



# Fish • Tales

NEWSLETTER OF THE GGSA • AUGUST 2014

## DROUGHT BILL MAY CREATE SALMON DROUGHT

**A**s *Fish Tales* goes to press, bills aimed at giving more salmon water to San Joaquin Valley farm interests at the expense of salmon, are working their way through Congress in Washington DC. GGSA is opposed.

We don't think it's wise to legislate unsustainable over-consumption of water by those who chose to grow in a desert. Instead, we should be moving to balance consumption with what nature supplies and using our water resources more wisely. In addition, the \$1.6 million spent by the western San Joaquin ag interests to influence drought relief legislation smells worse than a bait lost in the bilge for a week.

GGSA and members sent a note to the Senators involved in authoring one of the bills expressing our concerns. We're in a holding pattern, awaiting word from Washington on what will happen next. Perhaps the biggest worry is that any Senate bill would need to be reconciled with a House bill. There is a House bill and it calls for taking more salmon water, even in non drought years. ■

FROM THE WHEELHOUSE:

## TROUBLE AHEAD FOR SALMON



Chinook salmon awaits release (Dec Hogan / Shutterstock)



GGSA Executive Director  
John McManus

**G**SGA recently fought off a bill in the state legislature that originally mandated all hatchery fish

be implanted with coded wire tags. The problem is money to pay for the increased tagging would force major cuts in the number of salmon produced in the hatcheries. This would leave us far fewer fish in the ocean and rivers to catch. In Oregon and Washington, a similar effort resulted in coho hatcheries dropping production from an average of 26 million smolts to 11 million annually. A cut of more than half!

Although we won the first round and that bill went away, tagging proponents are already back at the state capitol trying to line up support for another try.

The tags are tiny pieces of stainless steel wire engraved with identifying numbers that tell where the salmon came from, year of birth, and where it was released into the wild. They are shot into the snout of the baby fish (which is why the fish counters want the heads of the fin clipped hatchery fish). Hatchery managers and biologists say the current 25 percent tagging is sufficient to get the statistically valid info they need to understand survival and stray rates of the fish.

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High tech facility used to tag and fin clip hatchery fish

The effort to increase tagging is being driven by one company, Northwest Marine Technology, that makes the tags and machines that insert them and clip the adipose fin. Millions of additional tags and dollars will be needed year after year if they succeed.

Fortunately, GGSA provided compelling arguments against the bill which resulted in the effort being abandoned. However, a second legislator has subsequently collected a few signatures from colleagues supporting more tagging.

Since we've lost 90 percent of historic salmon spawning habitat in California's Central Valley to dams and other development, and badly damaged what remains, GGSA remains committed to robust hatchery production.

The idea of increasing tagging came from a scientific review panel that looked at the effects of hatchery fish interbreeding with naturally spawned fall run king salmon. Adding tags to hatchery fish is supposed to provide fishery managers with a way to ID them and somehow keep them from

interbreeding with natural spawners.

Oddly, this same review group says that the Central Valley fall run is one big genetically homogenized run of salmon. Central Valley hatchery salmon are derived from local native wild stocks and have interbred for years. Consequently, beyond the hatchery review group, there's disagreement on the necessity of segregating the two in California's Central Valley.

The call for 100 percent tagging diverts attention from the real problems confronting our salmon runs. Eliminating the massive egg losses in the upper Sacramento River that happens every fall when water releases are suddenly dropped, reducing manmade predator ambush sites throughout the river and Delta, and restoring flows and key rearing channels are a few to start with.

Even with 100 percent tagging, a lot of additional very expensive hardware and infrastructure would be required to separate the stocks. Elaborate segregation gates on every creek and river where salmon spawn,

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## HARD, HOT FALL SPAWNING EXPECTED

Fishery managers are worried about conditions adult Central Valley will encounter as they return to spawn this summer and fall. Salmon are known to swim through hot river conditions when they're headed for spawning grounds. But the heat will likely take a toll on them and weaken both the adult fish and the eggs and milt they carry. Fertility will drop. Eggs successfully laid and fertilized will likely perish if temperatures exceed 56 degrees for more than three

days, something expected throughout much of the historic spawning grounds in the upper Sacramento River this year. The American and Feather Rivers could see high spawning failure as well.

A proposal has been floated to collect and fertilize salmon eggs, hold them in a hatchery near Redding and then inject them into Sacramento River gravel late in the fall when temperatures cool. ■



California's Feather River (Quiltsalad)



## WHEELHOUSE: TROUBLE *continued*

and structures to sort wild from hatchery stocks would be needed at all state and federal hatcheries to make this type of segregation work (any new state tagging law wouldn't apply to federally run hatcheries which could doom this effort). GGSA believes if California tries to separate hatchery from wild salmon stocks at some future date, it should only happen after input from both fishery agencies and salmon stakeholders since we're the ones that would be most affected.

Along with calls to increase tagging, there are calls to clip the adipose fins off all hatchery salmon (25 percent are currently clipped) so anglers and fishery officials can distinguish the two. Although this could provide some benefits, and is the current practice for hatchery

winter and spring run smolts, more clipping would also cost millions and likely outlaw retention of wild fish, including those from the Sacramento, Klamath, Eel, Smith and other rivers.

GGSA is working to educate state legislators and other decision makers about the problems and better ways to help restore our salmon runs. We're going to need your help and support to stop those trying to cut our hatcheries down. If your membership has lapsed, this is a good time to renew by visiting [goldengatesalmon.org](http://goldengatesalmon.org). Whether you're a regular or Heritage member, we need and appreciate your generous support! You can also call us at (855) 251-GGSA or mail your contribution to: Golden Gate Salmon Association, 1370 Auto Center Drive, Petaluma, CA 94952 - J. McM. ■

## MARIN DINNER JOIN US! 10/10

Enjoy a great time while supporting a major part of GGSA's annual fundraising effort! The raffle and auction items are easily worth the price of admission, not to mention the splendid meal and drinks. We hope to see you there!

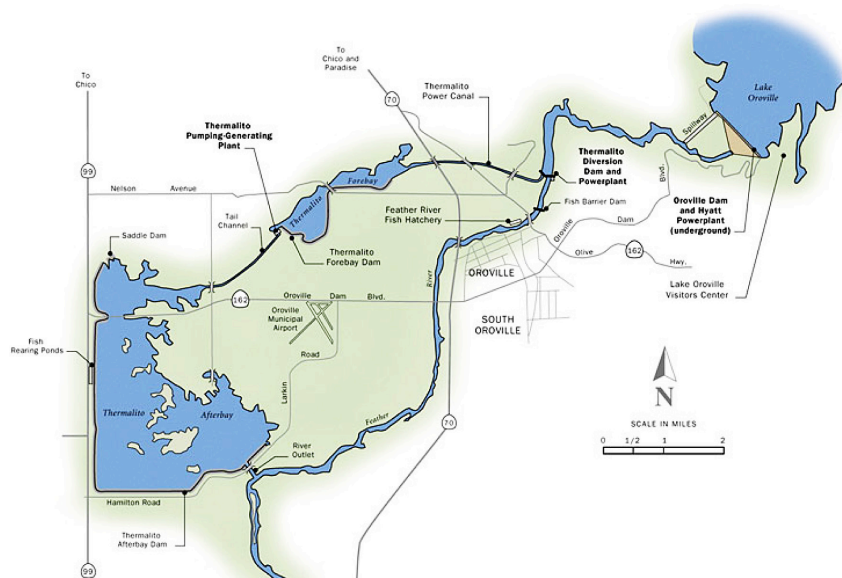
To purchase tickets, visit [goldengatesalmon.org](http://goldengatesalmon.org)

# FIX THE FEATHER RIVER

The Feather River is a major tributary of the Sacramento which, along with its tributary, the Yuba River, once provided excellent

spawning habitat for salmon. Dams now block access to most of this great habitat but there's still 15 miles of habitat downstream of Oroville

Dam that would be good but for one problem. It's called the Thermalito complex. This is a manmade giant pond that much of the Feather River is now channeled into after being run through power generating turbines. The giant shallow pond heats the water in the sun for use by rice farmers. What they don't use flows downstream and rejoins the mainstem Feather River, often at temperatures above 70 degrees which is too hot for salmon spawning. This often overheats 15 miles of what would otherwise be good salmon spawning habitat. How they managed to get away with building Thermalito and killing 15 miles of the river during the 1960's is baffling, but it can and should be fixed. The problem might be solved if water released from the dam was channeled back to the Feather River in a canal or pipe that bypasses the heating pond. ■



Map showing Feather River and Thermalito Complex

## WHAT IF THERE'S DROUGHT AGAIN NEXT YEAR?

Some experts are saying there's a greater than 70 percent chance we won't get the rain needed to break the drought. All we can say is, if there's drought again next year, a) we'll absolutely need to truck hatchery smolts again like we did this year and b) federal fishery managers should think long and hard about giving winter run a fighting chance by trucking or barging them too. Beyond that we can hope that some of the permanent almond orchards that are putting such a tax on California's water are found not to be profitable when needed water costs north of \$700 per acre foot. No doubt the drumbeat to shift more of northern California's water south will come back, probably louder than ever. ■

### GGSA *Founding Members*

Chris Arcoleo, John Atkinson, Raymond Bonneau, Dennis Burkell, Hugh Chatham, Coastside Fishing Club, Joseph Conte, Crab Boat Owners Association, Tom Creedon, Ron Davis, Jim DeMartini, Joe Donatini, Jacky Douglas, Chris Duba, Kerry Egan, Ken Elie, Patrick Elie, Tim Elie, Yancy Forest-Knowles, Douglas R. Gaebe, Vic Giacalone, Victor Gonella, Zeke Grader, Ren Harris, Humboldt Fishermen'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



Comparison of salmon raised on the Yolo Bypass with those from the river. (Jacob Katz)

## MOVE HATCHERY SMOLTS TO BETTER FEEDING GROUNDS

No doubt you've read about the experimental raising of baby hatchery salmon in the winter on flooded rice fields. Central Valley flood waters and soils naturally abound with insect life. Add water during rains and they provide rich nutrition and fast growth rates for the baby salmon. This has been demonstrated in a joint project involving Caltrout, government agencies and the owners of Knaggs Ranch, a rice farm located just west of Sacramento and north of highway 80 in what's called the Yolo Bypass. GGSA has added its voice calling for scaling this project up.

Because of the great work done by the commercial salmon stamp program, healthy baby salmon from the Feather River are currently being trucked to net pens near Mare Island. Survival rates of these fish are high and provide a good chunk of what we catch in the ocean and Delta. Now it might be time to broaden

this work by experimentally moving some of these fish, while still in the fry stage, out onto the flooded rice fields by the hundreds of thousands, if not millions. This would allow the baby salmon to quickly fatten and grow naturally. They can be contained in flooded fields with little water needed. When they're big enough to out swim a striper and survive in the ocean, the dams come down and water drains to the bay carrying the smolts with it.

One big benefit is the Yolo Bypass drains into the west Delta, near Suisun Bay which is safely beyond the deadly pull of the Delta diversion pumps. Another big advantage is the added size of the juvenile salmon makes it easier to survive predators and avoid starving when they first hit saltwater. We see a win/win here. GGSA is also working to restore other fertile rearing areas for salmon in the Central Valley. ■