



Fish • Tales

NEWSLETTER OF THE GGSA SEPTEMBER 2015

FROM THE WHEELHOUSE:

Will We Fish in 2016?



Many are asking, after four years of drought, what kind of salmon season might we have next year? It's too early to say for sure but with a little luck,

we should be fishing and it should be better than the 2015 season that many considered disappointing. However, damage to federally protected winter run salmon from drought could complicate things.

In a normal year about 75 percent of adult salmon that return to spawn are three year old fish. Two year olds, sometimes called jacks, make up most of the rest, with a small sprinkling of four and even fewer, five year old fish.

Two year olds were relatively plentiful in ocean in 2015, and this bodes well for a 2016 season for two reasons. One, the number of two years that spawn in the Sacramento River this year will provide a base number used to calculate the expected size of the run in 2016. Secondly, there should be decent

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Large flood control releases from Shasta

Raising Shasta Dam Bad For Salmon, GGSA Signs Letter Opposing

Various water users and the federal Bureau of Reclamation are pushing to raise the Shasta Dam by 18.5 feet to store more water. While this might seem like a reasonable idea at first, a report by the US Fish and Wildlife Service shows doing so would likely result in serious damage to our salmon fishery. GGSA joined in a letter to federal agencies saying as much. Raising the dam would also flood a major part of the state-protected McCloud River and some of the last traditional

tribal lands of the Winneman Wintu Indian tribe.

Currently, during prolonged heavy storms, water is released from Shasta to make room for incoming natural runoff. These flood water releases play a critical ecological role of distributing spawning gravel downstream and also providing the turbid, high flows needed to safely deliver baby salmon downriver.

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WILL WE FISH IN 2016 *continued*

number of jacks that will stay out in the ocean another year and be available to the fishery in 2016.

Fishermen caught many two year old salmon in the 2015 season. On one sport trip off the Marin coast in August 2015 six fish were caught by three fishermen. Three were hatchery fish and had coded wire tags which were later recovered. The three fish were five, ten and fifteen pounds. Analysis of the tags showed the five and ten pound salmon were both two year olds, though from different hatcheries. The 15 pound fish was a three year old. This suggests that the large number of salmon caught by sport fishermen in 2015 that ranged in weight from about five and ten pounds (dressed weight) were likely two year olds.

The high number of two year olds in 2015 isn't surprising considering GGSA's success in convincing both state and federal hatchery managers to truck virtually all of their one year old fish to safe release sites in the Bay and Delta in 2014 and 2015. In addition, other hatchery fish that are always net pen acclimated in the

bay, as well as some barged, and others net penned in Half Moon Bay, are contributing to the number of jacks in the ocean. Because of the trucking this year, we should again see a better number of two year old jacks in 2016, which will bode positively for the 2017 season.

We won't know how many total salmon returned to spawn in the Central Valley until early next year when all the surveys and carcass counts will be tallied. At this point most would guess that the 122,000 minimum adult returnees called for by fishery managers will be met. This number includes, both hatchery and natural spawning salmon. Presuming the minimum escapement is met, and the jack returns are promising, fishery managers should have what they need to put together a 2016 season.

On the other hand, natural spawning salmon largely failed to successfully reproduce in 2014 due to hot water in the rivers that killed the incubating eggs. This affected all runs of salmon and continues to worry both state and federal fishery managers. The damage to the

federally protected winter run salmon in 2014 prompted the state to insist on shorter fishing seasons for both commercial and sport salmon fishing this year. Concern for the surviving 2014 winter run out in the ocean is likely to result in a few more restrictions than we experienced in 2015. The reason; the survivors will be jacks in 2016 and big enough to get hooked. In 2015 sport fishermen lost eight days of fishing due to concern for winter run numbers. Commercial trollers lost trolling grounds below Pt. Sur and later below Pigeon Point. A steady increase in restrictions could become the norm for the next several years if the number of winter run dip. ■



Landings of 2015 commercially caught salmon were less than hoped for in San Francisco

Salmon in Hot Water Again in 2015

Like last year, we've just struggled through another very hot summer.

As in 2014, federal operators of Shasta Dam (the Bureau of Reclamation) again in 2015 misrepresented the volume of cold water during spring planning sessions. When they eventually fessed up, a scramble ensued to keep enough cold water in Shasta to avoid a second year of fish kill. It will be spring of 2016 before we know for sure how many baby winter and fall

run survived and get counted at the Red Bluff diversion dam when they migrate downstream. We know water temperatures in the spawning zone have exceeded the 56 degree maximum virtually all summer, instead hovering in the 57 to 59 degree range. Fortunately, we haven't run into the 60 and 62 degree temperatures that wiped out salmon in 2014.

Some part of the runs will likely survive. What's needed is much

cooler than normal weather in the northern Sacramento Valley in the fall months to come. ■



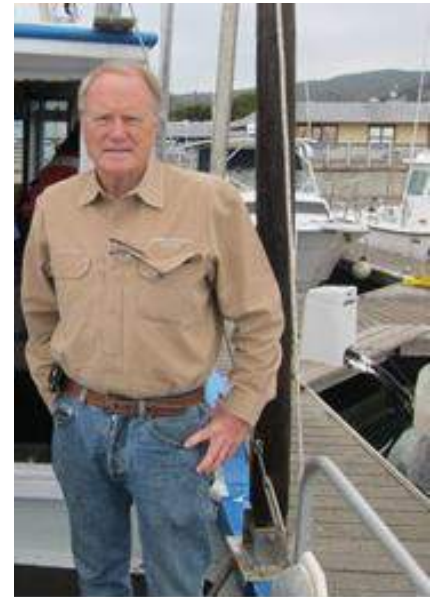
Winter run salmon taken for captive breeding

Zeke Grader, GGSA PCFFA Leader Passes

GGSA mourns the passing of perhaps the greatest salmon advocate California has ever had. GGSA Vice Chairman and executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations Zeke Grader died September 7, Labor Day, after a year-long battle with cancer. PCFFA's Tim Sloane put it well, "There are a lot of guys who would say that there wouldn't have been any small boat commercial salmon fishermen for the last 20 years if not for Zeke Grader." Sloane has taken over Grader's post as head of the PCFFA. "He built bridges between fishermen, policy folks,

environmentalists and the scientific community. His ability to unite people around preserving the fisheries was unmatched."

Zeke was a good friend to basically every member of the GGSA board of directors, many of whom have worked in the trenches to preserve salmon fishing in California with Zeke for the last 30 years. His wisdom, diplomacy, tactical thinking, knowledge of the halls of power and steady hand will be sorely missed. We'll not likely see his kind again. Thanks for all you gave us Zeke. ■



Zeke Grader, PCFFA Leader

CVPIA Restoration Fund Revamp GGSA Goes to DC to Fight for Salmon

GGSA efforts to redirect how \$20 million is spent annually on salmon restoration are starting to bear fruit. The money is from a fund designed to mitigate the damage to the fishery caused by federal dams, canals, and pumps in the Central Valley.

After several years of GGSA badgering the federal staffers in charge of the fund, we're starting to see an increase in money directed at restoring some key spawning and rearing areas in the upper Sacramento River. In addition, the feds overseeing the fund have agreed to allow non-federal stakeholders to participate in designing a new scientific screening process aimed at identifying where restoration investments will produce the most salmon. Only time will tell how successful this next chapter will be but GGSA is fully engaged in helping to develop the new scientific screening process.

While we were fishing over the summer, federal legislators introduced two new bills that could deeply affect our salmon fishery. Knowing these bills were coming, in May GGSA executive director John McManus joined GGSA board members Randy Repass, Dick Pool and Marc Gorelnik on a trip to Washington DC to plead the case for salmon. The GGSA members visited House and Senate offices with the simple message that current restrictions on Delta pumping need to be retained, or we'll lose our salmon.

One of the bills, introduced in the House of Representatives by San Joaquin Valley congressmen, would spell the end to salmon in California by basically transferring the last of the Central

Valley salmon water to San Joaquin Valley ag operations.

The fate of these bills is far from clear and GGSA remains vigilant and engaged to stop any legislation that will harm salmon. ■

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RAISING SHASTA DAM *Continued*

The US Fish and Wildlife Service found these needed flushing flows would become a thing of the past if the dam is raised. If raised, the lake will rarely fill to the point where water releases would be necessary anymore.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service study documenting the harm raising the dam would do to salmon in most years was ordered withdrawn by

higher ups who want to see the dam raised. Adding insult to injury, the federal Bureau of Reclamation, a proponent of raising the dam, is publicly saying that 49 percent of the benefits that would accrue from raising the dam will go to fish and wildlife, even though the truth is the opposite. This allows them to shift 49 percent of the cost onto taxpayers since wildlife

benefits are considered “public benefit”. Water users who would benefit would only be on the hook for 51 percent of the cost. Something stinks here. When the studies wrap up and the government issues a decision to go forward, expect a legal challenge. ■

State Capital Update

GGSA’s policy advocate, Barry Nelson, recently succeeded in stopping a bill that would prohibit the State Water Resources Control Board from setting aside certain stream waters for salmon. He got another bill modified that started as an anti- striped bass bill. It was changed to a predation management bill in line with the GGSA salmon restoration plan. GGSA worked to get a bill introduced to produce another two million hatchery fish but later withdrew this bill after the California Department of Fish and Wildlife volunteered to produce the extra salmon. The offer hinged on getting money from the Salmon Stamp fund paid for by trollers and charter boats, which graciously agreed to put up half of the money. Everyone owes them big thanks since the added fish in the ocean will benefit all.

GGSA continues to work on a bill to fix the plumbing problem that is overheating fifteen miles of the



Congressman Jared Huffman on a fact finding trip pictured with GGSA Founder Victor Gonella. Executive Director John McManus and policy consultant Barry Nelson, not pictured, participated.

Feather River downstream of the Thermalito outlet, making it too hot for salmon spawning. What’s needed is a bypass that

instead channels this water directly back into the river before it’s heated. ■

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 Elie, Yancy Forest-Knowles, Douglas R. Gaebe, 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