Some time back we told you we’d be changing the name from Golden Gate to Golden State Salmon Association. Well now it’s done as you can see in this redesigned Fish Tales. The change was done to better communicate our mission to restore the major runs throughout California’s Central Valley since these are the runs that keep the sport and commercial salmon industry afloat. Under the old name, some had mistakenly believed our interest was only in salmon as they appear around the SF Bay Area.

What Happened This Season? What’s Going On In The Ocean?

Ocean salmon fishing in the season wrapping up had some unusual twists and turns. It started with record salmon catches recorded in the early commercial troll fishery for the Morro Bay area. A big chunk of the salmon runs, for reasons known only to salmon, apparently shifted south this year, with salmon being caught all the way down to the Mexican border. This southern shift was still being seen with decent catches at the end of August in Monterey Bay when the sport season closed.

Cont’d on pg. 2.
The usual big shift of fish north to the Shelter Cove/Ft. Bragg are in mid-summer didn’t happen in the usual way although a good body of fish did materialize off the Sonoma/Marin coast from Pt. Reyes north in August. The expected big massing of fish off the Marin County coast in September didn’t quite materialize in the usual manner either.

In the Central Valley salmon watchers waited nervously for this year’s returning adult salmon to show up all through September, with better numbers starting to show by the last week of September. This seemed consistent with some theories that suggested the run was several weeks late this year. Or it may also be consistent with theories that Central Valley water operations have basically killed off the early part of the run. Fall run that spawn in November, December and even January may be producing a higher percentage of surviving natural spawned salmon these days.

Sport fishing in ocean water ends October 31, commercial fishing in ocean water ended October 15. As of early October, a few salmon were still being caught off the San Mateo coast, signaling a continuing move from the south to the Gate.

Where Will The Fish Return To?

Early returns show that Coleman hatchery fish were the most numerous hatchery fish in the commercial troll fishery off of Morro Bay in May and June. Coleman doesn’t often come in first in fish survival or contribution to the ocean fishery but this year’s good numbers of Coleman fish suggests that outmigration conditions in the spring of 2017, when these fish were one year olds, made a big difference. Recall we had near record rainfall and runoff during that spring. Just add (or manage to save and release) a little water and you get salmon.

The Mokelumne hatchery is expecting another year of good returns. Most of these salmon, which usually enjoy higher survival rates than other hatchery fish due to good rearing and release practices, unfortunately aren’t counted in the group used to forecast next season’s ocean population and to set the fishing seasons. The Pacific Fisheries Management Council, which sets the ocean season, only counts fish that return to the Sacramento River basin and the Mokelumne River is not considered part of this. Theoretically we could have a million fish in the ocean but still not meet escapement requirements if the bulk of them returned to the Mokelumne or the San Joaquin River basin. Having said that, a number of Mokelumne hatchery salmon stray into the American River annually and are counted towards the minimum escape-ment target.

In order to satisfy the fishery managers that there are enough fish to allow us to fish, 122,000 adult salmon need to be counted in Sacramento River basin waters. GSSA’s work to improve spawning and rearing conditions in the natural areas of the Sacramento basin helps assure this minimum number of returning adults is realized. Relying on hatchery fish alone greatly decreases the chances of satisfying this minimum return number.

Anecdotally, some noticed what appeared to be a much higher rate of fish caught with adipose fins during the early part of the season. More fin clipped fish seemed to be caught later in the season. Add to that some unusual water temperatures off West Coast this past summer, and additional theories sprung up. The guess is that a persistent blotch of cold water off the California coast may have attracted fish from northern waters that ran warmer than normal this year.

All of these theories will be sorted out by early next year when the California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife finishes “reconstructing” the stocks of salmon taken in the ocean fishery. Then we’ll learn more about where the fish caught originated and the relative contribution of the various hatcheries to this year’s ocean and inland fishery.
Governor Newsom Vetoes Senate Bill 1

GSSA and allies went to the mat to hold onto inland salmon protections by pushing for passage of Senate Bill 1, or SB 1. After surviving steep odds and passing in the state legislature, Governor Gavin Newsom vetoed it under pressure from the state’s biggest water districts. SB 1 would have preserved Central Valley salmon protections in place since 2009 that controlled Delta water diversions. A lack of such controls prior to 2009 led to the closed fishing seasons in 2008 and 2009.

Interior Secretary David Bernhardt (a former lobbyist and attorney for the Westlands Water District) is putting the final touches on new rules that roll the clock back and allow resumption of the largely unfettered Delta Diversions of the early 2000’s that were very harmful to salmon. In addition to increasing the Delta diversions, Bernhardt’s new rules will allow rerouting of Sacramento River to the pumps during the critical spring salmon out-migration period, less water retained by the big dams for the following year in case of drought, and warmer river temperatures in the spawning parts of the rivers. We know what to expect because we’ve seen this movie which turned into a nightmare in 2008 and 2009.

Prior to 2009, we basically had almost no limits on Delta water diversions, the Delta Cross Channel was open and sucking baby salmon to their deaths every spring, and the upper Sacramento River had fewer controls on how Shasta Dam was operated to keep the river livable for salmon.

We expect, first the federal government, possibly followed by the state now that SB 1 has gone down, to cross into illegal water operations by early next year. When that happens, expect legal action from friends of salmon, including GSSA.

Kids, Ladies, Agency Fishing Trips

GSSA introduced a lot of people to salmon fishing this summer. The old saying goes you won’t save what you don’t love and you don’t love what you don’t know. So we’ve worked to help people know about salmon.

Thanks to the Roger Thomas fund, GSSA sent two full charter boats full of kids and their chaperones fishing and both trips came back with limits of salmon. Two boatloads of ladies also fished this summer, with minimal male interference (other than the deckhands) and both of those trips were resounding successes, with full limits reported. Photos from these trips continue to grace the cover of fishing magazines and bounce around on the internet. Captain Joey Gallia of the New Easy Rider got a load of Sacramento legislative staff, agency folks and conservation workers out for a day of fishing with GSSA that returned with near limits of quality fish. Former Congressman George Miller, a lifelong champion of salmon, got out on a GSSA trip. Congressman Jared Huffman fished with GSSA and Reel Magic out of Bodega Bay. We also hosted some key representatives of the Sacramento Valley agricultural community on an ocean salmon fishing trip.

Everyone took fresh salmon home, with enough to share with extended family, friends and neighbors. Everyone saw commercial trollers at work making a living on the water. Everyone went away with personal stories and new appreciation for this incredible fish that has lived sustainably in our ocean and inland waters, and provided food for humans, since long before settlers came to California.

MAKE A TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION TO SUPPORT MORE SALMON!

TO DONATE, PLEASE CALL (855) 251-4472 OR VISIT GOLDENSTATESALMON.ORG
We've reported on the lawsuit GSSA filed with allied group against the Westlands Water District to stop the raising of Shasta Dam. In early October, after a steady stream of court losses, Westlands announced they'll cease and desist on the action that got them dragged into court.

GSSA joined the lawsuit because periodic flood control releases from the dam, which greatly improve the natural river habitat downstream of the dam, would become a thing of the past if the dam was raised. Meanwhile the federal Bureau of Reclamation (which owns and operates Shasta Dam, which owns and operates Shasta Dam) continues to make noises about go-ahead for the project.

Meetings are occurring with fishery managers, salmon fishing stakeholders, and others as the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) works on a court-ordered review of how ocean salmon fishing may affect endangered killer whales. NMFS has until May to report back to the court on their findings. In addition, the group looking into the issue is under pressure to come to a conclusion.

NMFS may feel under pressure to do some, if anything, to address the health of the ocean habitat of the California coast. Although the science speaks strongly against ocean fishing as a cause of orca death, the information is not yet clear.

NMFS is under pressure to address diarrhetic killer whales. We'll keep you updated.

GSSA Founding Members:


GSSA Founding Members: