



August 2020

FISH TALES

Newsletter of the Golden State Salmon Association

Anyone notice all the big fish this year?

Many are noticing a good number of bigger fish, 20 lbs and above in this year's catch. Most are four year old fish. These would have been born in the late fall of 2016 and migrated to the ocean in the spring of 2017, a year with very heavy rains and high juvenile salmon survival. Although most king salmon return to spawn at age three, nature tells a small percentage of them to stay out in the ocean for an extra year to spread the risk of a natural or manmade problem wiping out a year's worth of reproduction in the rivers.

Enjoy the big ones and pray for more rainy years. In the meantime, GSSA will continue working on



There have been plenty of bigger fish caught this year, one of the benefits we get four years after wet winters

water issues – so even in “off” years we’ll still have enough water to keep a decent run of salmon,

including some really big ones, in the picture. ■

GSSA pushes for doubling of salmon production simply by moving release site for more fish west

GSSA recently met with CDFW brass and asked the state to move more hatchery salmon releases from Vallejo's Mare Island to new sites closer to the Golden Gate Bridge. We believe we're seeing a major uptick in salmon in the ocean this year in part because of past successful efforts to increase the release of fish under the Golden Gate Bridge's north tower at Ft. Baker in Sausalito and the higher survival of fish from the

Coastside Fishing Club's Half Moon Bay net pen. CDFW brass want to see survival and stray rate data comparing the ocean releases to those released at the traditional Vallejo release site before deciding in favor of the fishing industry's request. GSSA is working to compile that data. From the returns of fish released at or near the ocean, we think we've already gained the equivalent of an additional hatchery or two just



Early signs point to much higher survival of fish released in Sausalito compared to those released near Vallejo so why not move more releases west?

from the better survival of fish released closer to the ocean. ■

GSSA in court to stop mass new water diversions

GSSA is working with allies in the courts to hold the line on multiple efforts to drain California's salmon rivers that have amped up considerably in the last two years. We're in federal court challenging the federal government taking much more water from northern California rivers than ever before. Increased water diversion hurts both hatchery and natural spawned salmon. After the feds threw out any pretense at self-control, water districts that get water from Lake Oroville and the State Water

Project complained they wanted more too and the state agreed to give in to their demands. So GSSA and allies filed a separate legal challenge to the state's salmon-killing operations.

Left unchecked, these increased water diversions will eventually mean game over for salmon. The current rate of diversion is already not only killing salmon, but also causing widespread outbreaks of toxic blue green algae all over the Delta this summer. ■



Vastly more northern CA water needed by salmon is instead being pumped to the arid western San Joaquin Valley

Oroville Wildlife Area floodplain restored, thanks to GSSA

Across the Feather River from the Thermalito Outlet is Unit D of the Oroville Wildlife Area. Until recently it was little more than a mountain of mine tailings. GSSA became aware that the tailings could be restored for flood protection and good rearing habitat for baby salmon. The state Dept. of Water Resources, which partly controls the area, was insisting that any restoration of this site would have to wait until the federal government approved a new license for Oroville Dam, something that's already taken 14 years and counting. GSSA mobilized elected officials, including Senator Feinstein and state senators, to successfully pressure DWR to allow this restoration to move forward. GSSA also worked closely with the Sutter Butte Flood Control Agency, the local project sponsor.



GSSA made possible restoration of 1500 acres of good rearing habitat for baby salmon on the Feather River

Our campaign worked, DWR approved the project and mountains of mine rock were moved to make the area once again function as both floodplain and salmon rearing habitat. The restoration is not only good for salmon but also reduces flood

concerns on downstream cities of Marysville, Yuba City and others.

This is a good example of GSSA's value in breaking through with state and federal bureaucracies to get needed projects moving. This project simply wouldn't have happened but for GSSA. ■

Avoidable massive upper Sac fish kill becoming more likely this year

GSSA lost a court fight seeking to force the federal Bureau of

Reclamation to reduce water releases from Lake Shasta this summer in order to avoid a massive fish kill this fall for spawning

salmon. Since spring, water has been released at such high rates that there won't be adequate

supplies of cold water available when needed in the fall. However, the State Water Resources Control Board still has the authority to order the feds to reserve salmon water. The state water board skirmished with the federal Bureau

of Reclamation all spring, trying to get the feds to admit and confront the looming threat and avoid overheating the river. The Bureau refused to cooperate. GSSA is encouraging the state board to exercise its authority and execute

its duty to protect the state's salmon that belong to all of us. The next test will be whether the State Board does nothing or files litigation or takes other regulatory action to avoid the looming fish kill. ■

GSSA efforts keep Sacramento rearing side channel restoration on track

After receiving a tip from a friendly source that funding would be cut off for some key side channel restoration projects in the upper Sacramento River Basin, GSSA succeeded in getting the funds reinstated this year.

Months ago local ag interests travelled to DC and convinced the federal government that funds being used to restore salmon habitat should instead be competitively made available to them. The feds agreed and suddenly work scheduled for this summer and fall was threatened, pending a newly set up competitive bidding process. The change meant a year's worth of high quality restoration work would likely be lost. GSSA appealed to federal officials to keep this year's restoration projects moving forward. We reminded the feds that in the midst of a recession, losing shovel ready restoration jobs



Anderson River Park side channel restoration is back on track thanks to GSSA intercession

now would not go over well with the public. Next thing we knew, the main side channel projects scheduled for this year were back on track. We later heard from federal sources that our concerns were heard and taken to heart.

In the last few years five side channel projects have been restored and are already being used by juvenile salmon for feeding and rearing, as we expected they would. The better fishing we're seeing

this year in the ocean is helped by the higher survival fish are experiencing in recently restored side channels.

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Membership drive, Online Auctions seek to fill the gap

During this time when we can't have fundraising dinners, GSSA is trying new things to keep the lights on. We recently did a fundraising/membership drive asking people to renew their membership. In addition we're sitting on goods and guided fishing trips that we'd normally auction off at dinners.

We'll be auctioning these off online in the weeks and months to come to replace needed funds to keep our work going. If you need fishing or outdoor equipment, keep an eye on our facebook page, website, etc (and your incoming email from GSSA) and consider helping us while getting some great auction items. Thanks. ■

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GSSA explores new SF bay salmon rearing site

GSSA has begun talks with a major bay area utility district and others to explore the possibility of adding an additional release site for acclimated hatchery fish in San Francisco Bay. The idea would be to acclimate the fish in a stationary net pen for at least a week so they'll return as adults and supply a new in-bay fishery. The idea is modeled after what existed in the Santa Cruz harbor where fish were planted and pen-reared for days came back as adults and created a local salmon fishery. Average people who might not own a boat or even have the money to go on a charter boat could still take home ocean bright king salmon caught from shore. A similar situation exists with acclimated net pen fish in Half Moon Bay. Regardless of where the fish return to, acclimated fish released closer to the ocean survive at much higher rates than those released elsewhere and add to the ocean sport and commercial fisheries. ■



Salmon caught inside Half Moon Bay's Pillar Pt Harbor

GSSA Founding Members

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