slwri/ (Page 9-1)

Third, Section 5(g) would give the Secretary of the Interior the authority to issue a list of all data needed to carry out the environmental review process for new surface storage projects. As a result, this provision would give the Secretary of the Interior the authority to limit the data used by another Department or agency in evaluating a proposed storage project. In the case of salmon, much of the federal expertise lies in the National Marine Fisheries Service, commonly referred to as "NOAA Fisheries." NOAA plays the lead or a key role in the management of harvest, habitat restoration, review of hydro projects, and salmon hatcheries. It is the agency that provides much of the government's science, including ocean conditions and trends, in support of salmon management. NOAA, through Congressional appropriations, provides funding to support Fishery Management Council science and staffing.
We believe that NOAA Fisheries also should be allowed to determine the data that are most appropriate for inclusion in its review of proposed projects that could determine the survival and health of Pacific salmon.

Conclusion

The health and sustainability of Pacific salmon are extremely important to both the West Coast recreational and commercial fishing industries, and the local communities and people that depend on them. The availability of adequate flows of cold fresh water, especially at key points in the salmonid life cycle – is critically important. It is certainly true that the construction of large dams has slowed significantly in recent decades. However, ASA, GGSA and PCFFA believe that the reason for this trend is not the environmental review process. Rather, we believe that it results from many factors including: the number of existing dams; the lack of available additional water; the shortage of promising new dam sites; the high cost of proposed surface storage projects; the difficulty of raising local cost share contributions, and; the rise of alternative water management strategies, ranging from groundwater storage and floodplain restoration to water use efficiency and water recycling. We hope the subcommittee will focus attention on these win-win strategies that can benefit salmon, generate new water supplies and reduce flood risk.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to testify today.