



April 2022

FISH TALES

Newsletter of the Golden State Salmon Association

Season Update

The sport ocean salmon season kicked off on April 2. Even with bad weather, boats managed to get out from Monterey Bay up to Bodega Bay. Salmon were caught in all places! Then conditions kicked up for a few days, and the wind laid down a bit on April 6, several of the big party boats ventured out the Gate and found fish with most reporting limits, including some commercial grade fish. With the early size limit being 24" minimum, even the smaller fish were bigger than many normally brought home this time of year.

Commercial is scheduled to open on May 1 from Pigeon Pt. south. The commercial season looks like it will be a fraction of a regular



Fish lined up like German soldiers? Nope, just two great days out the Gate. Photo courtesy Salty Lady

season with only about eight days of the usually lucrative July and August available to fish up to Pt. Arena. The commercial fleet is

being constrained to reduce their catch of coastal Chinook, which are kings from rivers like the Russian, Eel, Mattole, and others. ■

Ft. Baker to see 4 million again, Richmond release coming

After stops and starts it now appears that another four million hatchery salmon (instead of the usual two million) will be released at Sausalito's Fort Baker again this year. The National Park Service, which runs the site as part of the Golden Gate National Recreation Area (GGNRA), initially opposed the idea. GSSA met with them and expressed strong support for the expanded release, stressing the huge benefit these releases provide to the fishery and how those

additional fish probably saved the season for more than one fishing operation last year. Eventually the Park Service relented after the National Marine Fisheries Service weighed in with a letter of support for the state's plans to release hatchery salmon there.

Fish released there, at dusk, on an outgoing tide, have shown some of the highest survival of any hatchery salmon in California. They, and hatchery salmon coming out of the Half Moon Bay Coastside

Fishing Club net pen, are a significant contributor to the fish being encountered off the Northern California coast now. These fish likely added to the surprisingly strong commercial catch last year.

The Park Service bumped releases from two to four million last year due to extreme drought. With a repeat this year, salmon fishermen and women will have hope for the 2024 season, even though naturally spawned salmon are likely to be few due to drought losses. *Continued on page 2*

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In addition to the additional releases at Sausalito, CDFW is planning to release at least a truckload (about 200,000) in Richmond this year. CDFW worked with GSSA and the City of Richmond to find a site that promises high survival, meaning close to heavy outgoing tidal current, closer to the GG than Vallejo, and deep enough water to buffer from predation. Oh, and the tanker trucks have to be able to get to it and set up.

GSSA has facilitated getting local school age kids involved, which CDFW and the City of Richmond greatly appreciate. Due to safety



Tanker trucks with about 200,000 smolts each await dusk before unloading at one of the best release sites in California

concerns, it's likely the kids will observe from a boat (thank you Salty Lady!). In the long-term, GSSA would like to see an acclimation net pen receive future deliveries of fish in Richmond,

where they'd be reared for a week or two prior to release. These fish would be expected to return to the Richmond area as adults, where many will hopefully end up on local dinner plates. ■

Coleman hatchery wraps up a successful experiment partnering with GSSA, now we wait for results

On April 7 the Coleman fish hatchery released the last of a three-year experiment involving trucking fish 60 to 85 miles downstream from the hatchery to see if survival increased without measurable straying. The fish were released at dusk to minimize bird predation at the Butte City Bridge.

About 180,000 juvenile salmon were released at the Butte City Bridge. A second control group of the same size was released a few days earlier at the hatchery to provide a comparison. Coded wire tags were planted in the snouts of all fish involved.

A subset of both groups, were implanted with acoustic tags. This allowed tracking of the juvenile salmon in real time during their downstream migration. Last year zero of the acoustic tagged fish made it to Benicia in the Delta while 4.7 percent of the ones



GSSA's Cat Kaiser and Dick Pool, with US Fish and Wildlife personnel, document salmon release

released downstream did. None of the fish have made it to Benicia yet but five times more of the downstream release group have made it to the City of Sacramento. Not surprising since, many of the upstream group were lost in the upper river and didn't make it even as far as Butte City Bridge. ■

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Staring at another year of expected hot upper river temperatures

All signs are pointing to another year of lethally hot water in the upper Sacramento River spawning beds this summer and fall. To avoid another total wipeout of federally protected winter run salmon, the state will pay senior water right holders that farm the Sacramento Valley not to divert as much water as they normally would. The current governor believes handing over taxpayer dollars to buy back this public resource is a preferable route to go. Even with this arrangement, at least half of the winter run eggs that return to the upper Sacramento Basin this year are almost certain to die from heat



Here we go again, another year of overheated rivers likely to kill most of the spawn

before hatching into fry. One federal study says up to 70 percent are likely to die from the heat. Last year an estimated 75 percent were killed by heat and most of those that managed to hatch then perished from other causes by the time they got to the Delta. A similar loss was likely experienced by the fall run we fish. No official loss figures for fall run have been released yet. There were some

anecdotal signs that at least some of the fall run fish “strayed” into Battle Creek and Clear Creek last year, both of which had colder water. These fish had a chance to successfully spawn. This year, Battle Creek will likely run colder again but it’s not clear that Clear Creek will.

GSSA has been advocating the State Water Control Board for months to require water be managed not only for human health and safety, but also for salmon survival, something that now appears somewhat likely to happen due to the state payment scheme mentioned above. Good or bad, this year’s arrangement is unprecedented but it won’t do anything to help fall run that spawn in September or October or even most of November, in the upper Sacramento River. ■

Newsom hands pen to water users to write voluntary agreement to do little

On March 29 the state announced it signed a Memorandum of Understanding with key Central Valley water districts intended to improve ecological conditions in the Central Valley. Except that that the agreement probably won’t provide much improvement at all. The state, in its zeal to get a deal, basically handed over the pen to the water districts to write the deal themselves. What the districts have agreed to is to basically divert almost as much water as usual while getting paid by the state to release a little back into the rivers.

The deal is based on an assumption

that huge Delta pumping allowed by the Trump administration, is still the baseline target to meet. Newsom signed off on this arrangement even though the federal government has agreed to rewrite the Trump rules because they were so environmentally damaging.

Several key water districts either refused to sign or weren’t invited to sign. Among those not invited, San Francisco’s Public Utilities District, and their diverter partners on the Tuolumne River, the Modesto and Turlock Irrigation Districts. The SFPUC and its partners were left out because they refuse to put forward even a fig leaf of a proposal to help improve environmental conditions on the Tuolumne River, where they get water from.



Salmon lose under a proposal struck with the Newsom Administration

The deal will next go to the State Water Resources Control Board for its review and scoring on what the environmental impacts would be. If the Water Board follows real science, it will surely show this agreement falls woefully short of providing the water needed to heal the environment and our salmon runs. In fact this new Newsom deal only provides about a quarter of the water the State Water Board has said in the past is needed to fix the Delta and its tributaries. ■

Santa Rosa dinner update

There are still tickets available for the June 3 annual Santa Rosa fundraising dinner. It'll be back at the Friedman Event Center again, like usual and will serve the same great ribs and chicken grilled out back as always. Auction prizes this year include a lot of great trips, from accommodations in Cabo San Lucas Mexico to fishing trips on large and small charter boats all the way north to the Oregon border. Tons of great fishing gear, marine electronics, crab traps and more, will be auctioned or raffled off along with prizes and trips that one might want for their family or loved ones. Both sport and commercial fishing will be closed north of Pigeon Point on the night of the dinner so it should be a good night to get back together again and support the organization that is making a real difference in getting more salmon in California to the adult stage. ■



For more info and to purchase tickets, go to: goldenstatesalmon.org

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