



January 2021

FISH TALES

Newsletter of the Golden State Salmon Association

2020 Salmon Returns Update

After a lot of worry, and what seemed like poor salmon returns to the Central Valley last year, a picture is starting to take shape. Among other things, at least the hatcheries were able to take enough eggs to meet their targets, even if few fish were available to river anglers.

The Mokelumne River hatchery reports a total of 4,000 Chinook salmon returned to the river. This compares to over 12,000 in 2019 and about 18,000 that returned in 2018. The Mokelumne hatchery also got 2 million eggs from the Feather River hatchery to produce enhancement fish. A good number of Mokelumne fish are believed to have strayed both up into the American River and down into the three main tributaries of the San Joaquin River; the Stanislaus, Merced and Tuolumne. The straying is likely driven by water operations in the fall when flows from the Mokelumne are often low compared to the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers. The heavier flows in the bigger rivers create an attraction adult salmon find hard to resist.

At the Nimbus Fish Hatchery 6,006 fall Chinooks were trapped this fall, compared to almost twice as many



Nimbus Hatchery workers working hard

the year before.

At the Feather hatchery 16,572 fall run adult fall run Chinooks were trapped and 1,490 jacks (2-year-olds) were trapped, compared to a total of 26,979 fall chinooks, last year.

The 2020 group of salmon were offspring of a consistently poor brood going back to the depths of the drought in 2014 (which led to the 2017 return, which led to the 2020 returns) when most naturally spawned salmon died as eggs in overheated rivers. Having said that, early indications are that natural areas spawning was decent this past year. Pray for rain in the coming months to get any fish born there safely to the ocean this spring.

State officials suggest that returns were later than normal this year and returning fish met low water conditions which may have

prompted them to shoot up the rivers to the areas below dams. It appears that jack returns were on the lower side.

In March we should get official numbers for 2020. We'll find out how many and where the fish returned to and get a forecast of what officials believe to be the number of salmon that will mature to adulthood in the ocean this year. In spite of the poor river fishing, early reports suggest we may get close to the 142,000 returning adults targeted by fishery managers. What that, coupled with the number of jacks that returned last year, will mean to the 2021 fishery remains to be seen.

Net pen in Crescent City? Report says it could come at cost to HMB, Santa Cruz or Monterey



Crescent City Harbor

According to a report in a north coast publication, the Lost Coast Outpost, a move is afoot by the Crescent City harbor master to establish a salmon net pen program there. The published report says the idea is to get broodstock from the nearby Rowdy Creek Hatchery, a tributary of the Smith River.

The Crescent City site would be outside the designated habitat of ESA listed coastal chinook (the northern boundary is miles south at Redwood Creek). The newspaper reported that any fish supplied to the new net pen project could come at the expense of existing ocean release programs in Half Moon

Bay, Santa Cruz and Monterey. That's because the Crescent City proponents would apparently be looking to the California Salmon Stamp Committee to supply funding needed to produce the extra fish. Those funds are currently used to produce the fish released at Santa Cruz, Monterey, Half Moon Bay and Ft. Baker in Sausalito. At least one Humboldt County fishery expert said similar ideas have been floated in the past. Others noted that since Crescent City is within the highly regulated Klamath Management Zone, fishing restrictions tied to KMZ management wouldn't likely change to accommodate any extra fish produced.

New Administration shaping up in DC, what might it mean for CA salmon?

GSSA is working to get key issues beneficial to salmon and the environment heard by the new incoming federal Biden administration. GSSA has been working primarily through allies in friendly Congressional offices who are in touch with some of those nominated to take over key positions affecting water and wildlife in the new Biden administration.

At the top of our list - getting the new administration to undo the Trump Delta diversion rules that allows another 600,000 acre feet of water to be siphoned annually. We would like to see the new administration reverse the damage and reinstate better environmental protections. We've also recommended the federal government kill the Shasta Dam raise proposal once and for all. We're discussing with allies



Shasta Dam is run by the federal US Bureau of Reclamation

a second tier of "asks" which might include undoing some of the new suspect water rights that were given away to San Joaquin Valley ag operatives by the Trump administration. There may be a

suggestion to roll back or eliminate damaging new water diversion projects authorized under the WIIN Act (and allowing it to expire as scheduled at the end of this year).

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Delta Smelt functionally extinct, who's next

The latest survey of the Delta by the state failed to find any Delta smelt, signaling that the native fish has gone extinct in the wild. A second native Delta and SF Bay fish, longfin smelt, are on the brink of extinction. Both species clearly tell us that the natural environment in the Delta has been badly damaged. The same lack of water killing off smelt is also creating severe problems for hatchery and native salmon when they try to

Effort to get CDFW to move fish releases west needs more push

GSSA has asked CDFW to consider changing the location of its bay fish releases to respond to mounting data clearly proving that moving the release sites west results in markedly better survival of the fish.

GSSA supplied CDFW with data demonstrating the higher survival and roughly equivalent stray rate of fish released in Sausalito. Instead of acting on the data presented by GSSA, CDFW has asked GSSA to propose a specific release site and number of fish to consider for a new pilot program. GSSA has asked Chevron about the possibility of using part of their pier immediately south of the Richmond/San Rafael Bridge on the Richmond side as a release site. Chevron is considering the request and has asked for more information, including legal status of salmon releases in the bay. GSSA has also surveyed a possible second release location on Treasure Island.

In addition to moving release sites



The Delta is in bad shape

get through the Delta and out to the ocean as juveniles. The State Water Resources Control Board has recognized the problem and attempted to get diverters to reduce their diversions in order to increase needed outflow through the Delta to the Bay.



The further west they're released, the higher their survival is

west, GSSA has also proposed a small terminal net pen project for the City of Richmond. We would do this in partnership with the East Bay Muni Utility District (EBMUD), which supports the proposal. CDFW has heard (and read) our proposal but claims it has internal policy and legal hurdles to clear before it can give proper consideration to it. GSSA and EBMUD believe such a site, if successful, might see adult returning salmon to the Richmond Marina area where local people could catch them from shore and small boats. Local students could participate in the program, bringing them closer to the natural world around them. The community would benefit.

GSSA mounts campaign to make the SFPUC better environmental stewards, what's that got to do with salmon?



San Francisco's dam on the Tuolumne River

Conservation groups and GSSA are working to alter the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission's death embrace of unsustainable water diversions on the Tuolumne River. The Tuolumne feeds into the San Joaquin River and is among three rivers ordered to reduce diversions by the state in December of 2018. Instead of complying, the City of SF joined other diverters in suing to block the order.

Although no longer a big salmon producer, the Tuolumne may hold outsized influence as the Biden administration considers how it wants to conduct western water policy and seeks input from western Democratic allies, including the City of San Francisco.

Looking for new gear or planning your fishing trips for 2021?

Why not bid on our auction items to help support salmon? It's tax-deductable!

www.goldenstatesalmon.org

GSSA proposes modification to Thermalito fix to create new spawning and rearing habitat

GSSA remains central in planning with the State Dept. of Water Resources and others on ways to fix the hot water pollution problem in the Feather River. GSSA was primarily responsible for getting this planning going.

The state has contracted an outside water temperature modeling firm to calculate how much cold water will be available downstream of the Oroville Dam under the various alternatives being considered. Results of this work will inform the group's decision on which alternative to implement.

A leading contender is to build a canal linking the Thermalito project downstream of the forebay directly to the Feather River,



The last mile of the conceptual canal around Thermalito Afterbay could be modified to provide rearing and spawning habitat

somewhere near the current Thermalito Outlet. There may be an opportunity to build the last

piece of such a canal so it includes side channels to provide additional spawning and rearing habitat.

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