

Fishing Season Is Here



Soon, salmon on the BBQ

If you have a chance to fish this year, do it. It should be worthwhile. If you're commercial and you've been putting off some of those boat repairs or upgrades until a good season, hopefully this will be the one. Signs point to this being the best season since 2013. As in 2013, good rains and snow runoff two years prior set up good returns for this year. We had really good runoff in the spring of 2011 which led to the great 2013 season and we have good runoff in the spring of 2017, which should result in good returns this season.

Wet springs mimic pre-dam, more natural, conditions that provide the juvenile salmon with the strong, fast, turbid runoff they need to survive the trip from the Central Valley to the ocean. Wet springs also inundate some of the historic floodplains in the Central Valley, including

the Yolo and Sutter bypasses. Both are large areas adjacent to the rivers that when flooded, bloom with the type of tiny plankton and insects baby salmon love to eat. If you noticed we got some decent rains this year, and conclude from the above this too will help baby salmon, you're right. Baby salmon born late in 2018 are now rearing and migrating out from the Central Valley. You can book fishing dates for 2021, when this year's babies return as adults, and chances are you'll enjoy good fishing. Much of the work of GGSA is to pry enough water out of the system in non-flood years to avoid the manmade droughts that so often hammer our salmon runs. Another part of our work is to lower barriers to floodplains so they flood more often and provide benefits to rearing salmon even at lower river flows. ■



Grad students from UC Davis prepare to install an acoustic tag in one of the experimental fish Photo: Courtesy of UC Davis

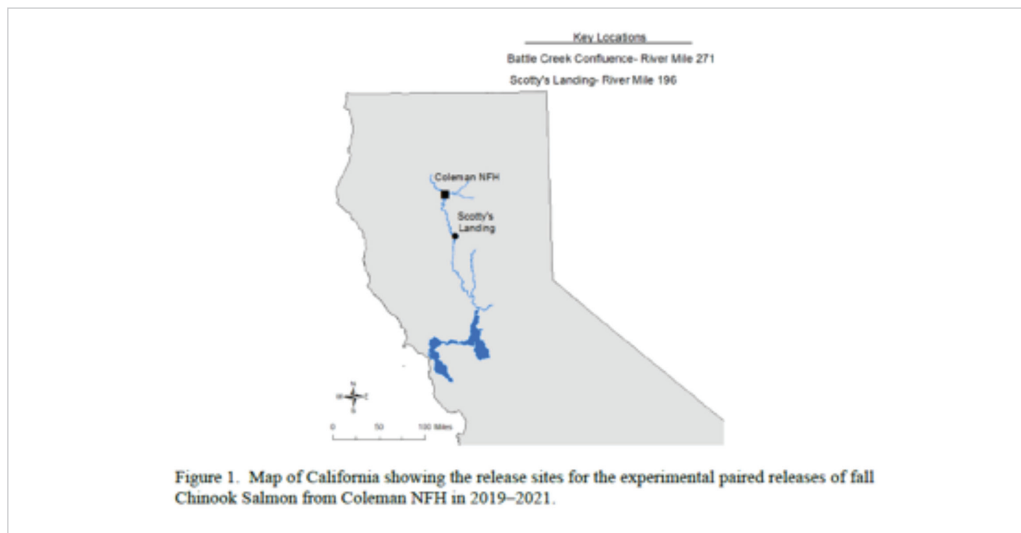
GGSA pilot project shows great promise for better salmon survival

Acting on a GGSA proposal, the US Fish and Wildlife Service trucked and released over 150,000 baby salmon from the Coleman National Fish Hatchery 75 miles downstream from the hatchery. The release on April 13 is expected to greatly boost survival of the fish without raising stray rates when they return as adults. A control group of fish was released at the hatchery to compare results.

Baby salmon from Coleman have the furthest to go to the ocean of all Central Valley hatchery salmon, and typically don't survive well due to hostile conditions in the hundreds of miles of river and Delta they travel. Some of the fish in this project are carrying acoustic tags which are tracked as the fish travel downstream. The feedback is available almost instant-

cont'd on pg. 2

GGSA pilot project shows great promise for better salmon survival



ly documenting if the trucked fish indeed survive at higher rates down to the ocean. GGSA has partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Norcal Guides and Sportsmen's Association, the US Bureau of

Reclamation and UC Davis on this experiment. If successful, this release strategy should greatly increase the future number of adult Coleman hatchery fish in the ocean and returning to the river. ■

Salmon groups, CDFW talk hatchery reform



Many of the best salmon minds in CA were at the hatchery reform meeting

GGSA joined salmon fishing advocates at a recent meeting with the state's hatchery managers to discuss ideas for hatchery reforms. The meeting was prompted by a letter from the Norcal Guides and Sportsmen's Association to the CA Citizens' advisory committee on salmon and steelhead. The committee, which was created to channel stakeholder input to CDFW, agreed to provide a forum and CDFW made many of its top hatchery decision makers available for the meeting. High on the list of

concerns was the killing of "excess" fish at the Feather River hatchery, above what's needed for egg take. CDFW explained this is done in part to relieve pressure on federally protected spring run salmon spawning in the Feather River near the hatchery. Fall run hatchery salmon are known to upset the nests of spring run, which typically bury their eggs in river gravel about a month earlier than the fall run. In the past, the two runs produced hybrid offspring, something CDFW is trying to undo.

There was also discussion on the hatcheries' practice of growing fish to an optimal size prior to release. GGSA and other salmon fishing groups have suggested that earlier release of the fish, at a smaller size, might provide a big benefit, considering how hostile Central Valley rivers become for juvenile salmon as March turns to April and May. The Coleman hatchery has been experimenting with releasing smaller fish earlier in the season for several years,

something GGSA supports. Survival data demonstrating whether this gamble is worth it should be available in the next year or so. ■

GGSA pushes expanded HMB, Ft. Baker releases with CDFW



Baby salmon entering SF Bay at Sausalito's Ft. Baker from a tanker truck

GGSA and salmon allies are pursuing proposals with CDFW to further boost survival of hatchery salmon by expanding on newer release practices that are far out performing prior ways of doing business. Hatchery salmon released at the HMB ocean net pen enjoy far higher survival than their cousins released at the traditional Vallejo sites. More recent releases of fish trucked to Ft. Baker in Sausalito also survive at higher rates. Based on these results, GGSA and others are pressing CDFW to see about moving more hatchery fish from Vallejo to both Ft. Baker and HMB in the future, as well as Monterey Bay. ■

GGSA pushes back on two huge water diversion proposals

GGSA is working to keep a group that wants to build a major new Sacramento



Fresno River, totally dry. Some water diverters have shown they will kill rivers and salmon unless someone stops them.

River diversion project from harming salmon. Proponents say the new facility, called the Sites Reservoir, will help salmon but if it did, it would be the first dam project in history to do so. CDFW has told the Sites proponents that river flows over 13,000 cubic feet per second (a decent clip) would be needed before they could responsibly divert into the proposed reservoir. The Sites folks have said they think it should be allowed to divert at less than half that. If they do, it could kill all, or most, of the juvenile fish coming down the river from the Coleman hatchery and natural spawning beds in the upper river.

Just up the road, the Westlands Water District (yes, those growing on the west side of the San Joaquin Valley hundreds of miles to the south) is working to make Shasta Dam bigger so it traps more water. The federal Fish and Wildlife Service found that raising the dam would hurt the entire downstream Sacramento River, and all of its native salmon runs, which is why GGSA is opposing this project. Periodic flood control releases

from Shasta, which do wonders to revitalize the river downstream of the dam, would become a thing of the past. These high flows clear downstream side channels and gravel bars while knocking out invasive vegetation and generally give the river system a booster shot. If the dam is raised, the natural hydrograph of high spring flows, low summer and fall flows, would be further reversed, with high summer and fall flows and low winter flows.

Meanwhile, down in the Delta, the federal Dept. of Interior, currently run by the former lobbyist and attorney for the Westlands Water District, is working to toss out the Delta pumping restrictions and other salmon protections. They want to take us back to unlimited, salmon-killing, Delta pumping levels that largely caused the shutdown of all salmon fishing in 2008 and 2009. GGSA is spending lots of time and energy working all of these. A bad outcome on any of these would be very bad for the future of California's salmon which is why we're in the trenches. ■

Is Jerry Brown's legacy undermining restoration of river flows?

GGSA has been hard at work with the Newsom administration to better understand water deals struck in the 11th hour of the Brown administration and if they pose a serious threat to salmon and may need altering. Fears abound that Brown was so anxious to sew up deals that he agreed to close his ears and eyes to the details, (which matter) and rammed through bad agreements last November and December. The worry is that the agreements would allow the water users to avoid having to restore salmon runs and the health of the Delta in exchange for vague promises that they may eventually restore some habitat, including some they were required to restore years ago! GGSA is working to see these agreements either actually help salmon and increase out flow through the Delta and bay, or are modified. ■

GGSA working the State Capitol

GGSA has been hard at work in Sacramento to get some help from the state legislature and new governor's office on salmon restoration actions. We're working to marshal support for Senate Bill 1 which aims to restore salmon protections, won in 2009, that the Trump administration is now stripping away. We worked closely with the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations and the office of Sen. Scott Weiner to craft provisions in Senate Bill 69 calling on CDFW to undertake a pilot study to determine if new DNA tracking technology might be employed with hatchery

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GGSA working the State Capitol



GGSA president John McManus recently testified before State Legislature's Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture

salmon to allow for earlier release. If successful, this could greatly boost survival since out migration conditions are generally much better in the early spring compared to late spring. SB 69 also calls on CDFW to consider expanding the ocean net pen program beyond the current net pens in Half Moon Bay and Santa Cruz.

We've joined efforts to stop bad legislation that will harm salmon and expect to see more in the future. Top of the list at the moment is Assemblyman Adam Gray's AB 636 which seeks to block the state water board from doing its job of rebalancing excessive water diversions in the Central Valley that are killing salmon. As we went to press, Assemblyman Gray pulled his bill after facing opposition from GGSA and other groups but we fear it may come back.

GGSA president John McManus recently testified at a key state legislative hearing on behalf of salmon and salmon fishing families. He made the case for why the state needs to review and fix the damaging backroom water deals struck by former Gov. Jerry Brown, mentioned above. McManus also alerted the legislature to the Trump administration action to lift all pumping limits in the Delta. He

made the case for supporting SB 1 and SB 69 and reported on the dangers posed by the Shasta Dam raise and Sites project, all mentioned above. ■

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