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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Re: 1996-1997 - - MATTOLE SALMON RECOVERY PROGRESSES

Final results of surveys on the Mattole River this fall and winter indicate that the 1996-1997 salmon spawning run was the strongest on the Mattole River in 10 years. The Mattole Salmon Group, which operates throughout the watershed, has just completed review of spawning ground surveys conducted by over a dozen trained local residents. Conservative estimates based on these results indicate that over 1,000 chinook and 300 coho salmon spawners used the Mattole this year.

Salmon Group personnel point out that, though these estimates are far below historic numbers, thought to be easily in the tens of thousands, they do point toward a small but steady pattern of recovery. The Group has conducted spawner surveys, counts of spent salmon carcasses and spawning bed, or "redd", identification since 1981. Salmon numbers reached an all-time low in 1990 (400 or less of both chinook and coho combined) and have grown slightly each year since then.

Group representatives are eager to point out that the recovery trend is, at best, delicate. Though extinction of Mattole kings and silvers seems to be temporarily averted, restoration of the former stature of the runs depends entirely on future commitment and support by Mattole residents and landowners in general and by public resource agencies.

Success to date, according to the Salmon Group, relates to the forbearance of commercial and sport fishers who have sacrificed their seasons to aid the fish. Landowners who have reduced impacts on salmon habitat also share some of the credit as does an upriver Mattole land trust, Sanctuary Forest. This organization has managed to set aside over 1,000 acres of undisturbed forest that protects prime upper mainstem spawning reaches. Similar set-asides on land belonging to the Bureau of Land Management afford protection to the stream reach on the south fork of Bear Creek that was most heavily utilized by coho spawners this season.

Without the stability these forest lands provide, the Salmon Group feels, the flood-level storm of January 1st would have destroyed many of the spawning 'redds', and their eggs would

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have been lost. This is exactly what happened in January of 1995 when most of the salmon from the annual run spawned lower in the Mattole watershed where sediment running off of damaged forest lands caused a loss of much of that year's reproduction. The heavy rains of early December this season allowed salmon spawners to reach the relative protection of the headwaters.

The Salmon Group has been operating a hatchbox and rearing program since 1980 to help rescue native Mattole salmon stocks. Residents from up and down the valley have participated in this program. The Group, along with the Mattole Restoration Council, has also undertaken a variety of hands-on restoration projects throughout the watershed and has offered educational programs in most of the Mattole's public and private schools.