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**Federal Judge and Enviro Groups Say It's Time to End Debate On Yuba River Dams**

**Nevada City, CA** – On Monday, February 1, Judge John Mendez of the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of California issued an order to the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the Army Corps of Engineers that was critical of their continued delay in making a decision that could seal the fate of the Yuba River's threatened fish species, which include Spring-run Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, and green sturgeon.

Mendez's ruling comes on the heels of a letter sent by South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL), Friends of the River, and 12 coalition partners urging NMFS to take action on the Corps' Yuba River dams and craft a watershed-wide solution to save the Yuba's threatened fish species.

The letter was issued at a crucial moment in an Endangered Species Act lawsuit filed by Friends of the River. In a victory for Friends of the River, the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court of Appeals ruled in October 2019 that the 2014 decision by NMFS regulating the Corps' management of Englebright Dam and Daguerre Point Dam is legally flawed. As a result of that ruling, NMFS must make a choice whether to further explain its 2014 decision or start over, reassessing the dams' impacts on Yuba's threatened fish, and issuing a new decision, called a biological opinion. SYRCL's coalition letter demands a new biological opinion, presenting compelling evidence that harm caused by the Corps' dams, compounded by increased harm from climate change, has led to a dramatic decrease in Yuba River fish populations that puts them in ever greater danger of extinction in the watershed.

"Although NMFS has known since the 9th Circuit's ruling in October 2019 that it has to make a decision about whether to issue new Endangered Species Act regulations for the Corps' Yuba River dams, NMFS has continually delayed doing so. On Monday Judge Mendez said the delay could no longer go on indefinitely," said Eric Wesselman, Friends of the River Executive Director.

Mendez has ordered NMFS and the Corps to tell the court whether they have decided to provide "a more reasoned explanation" of the 2014 decision or whether NMFS "will issue a new biological opinion." Further, if in ten days they still have not decided, they must provide the court with "a specific estimate of when that decision will be made."

According to SYRCL and Friends of the River, action is long overdue and critically urgent. The salmon, steelhead, and sturgeon do not have time to wait. Their survival is in jeopardy.

“Friends of the River and SYRCL hope this letter, which summarizes close to 20 years of conversations, lawsuits, and comment letters, will make clear the need for NMFS and the Corps to comply with their legal obligations for the lower Yuba,” said Melinda Booth, SYRCL’s Executive Director.

The two organizations are optimistic that the new federal era will bring about accountability, transparency, and inclusion in holistic watershed management. They also hope it will provide much-needed funding and coordination between all important stakeholders who do the work necessary to preserve the species native to the Yuba River.

A dozen partners from across California and the nation signed onto the coalition letter, including Fly Fishers International, Gold Country Fly Fishing, Sierra Club, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, Center for Biological Diversity, California Coastkeeper Alliance, Trout Unlimited, San Francisco Baykeeper, The Sierra Fund, Nevada City Rancheria Tribal Council, Stoecker Ecological, and Patagonia. Other supportive organizations of the letter include American Rivers and Our Children’s Earth Foundation.

**About SYRCL:** The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL, pronounced “circle”) is the leading voice for the protection and restoration of the Yuba River watershed. Founded in 1983 through a rural, grassroots campaign to defend the South Yuba River from proposed hydropower dams, SYRCL has developed into a vibrant community organization with over 3,500 members and volunteers based in Nevada City, CA. See: [www.yubariver.org](http://www.yubariver.org)

**About Friends of the River's lawsuit:** The name and case number in the U.S. District Court, Eastern District of California is *Friends of the River v. National Marine Fisheries Service, et al.*, 2:16-cv-00818-JAM-EFB.