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# Salmon FISH & FISHING fate in limbo

## Nearly extinct in Scott Creek

McClatchy News Service

To Dave Hope's trained eyes, the situation in Scott Creek last summer looked desperate.

Farmers were pumping irrigation water from the little coastal stream outside Davenport that was on the verge of drying up, a circumstance that could kill a silver salmon population that appeared to be near extinction.

"The last wild coho that were alive in the stream were in these pockets, and they just kept dewatering it until they wiped (most of them) out, and right in front of us," the Santa Cruz County resource planner said. "We were having a fit about it, and they just wouldn't even listen to us."

Nearly a year later — in liberal, environmentally sensitive Santa Cruz County, where farmers share family names with the former director of the state Department of Fish and Game and state university students plow the ground — the issue still is unresolved.

Hope's experience helps explain how, even under relatively simple and apparently congenial circumstances, efforts to stem the decline of Pacific salmon populations along the coasts of California, Oregon and Washington face formidable obstacles.

The immediate impact of drought and the longer-term impact of habitat destruction have so depleted Pacific salmon stocks, especially coho, that federal and state authorities virtually canceled the 1992 commercial and sports ocean salmon seasons.

Along the coast, the economic impact is quick and enormous, but the local, state and federal

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## Huge obstacles peril survival of Pacific salmon

### ■ SALMON

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government response is slow and mixed.

In the case of Scott Creek — southernmost rearing habitat for the coho silvers on the West Coast — the issues are ensnared in local politics and the labyrinthine passages of state water-rights adjudication.

The Scott Creek coho population is down to a handful, fisheries specialists say, but a petition to classify the stock as threatened or endangered has been vigorously opposed by farmers.

The county has filed a formal water-rights protest against Ernest Bontadelli, a cousin of Pete Bontadelli, fish and game director in the administration of former Gov. George Deukmejian. Ernest Bontadelli uses water from the Scott Creek watershed to irrigate artichokes outside the watershed.