

Plight of Our Fisheries

Topic of select panel

From WESTERN OUTDOOR NEWS, February 1, 2008

SACRAMENTO – A select panel of sport fishing leaders outlined how fishermen can reverse the dramatic declines in the salmon, striped bass and other runs of fish in Northern California during a presentation at the International Sportsmen’s Exposition Show at Cal Expo last week.

Sep Hendrickson, host of the California Sportsmen Radio Show, organized the event in response to some of the worst bay, delta and ocean fishing conditions in decades.



The panelists were Dick Pool, President of Pro-Troll Fishing Products; Dan Bacher, Editor of the Fish Sniffer; John Beuttler, Director of Conservation California Sportfishing

Protection Alliance and recent participant in the Governor’s Delta Vision Stakeholders process; California Assembly-member Lois Wolk, who chairs the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee; Dan Wolford, Science Director of the Coastside Fishing Club and Pacific Fishery Management Council member; and Jim Martin, former Chief of Fisheries, State of Oregon. The panel was moderated by Mike Aughney, operator of the USAFishing.com Fishing Reports Web site.

“The 2007 fishing season was a big disappointment for Northern California anglers,” said Sep Hendrickson. “Fishermen are upset and angry. The salmon season was the worst on record, striped bass fishing in the bay was terrible and the rockfish season closed early. We now know what the problems are and this panel has told us how we can change the outlook.”



Dan Bacher laid the problem squarely on the California Department of Water Resources and the Federal Bureau of Reclamation.

“These people have one objective – to pump more

water with no consideration of the environment or other consequences.” Bacher said. “They have broken laws,

ignored the Endangered Species Act and have illegally changed biological opinions that got in their way. In the process they have nearly destroyed the Delta and have decimated the once healthy fish runs of the Central Valley.”

Bacher cited the recent mid-winter trawl survey which shows that the Delta smelt and other delta fish populations continue to plummet towards extinction.

“The water agencies and the state water contractors continue to state that 25 million people depend on water from the delta,” Bacher emphasized. “The truth is that 85 percent of the water goes to subsidized agriculture and they want more. The state’s water policies need to be drastically revised to ensure that there will be plenty of water for both population growth and healthy fisheries.”

Early in 2007 the Governor appointed the Delta Vision Blue Ribbon Task Force to analyze the problems of the delta and to propose restoration actions. John Beuttler worked closely with the Task Force as a member of its stakeholders advisory panel. Beuttler was very disappointed in the Governor’s reporting of the Task Force recommendations. Beuttler cites twelve integrated and linked recommendations of the Task Force.

“The Task Force was very careful to indicate that the 12 recommendations cannot be split apart or the delta restoration objective will not be met.” stated Beuttler, adding, “The governor took the report out of context and used it as a forum to promote his controversial \$9 billion water plan including his “water conveyance system” – the peripheral canal.”

Beuttler outlined three changes fishermen want in order for fish to survive in the delta.

1. Reduce export pumping and restore the flows necessary to allow the Delta’s foodweb to recover and supply the food our fisheries need as they migrate through the estuary.
2. Pumps to stop the destruction of many millions of fish annually.
3. Adopt a State of the Art fish salvage and recovery program at the state and federal pumps to help mitigate for the billions of fish lost at the pumps.

“These fish declines are a symptom of an ailing Delta,” said Assemblywoman Lois Wolk, chair of the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee. “If we are to restore this complex, critical resource and provide for its long-term sustainability, we must enact a comprehensive plan that includes fishery and ecosystem restoration, sustainable farming practices and water supply, recreation and public

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access.

"I plan to introduce legislation establishing a clear steward for the Delta, which can ensure that the needs of the Delta and state are heard amongst the voices of conflicting interest groups with a stake in this resource. I have also introduced legislation this session requiring the state to prepare plans to protect fish populations and provide emergency fish rescue, to prevent another massive fish kill the likes of that we saw on Prospect Island late last year."

She said that "anglers need to get involved, get unified and make your needs known. Help the legislature map a plan that resolves the crisis facing the delta and fish populations, as well as providing for other water needs."

Dan Wolford reiterated the importance to our fisheries of water related issues in the Delta and on the Klamath, but focused primarily on the Marine Life Protection Act, and about the impact that Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) will have on saltwater fishing. MPAs are being defined for the North Central Coast right now, and alternative plans will be considered for adoption by the Fish and Game Commission this spring. Wolford emphasized that fishermen need to be counted when the process moves to the adoption stage by the MLPAs Blue Ribbon Task Force and ultimately by the Commission.

He said, "Recreational fishermen have long been recognized as the stewards of our fishery resources and their ecosystems. So it has been easy for us to support the development of the MPAs, but the trick has been to find the right balance between closures and public access. A recent Field Research survey of California's public shows their interests, and the interests of recreational fishermen are in close alignment – seeking to conserve the ocean environment as a place to be utilized with public access to a recreational fishery."

Jim Martin, former Chief of Fisheries for the State of Oregon summed up the panel presentation and hit fishermen hard. He said, "I worked 38 years as a biologist and fish manager to fill the lakes, rivers and ocean with fish. I am outraged at what I see happening in California. Every fisherman should be



mad as hell and every fisherman should join the battle to fight back. The lifeblood of our fisheries is being sucked dry. We have two choices: stand by and let the policies of yesteryear continue to destroy our heritage and the heritage of our children and grandchildren, or get mad as hell and organize ourselves behind programs like Water4Fish and let the governor and every other politician know we demand changes."

Dick Pool, President of Pro-Troll Fishing Products, has worked on California fishery restoration and enhancement programs for over 20 years. He now coordinates the Water4Fish political action program.

He said, "Our corporate adversaries currently control the water policies of California. 85 percent of the delta water goes to agriculture, yet they want more. They have teams of lawyers, lobbyists and biologists working full time against us. Nothing is spared when it comes to their money and political contributions. We cannot match this activity. However, we have one thing they can't match – fishing is huge in California. There are 2.4 million sport fishermen in the state. If we organize ourselves, they cannot match our political power at the ballot box."

Pool added, "Following the successful Klamath advocacy program led by the Coastside Fishing Club in 2006, we organized the Water4Fish.org program. In about one minute, fishermen and other supporters can log on, send emails to their elected leaders and give us one more supporter to be counted. This is our vehicle for regaining the destiny of our fisheries. So far 21,000 concerned anglers have signed on and sent letters, but we need at least 50 to 100 thousand. I urge every fisherman and those who care about protecting our wildlife heritage to join us. Log onto Water4Fish.org and be counted."

For more information, see <http://www.water4fish.org>

