



April 2020

# FISH TALES

Newsletter of the Golden State Salmon Association

## GSSA and allies ask federal court to block increased Federal Delta diversions, pumping

In March GSSA and allies asked a federal court to immediately block a new federal water diversion and pumping plan because of its imminent danger to salmon. The groups filed a motion for preliminary injunction on March 5.

The federal plan, overseen by US Interior Secretary David Bernhardt, calls for boosting water diversions from salmon rivers in northern California and the Delta by 600,000 to 1 million acre feet at a time when the state and multiple scientific agencies have documented the need to reduce such diversions and leave more water in the rivers to maintain salmon and other native wildlife.

Interior Secretary David Bernhardt's is a former lobbyist and attorney for the Westlands Water District which serves huge corporate growing operations in the dry western San Joaquin Valley.

Last July the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) rejected the pumping and diversion plan, warning of the harm it would do to salmon. Later, under pressure from Bernhardt and the Trump administration, NMFS reversed course and approved it in a biological opinion, or biop.

The federal plan allows diversion and pumping at levels like those of the early 2000's which collapsed the salmon populations and shut



*The upper Sacramento River could overheat this year, killing spawning salmon*

the fishery down in 2008 and 2009 for the first time in history.

If GSSA and allies succeed in court, the federal agencies will be forced to reinstate the prior protections and pumping limits while the case makes its way further through the court system. ■

## 2020 Season Outlook



*In 2020, take a kid fishing!*

**Note:** As we went to press, counties were closing launch ramps due to the Covid 19 virus. The State of Washington closed all sport fishing and Oregon closed sport fishing on the Columbia River. California has had internal discussions but as of March 26 had not banned any sport fishing.

Sport ocean salmon fishing will begin April 4 from Pigeon Pt near Santa Cruz south to the Mexican border, followed a week later from Pigeon Pt. north to Horse Mt, just north of Shelter Cove in southern

Humboldt County. Commercial fishing will follow a similar template starting in May (date still to be determined), first from Pigeon Pt. south, followed by open waters from Pigeon Pt. up to Pt. Arena. The Pacific Fisheries Management Council will finalize details relating to the commercial and sport seasons at a meeting scheduled for early April.

The California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife believes there are about 473,183 adult salmon in the ocean now. This is better than

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their predication last year at this time of 379,600 and should lead to a decent fishing season. The improved fishing is due mostly to plentiful rain and runoff during the last several years which always increases salmon numbers by increasing survival of baby fish migrating from the Central Valley

out to the ocean. In addition, improved hatchery release practices are paying off.

Although the forecast for the Sacramento Valley is better this year, fewer salmon from the Klamath River are expected. Returns of salmon to the Klamath River in 2019 were very poor, at

only about half of the minimum number set by fishery managers. Both sport and commercial fishing this season in the northern part of the state, where more Klamath salmon are known to be taken, will be restricted. ■

## What we learned from the 2019 Season

The value of protecting parts of the rivers where salmon spawn and rear is repeatedly underscored in the info from last year's fishing. For instance, nearly half of last year's ocean commercial and sport catch was made up of natural origin salmon. In addition, an estimated 75 percent of the adult salmon that returned to the Sacramento basin in 2019 spawned in the wild.

The Feather and upper Sacramento River still support the biggest natural spawning areas in the Central Valley followed by the American River.

The very high number of Coleman Hatchery fish taken in the commercial fishery is further evidence of the value of the high natural flows we saw in the

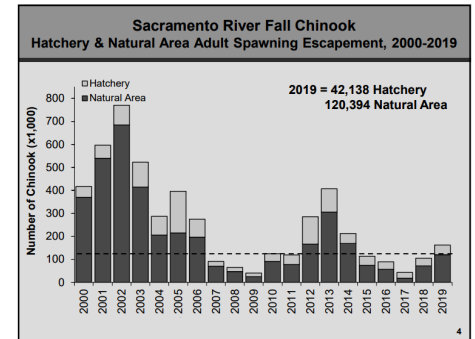
Sacramento River in the spring of 2017. Coleman released over 12 million baby salmon that spring, more than any other hatchery. After Coleman, hatchery contributions to the commercial troll fishery were led by Feather River, Nimbus and the Mokelumne hatcheries, in that order. In the ocean sport fishery, Feather River hatchery fish were the biggest contributor followed by Coleman.

In all, the commercial fishery caught slightly more hatchery fish than natural origin fish (53 percent vs 47 percent). The sport ocean fishery catch was 58 percent hatchery fish and 42 percent natural origin fish.

In 2019 commercial trollers had their best season since 2013 with

the daily average catch being 17 fish, matching 2013's catch rate.

Because we once again got good rain and snow in 2019, we should see another strong fishery in 2021. GSSA and allies' efforts at stopping the big planned federal boost in Delta water diversions and pumping will be a key to protecting the salmon runs beyond 2021. ■



## GSSA Testifies at State Legislature

After years of advocacy by GSSA, California Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot vowed to begin fixing the Feather River's hot water problem in the next four to six months. The commitment came at a hearing of the California Legislature's Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture March 12.

GSSA president, John McManus, testified at the same hearing and reported on the status of Central Valley salmon runs. McManus



*GSSA president John McManus points out hot water flowing out of the Thermalito Afterbay on the Feather River*

covered a range of topics including recent CDFW info showing that natural origin salmon made up 42 and 47 percent of the sport and commercial 2019 ocean

salmon fishery. He used this to illustrate the value of protecting the rivers the salmon rely on. He pointed out we only have truly good fishing seasons in years with major contributions from both the hatcheries and natural born salmon. After reminding the committee of the overall downward trajectory of the state's salmon runs since 1985, McManus illustrated how the governor's new vaunted voluntary settlement agreements with the major Central

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Valley water users provide nothing for salmon unless the federal biops, described above, are stopped. He also alerted the state to the pending lethal spawning temperatures the upper Sacramento River could experience this year as a result of

the new federal rules. He noted Secretary Crowfoot's commitment to act on the Feather and renewed the plea to the state to make sure it happens. Fixing the hot water pollution problem in the Feather River, created by a Dept. of Water

Resources operation, could provide a major benefit to the tens of thousands of salmon that are now pulled from the river and sent to slaughter. ■

## Gov. Newsom announces water and habitat restoration agreement. GSSA and Allies respond in a letter to the state.



*Gov. Newsom: California must get past differences on water. Voluntary agreements are the path forward*

In early February Governor Gavin Newsom declared major progress in his administration's efforts to get Central Valley water districts to voluntarily improve river flow and habitat restoration for salmon. This follows similar announcements in late 2018 and in 2019 that fizzled out.

While the governor's plan sounded good with the promise of new river flows, those same flows would be

immediately sucked up and lost to increased federal water diversions and pumping. Next the state filed a lawsuit to stop the federal actions. As soon as that happened, the big water districts all stopped negotiating with the state. So this latest announcement is fizzling too.

On top of it all, the state's Dept. of Water Resources is moving ahead with plans to boost its own Delta pumping operations to higher than usual rates, just like the feds are doing. In applying for a needed permit, DWR ignores the harm its water operations at Oroville do to the Feather River. If this sounds confused, you're right, it is. Several fishing and conservation groups sent a letter to DWR's boss, Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot outlining the problems and asking for his help in rectifying

the environmentally damaging proposal to over pump coming from DWR.

One possible reason Governor Newsom has such a hard time figuring out a fair and legal water policy is maybe because he's unduly influenced by the likes of John Harris, former owner of the cattle feedlot in the San Joaquin Valley on I 5 called Harris Ranch that travelers smell miles before they see it. Harris is among those in the San Joaquin Valley gunning for more salmon water. ■



*San Joaquin Valley ag leader John Harris and Gov. Gavin Newsom*

## GSSA asks Bureau of Reclamation about Folsom Dam fixes

GSSA is seeking action from the US Army Corps of Engineers officials responsible for fixing the broken temperature control device mounted on the upstream side of the Folsom. Fixing this would allow cold water, needed for salmon spawning in the river and to run the Nimbus Hatchery. As is, much of the water released from Lake Folsom comes from the upper, warmer layers. The Bureau of Reclamation has the ability currently to release colder

water out of the bottom of the dam but they're reluctant to do it because it requires bypassing the power generating turbines built into Folsom Dam. The power generated is a relatively small amount but apparently enough to make the Bureau dig its heels.

The Army Corps said they'd fix the TCD while it was raising Folsom Dam (which is happening now), but may have dropped this commitment.

That's not all. The Nimbus hatchery needs to filter the water brought into the hatchery to hatch eggs. They got some filtration equipment a few years back but ran out of money before it was all installed. So some of it is just sitting there. Getting this equipment online would cut down on deadly fungal attacks on incubating salmon eggs in the hatchery. GSSA is asking federal agencies what can be done to address this. ■



# Lack of rain makes hatchery releases iffy

Hatchery managers and salmon fishermen and women alike are all praying for rain as April and May are upon us. This is the time when hatcheries release the baby salmon they've raised into nearby rivers. If the rivers are running low, slow, and clear, many or most of these baby salmon will be lost to predators before making it to the ocean. If it rains, the rivers will likely swell with turbulent runoff, increase in speed, drop in temperature and the baby salmon will survive at much higher rates.

The Coleman Hatchery planned to take advantage of late March storms and release many of their fish when river levels were expected to be high.

About half of the 32 million salmon reared in Central Valley



*Hatchery fish trucked to SF Bay and Delta release sites are more likely to survive*

hatcheries will be trucked to various SF Bay and Delta release locations. Some will be trucked to the net pen in Half Moon Bay operated by the Coastside Fishing Club. Survival of all of these trucked fish is much higher in most years than those released at the hatcheries because they bypass the predator-filled waters, especially in the interior Delta, that are deadly to baby salmon. ■

## April 3 fundraising dinner rescheduled, fingers crossed

Due to virus concerns, the April 3 Santa Rosa fundraising dinner was rescheduled to May 15. This date may need to be reevaluated as we get into early April. ■

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