



FISH • TALES

NEWSLETTER OF THE GGSA • APRIL 2017

2017 SEASON



Early season salmon.

The Pacific Fisheries Management Council has ordered a restricted fishing season for most of this year. Those above Horse Mountain in southern Humboldt County (roughly Shelter Cove north to the Oregon border) won't get to fish salmon at all this year. Commercial fishing activity south of Horse Mountain will be greatly constricted in large part due to an extremely poor return to the Klamath River last year and an even lower return forecast for this year.

Off southern parts of the coast (Pigeon Pt south) fishing will be restricted

similar to last year out of concern over low Sacramento winter run numbers. The best news is Sport fishing from San Mateo County (Pigeon Point) to Southern Mendocino County (Point Arena) will remain open to April, shut down the first 2 weeks in May, and then reopen until the end of the season, Oct 31.

Commercial trolling will be allowed during May and June South of Pigeon Point. Trollers will be allowed to fish between

Pigeon Point and Point Arena in August and September, with a more constricted season in September, North to Horse Mountain. Commercial trolling will also be allowed during 10 days in early October between Pt. Reyes and Pedro Point.

The better news is that 230,000 Sacramento salmon are believed to be swimming off the coast. These are likely those fish trucked in the spring of 2015 as a result of cooperative work between GGSA and state and federal

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fish agencies. The majority of fish caught this season are likely to be these fish that were trucked in 2015.

Although predictions for the 2017 season are low, this should be the last of the really bad, drought-driven returns. Rains in early 2016 and early 2017 are expected to lead to an increase in salmon starting in 2018 and there are already lots of reports of small salmon in the ocean. ■

STATE SENATE INTRODUCES BILL TO SAVE CALIFORNIA SALMON

A state Senate bill defending salmon and California’s environment from damaging federal water policies has been introduced in Sacramento. Senate Bill 49, will lock in important salmon protections, as they existed in January 2016, if passed and signed into law. The bill is needed to blunt a law passed last December aimed at moving more water south in ways harmful to baby salmon.



Salmon water diverted south to arid lands

Even now, members of Congress from the San Joaquin Valley are saying “not good enough, we want more water” and are working to pass an even worse federal law to grab more water.

Salmon fishermen and women have a strong interest in seeing SB 49 become law to protect from such attacks. If it doesn’t, we will for sure lose baby salmon before they can get to the ocean as more

get sucked into diversion canals and pumps.

Without SB 49, weaker salmon protections could spell the end to some runs the next time there’s a drought ■

HEAVY WINTER RAINS

The heavy winter rains California got this year have probably been a mixed, but mostly good, bag for salmon. We won’t know for sure until the 2019 season when the majority of this year’s crop of baby salmon come home as adults to spawn but there have already been reports of good size juvenile salmon spotted in the Yolo Bypass by researchers. The following updates all speak to different aspects of what this years’ rains have meant for salmon. ■

QUICK THINKING AT THE FEATHER RIVER HATCHERY SAVES SALMON

GGSA applauds the fast action and quick thinking of Feather River hatchery staff in dealing with massive mud problems that developed when the concrete spillway at Oroville Dam failed. Tons of mud washed into the hatchery at the base of the dam. Hatchery staff quickly trucked this year’s crop of spring run salmon and some of the baby fall run salmon to a smaller facility ten miles away. This facility is fed by well water which took care of the mud problem but cut the fish off from continued imprinting on the smell of the Feather River. Other fall run salmon and about a million incubating steelhead eggs stayed behind at the hatchery where staff faced the mud problem.

They switched from Feather River water to clean water from a fire hydrant powered by City of Oroville water which is treated by chlorine, making it not so good for the fragile baby salmon. To address this problem, three big charcoal filter canisters were set up and the chlorinated water run through them to strip the chlorine before delivery to the remaining fish and eggs at the hatchery. According to reports, it worked with very few fish lost. ■



Charcoal filtration canisters

FLOODPLAINS KICK IN TO HELP SALMON AND SAVE PROPERTY

GGSA is pushing hard to increase the floodplains that saved much of the Central Valley from flooding because they also provided good nurseries for baby salmon. Lowering flood control barriers to allow floodplain inundation at lower river levels is one way to get the job done.

When the rains came, water spread out all over the Central Valley, flooding all the usual places and some that hadn't been flooded in years. Among the usual places, the low lying Sutter Bypass in the central Sacramento Valley and the Yolo Bypass near Davis both conveyed vast flood waters away from cities, towns and human development, as they're designed to do. Nearby levees built to channel floodwaters downstream to the Delta and Bay were bursting at the seams and more would have failed but for the relief the bypasses provided. In addition to saving developed areas from flooding, the floodplains became home to untold numbers of baby salmon flushed down the river.



Water pouring into the Yolo Bypass from Sacramento River

Floodplains are special food producers since they're dry part of the year when they typically develop dry land plant and insect growth. When flooded, swarms of tiny insects hatch which are

then eaten by the baby salmon in the slower moving, shallow waters causing them to grow at higher rates than fish forced to rear only in the rivers. An additional benefit comes from the recharge of underground aquifers by the water in the floodplains that slowly percolates back underground. ■

EXPERIMENTAL SALMON RELEASE SCHEDULED FOR BODEGA BAY

In a first for Bodega Bay, 250,000 baby salmon are scheduled to be released in late May as part of an experiment designed by GGSA and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. Scientists hope to learn how well the fish survive, where they go in the ocean, where they return to as adults, and how big a contribution they ultimately make to the ocean and inland salmon fishery. GGSA started working over 12 months ago with the state and the Commercial Salmon Stamp Committee to launch the project.

After being reared for several months at a hatchery, the fish will be transported via tanker trucks and then offloaded into a floating net pen at Spud Point Marina. They'll be held for a short time to reorient from the truck ride and then released to the ocean on the outgoing tide. Survival of these fish is expected to be much higher than for similar fish released at Central Valley hatcheries.

GGSA couldn't have put the pieces together to make this happen without generous assistance from a number of groups and individuals including the Commercial Salmon Stamp Committee, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and the Bodega Bay Fishermen's Festival. Spud Pt. Marina harbor and Sonoma Country Regional Parks generously offered use of their dock and crane to unload the fish. ■



GGSA efforts lead to first-ever release of baby salmon in Bodega Bay in May

FOUNDING MEMBERS

Chris Arcoleo • John Atkinson, Raymond Bonneau • Dennis Burkell Hugh Chatham • Coastside Fishing Club • Joesph Conte • Crab Boat Owners Association • Tom Creedon Ron Davis • Jim DeMartini • Joe Donatini • Jacky Douglas • Chris Duba • Kerry Egan • Ken Elie, Patrick Elie • Tim Eli • Yancy Forest-Knowles • Douglas R. Gaebel Vic Giacalone • Victor Gonella • Zeke Grader • Ren Harris • Humbolt Fisherman's Marketing Association Paul Johnson • Perry Kerson • Jonah Li, Todd Magaline • John McManus Joseph Meiswinkel • Mark Mlcoch Galen Onizuka • Rick Powers • Bob Praszker • Queen of Hearts Sportfishing • Randy Repass • Frank Rescino • Jeff Robles • Patty Schifferle • Frank Seghesio • Richard Shears • Ken Stagnaro • Roger Thomas • Edwin A. Tognetti • Aaron Weinzinger • Jay Yokomizo David Zeff • Thomas Zizzo

LONG TERM FEATHER RIVER FIX IN SIGHT?

GGSA is asking state officials to include long-needed fixes to the Thermalito complex in the coming repairs to the damaged Oroville Dam. The Thermalito Afterbay, which is part of the dam operations, has been dumping hot water into the Feather River during the spawning season for 50 years, making parts of the river inhospitable for salmon spawning. The state Dept. of Water Resources has been given ten years to fix this problem. GGSA is calling for making that fix now with all the attention, funds and heavy equipment being devoted to fixing the nearby Oroville Dam.

In addition to its hatchery production, the Feather River still has the capacity to contribute large numbers of naturally produced salmon to the fishery. In years with both good hatchery and natural salmon, commercial salmon fishermen are able to have profitable seasons. ■



Thermalito hot water flowing into Feather River

WINTER RUN AFTERMATH *continued*

The Bureau of Reclamation repeatedly questions the feasibility of complying, based on its determination to supply water to agriculture, even though they're required to comply under the federal Endangered Species Act. The truth is cold water can be supplied but in drought years, it could come at a cost to some current water users,

WINTER RUN AFTERMATH

In the wake of the near total losses of winter run eggs in 2014 and 2015 from elevated river temperatures, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) is proposing new rules calling for slightly colder water to be released during spawning and incubation periods. The US Bureau of Reclamation, which controls the water temperature through its operation of Shasta Dam upstream of the spawning areas, is pushing back against the proposal as is the Association of California Water Agencies. Both groups have sent notices to NMFS stating a long list of objections and concerns they have with having to provide cooler water.

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SCIENTIFIC VERDICT ON TWIN TUNNELS IN: BAD FOR SALMON: GGSA OPPOSES TUNNEL PLAN

In late December the National Marine Fisheries Service published draft documents looking at the damage the proposed twin tunnels project would do to salmon. The fishery agency found the tunnels would be bad all around which came as no surprise to salmon advocates. Baby salmon trying to pass the three giant intake screens in the Sacramento River south of the city of Sacramento would be pulled into, and bounce off them, losing energy and strength with every hit. Large predator fish, able to navigate around the intakes, would likely park there for easy meals. After the intakes sucked a big portion into the tunnels, the river downstream would be much smaller with a lot less power, water, flow and velocity. With less river water pushing seaward, the tidal ebb and flow would increase in the north Delta.



Good luck making it past the intake screens

Any surviving baby salmon would be sucked into the interior Delta through Georgiana Slough and the Delta Cross Channel in greater numbers. In addition, increased reservoir releases upstream at Shasta dam and on the American River, to feed the tunnels, would further reduce salmon by damaging their spawning and rearing habitat. For all of these reasons, GGSA has chosen to oppose the tunnels. As the administration of Governor Jerry Brown heads into its final years, it's not clear what the future holds for the tunnel ideas. Lots of loose ends persist including how the financing among the ag and southern California urban water districts will be split up and whether the threat posed to federally protected species is enough to stop the project. ■

something the Bureau of Reclamation and ACWA is trying hard to avoid. Current anti-Endangered Species Act sentiment in Congress doesn't help. ■

Winter run eggs got too hot in 2014 and 2015 and died

