

# Decision delayed on salmon protection

By LANE WALLACE  
STAFF WRITER

An endangered-species designation would be too drastic a step in the effort to preserve coho (silver) salmon spawning in Santa Cruz County, the county Fish and Game Commission was told last night.

Commissioners listened to more than two hours of testimony, most of it from people concerned that an endangered-species designation could hurt farming and lumber harvesting as well as fishing because water use from streams might be limited.

The commission took no action and will consider the issue again Nov. 7. Any recommendation by the local commission would go to the state Fish and Game Commission, which has the power to impose an endangered-species designation.

The county planning staff is recommending the designation, citing a declining salmon population. Last year, one spawning pair of salmon was found in Waddell Creek and five males were found in Scott Creek, both on the North Coast, a planning staff report said.

There's a fear of the unknown locally, because the state Fish and Game Commission would have some flexibility in setting the rules for protecting the salmon.

The most drastic step would be

a blanket closure on salmon fishing in the ocean off Santa Cruz County. The state commission "is not inclined to take such a step," said Dave Hope, who wrote the planning staff report.

Nearly all the salmon found in the ocean off Santa Cruz come from other areas, Hope said.

Closure of ocean fishing at the mouths of Scott and Waddell creeks would be a reasonable protection measure, Hope said. Fishing could also be limited in the San Lorenzo River, where the number of planted salmon has been declining.

If the salmon is declared endangered, the state could limit water availability for farmers on the North Coast. Bud McCrary, owner of Big Creek Lumber, on the North Coast, said a voluntary effort to limit water usage would work. "I think everyone would be willing to cooperate," he said.

Because salmon are not found in the Pajaro River, water rights would not be affected by a salmon protection designation, Hope said.

Alan Baracco, a biologist for the State Department of Fish and Game, said there are already methods of controlling the coho salmon population, mainly by lowering catch limits and the length of the season.