



FISH • TALES

NEWSLETTER OF THE GGSA • JANUARY 2019

Major Victory Promises To Restore Water For Salmon



Two spawning salmon in the Tuolumne River

On December 12, after years of work, GGSA and allies won a historic ruling from the State Water Resources Control Board to finally restore some of the badly needed natural flows to our Central Valley salmon rivers.

The Board voted to require more water be left in the Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Merced in order to restore salmon runs in the San Joaquin Basin.

Only 20 percent of the Tuolumne and Merced rivers are left after water diversions in some years. Now those rivers will be required to flow at around 40 percent of natural flow in the critical February through June period when baby salmon need spring runoff to transit to the Delta, Bay and ocean.

This unprecedented vote caps nine years of meetings and back and forth with many stakeholders and water user groups. GGSA has been in the middle of it from our founding in late 2010.

Next the State Water Board will consider similar action to restore the Sacramento River and its major tributaries including the Feather and American rivers. Restoring more natural flow has repeatedly been cited in scientific studies as the single most important element needed to help Central Valley salmon runs.

Water diverters throughout the Central Valley have banded together to fight against having to reduce their diversions. We likely haven't heard the last of this. ■



Fresno River bed, killed by unregulated damming

Governor Brown Strikes Bad Water Deals As His Last Act

On his way out the door into retirement, Governor Jerry Brown attempted to strike a number of bad deals with the federal government to give away more northern California water to western San Joaquin Valley almond growers in exchange for their support for his Delta tunnels. Part of the dealing requires raising money from some water users to buy water from others. On paper, this bought water would be used to restore the environment. However, in a side deal, Brown agreed to allow the feds to vacuum it all

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back up once it reached the Delta pumps, and never allow it to restore the Delta, Bay or salmon runs that need it to survive to the ocean. Federal legislation needed to enact the funding died at the end of 2018 in the federal government shutdown. It's unlikely to be resurrected in the new Congress started January 3.

It's unclear how much of the other Brown-inflicted damage will stick if the Gavin Newsom administration decides to not support these deals.

Interestingly, Governor Brown's point people on the deal, CDFW director Chuck Bonham and DWR director Karla Nemeth, trotted out a long list of salmon habitat restoration projects they claimed they'd implement. Turns out almost all were old projects, responsibilities, and requirements, some dating back ten years, the state had already committed to under other agreements. All would be beneficial to salmon, but they don't represent new commitments, as was sold to regulators at the State Water Board. In addition, the "new" water they promised is only about one third of the

amount identified as needed in earlier proceedings. ■



Although fishing was good for some, overall returns of adult salmon to the Sacramento Valley failed to meet minimum targets in 2018

2018 Salmon Returns Disappoint, Again

Preliminary returns suggest that the return of fall run salmon to the Sacramento Valley fell short again for the fourth year in a row. Final numbers won't be made public until sometime in February or March but as of December it was looking like returns were considerably less than the 151,000 fish hoped for. If so, this will mark the fourth year in a row where returns were lower than targeted. In early 2018, after the third year of disappointing returns, fishery managers shortened the seasons for ocean

salmon fishing and cut the inland river fishery to a one fish daily bag limit. This was done to boost the number of adult fish that would return to the Sacramento Basin to spawn. The measures undoubtedly increased the number of returning spawners, but not by enough. Early guessing is that that the National Marine Fishery Service could cut fishing seasons by weeks again in 2019. One knowledgeable CDFW source said if he had to guess, he'd guess that the 2019 fishing season may be similar to the time and area we fished in 2018. But it's early and things could still change.

Progress has been made to allow a two fish limit for river fishing in 2019 by getting the Fish and Game Commission to consider take of a two year old jack salmon as a second fish if measures to curb catch of adult fish are again implemented.

In a positive development, it appears that most of the Central Valley salmon hatcheries will get enough eggs to meet their production goals for 2019. For the Coleman hatchery, this is a significant improvement over the 50 percent of production they achieved in 2018. ■

GGSA EVENTS

SAVE THE DATE: April 5th, Santa Rosa Dinner

Salmon season will be here before we know it! **Save the date** to celebrate the biggest salmon celebration and party of the year on **Friday, April 5th 2019**. The GGSA Santa Rosa dinner is the biggest opportunity to raise money needed to continue our work rebuilding California salmon runs and the watersheds they rely on. You don't want to miss it!

If you would like to be part of the cause and help by donating fishing trips, goods

and gear or your tax deductible vacation home to be auctioned off at the dinner, please contact GGSA at 855.251.4472 or Cat@goldengatesalmon.org. **Ticket sales and info coming soon. See you there!** ■

GGSA at 2019 ISE

Starting January 17 GGSA will be back at the Sacramento International Sportsmens Expo at Cal Expo. We'll be hosting a booth to meet and visit with sportsmen and women from across the state who flock by the thousands to this annual show. If you go to the show, come by and introduce yourself, we'd love to meet you. ■



We had to show respect to the water, to the salmon and everything that the creator sent us. We would respect the cedar that gave its life for our canoe, the salmon that gave its life so we could eat.



**Mary McQuillen,
Makah Elder**



Baby salmon being offloaded from a tanker truck into the Half Moon Bay net pen

HMB Coastal Net Pen Top Contributor Of Hatchery Fish

Coded wire tags recovered from hatchery fish continue to deepen our understanding of which release techniques for hatchery fish produce the highest survival. The most productive release strategy for the ocean salmon fishery are the ocean net pens in Half Moon Bay operated by the Coastside Fishing Club and one in Santa Cruz operated by the

Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project. These fish survive at anywhere from three to five times greater than any others with one possible exception. Fish “barged” from the Mokelumne hatchery and released near the Golden Gate Bridge may survive about as well. This was a marked difference from the experience of barging fish from the Feather River hatchery, which survived no better than Feather River fish trucked and released at Mare Island near Vallejo. However, to date, moving fish in barges or boats with live tanks that allow circulation of river, Delta, and Bay water, has been hampered by scale. Whereas a barge might move 100,000 fish at a time, ocean net pens currently acclimate and release many times that amount.

One takeaway is if we want to see higher survival, efforts could be made to expand the current ocean net pen program. Stray rates of Half Moon Bay acclimated fish, which measure how many do and don’t find their way back to their birth river, are about the same acceptable level as fish trucked to Vallejo or Sherman Island. They are even less for fish released from net pens in Santa Cruz harbor. ■

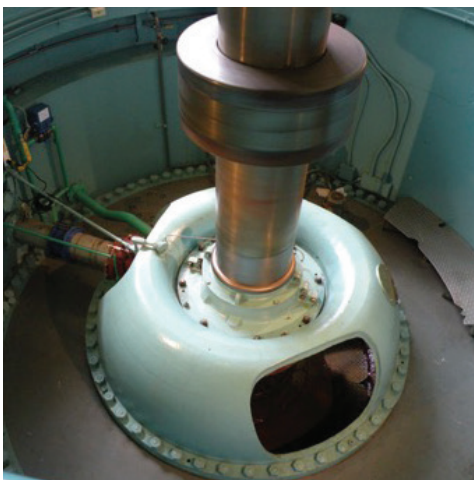


Heavy equipment at work grading restored habitat for salmon

More Salmon Rearing Habitat Restored

After GGSA work with state and federal legislators to win support, the Dept. of Water Resources finally reversed course and allowed restoration of 1,000 acres of salmon rearing habitat on a former Feather River floodplain at the Oroville Wildlife Area. The work is going on at what’s called Unit D which is on the east bank of the river across from the Thermalito Afterbay outlet. This area was cut off from the river by mountains of rock left after gold mining. There’s great potential at this site to restore good rearing habitat for baby salmon, which should bolster survival. ■

Federal Attacks on Salmon Thwarted by Government Shutdown



Federal legislative efforts to increase the massive Delta pumps faltered with the end of year federal budget problems

Due to the shutdown of the federal government, and political disagreements that caused it, bad federal legislation harmful to salmon died before being enacted into law. This was a lucky break for salmon. Several bills all aimed to allow increased diversion of water from the Delta where it’s needed by salmon. The water would go to big growers in the western San Joaquin Valley. These ag operators still have some friends in Congress and undoubtedly will try again to seize water they call theirs that originates 400 miles from their fields. One of the bills that failed to pass would have protected the

proposed Delta diversion tunnels from legal oversight by the courts.

But threats continue. Actions by the federal government to raise Shasta Dam and trap more water for far away almond orchards is expected to continue in 2019. GGSA and allies oppose these efforts due to the harm they will cause salmon. GGSA president John McManus recently addressed a Redding meeting called by the Westlands Water District aimed at pushing the effort to raise Shasta. Although the meeting originally banned public comment, GGSA and allies in the

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Federal Attacks On Salmon Thwarted By Government Shutdown

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Winneman Wintu tribe managed to turn that around. The public heard clear arguments and evidence about how raising the dam would harm salmon downstream and further destroy what little remains of the Winneman Wintu tribe's historic lands above the dam. The headline in the local Redding paper the next day said it best: ***Westlands' role in Shasta Dam-raising project takes a beating in Redding.***

We also expect the federal government to divert more Delta water under a law called the WIIN Act that became law in late 2016. Although its backers said it was only designed to relieve strain from what was then a four year old drought, it's instead been a Trojan horse, giving federal water operators an excuse to go after more water than they have a right

to. To the extent federal water operators take more than their share of water in 2019, the expectation is that state water managers will be forced to cut back their share. Indeed, the Brown administration, in one of its final acts, agreed to reduce the state's take of Delta water to appease federal water managers who want to ship more to western San Joaquin valley farms.

A new state bill, SB 1, has been introduced in the state legislature that calls for locking in environmental protections, including those for salmon that existed prior to the Trump administration. We need this law to be passed and signed. ■

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