

To: Peninsula Fly Fishers Board of Directors

From: Rodney Chun

Subject: Report on 8th Semi-annual Meeting of the NCCFFF Conservation Network
April 3, 2004 - Cal State University-Sacramento Aquatic Center, Rancho Cordova

This meeting is held twice a year by the NCCFFF to organize their conservation efforts and to allow member clubs to report and discuss pressing conservation issues, many of which impact their own "home" waters. Approximately 23 representatives attended this meeting from California clubs and FFF at-large members. We covered an enormous number of topics so I can only summarize topics in this memo.

The session started with the announcement that the current VP of Conservation, Rob Ferroggiaro, is stepping down after 5 years of dedicated service. He is being replaced by Mark Rockwell, a retired Chiropractor and member of the Gold County Fly Fishers. In an interesting twist of fate, Rob and Mark were both members of the Peninsula Fly Fishers at some point in their careers!

The first two parts of the meeting were dedicated to updates of current issues. The first part consisted of quick 5-minute updates on short issues (NCCFFF Updates), followed by longer presentations on more substantive issues (Network Updates). Finally, the third section of the meeting consisted of a longer presentation by Bureau of Reclamation biologists about American River steelhead.

I. NCCFFF Updates

1. Upper Sac Rail Safety Regulation: In a setback to conservationists who have been trying to get Federal regulation of the rail traffic passing through the Upper Sac corridor, the Supreme Court ruled that the CPUC will maintain regulatory control. CalTrout and Friends of the Rivers are pursuing further action via the CPUC.
2. DFG Trout Management Strategic Plan: Outline of DFG plan is now posted on their website. Contains highlights regarding their Wild Trout program and hatchery management practices. See: www.dfg.ca.gov/fishing/assets/publications/StrategicPlanNov03.pdf
3. Butte Creek Salmon Kill: Coalition of interests has filed a "notice of intent to sue" over PG&E water management on the Creek.
4. Tongass National Forest: Despite the fact that this is outside of the normal scope of the NCCFFF, there have been requests for local (CA) support of conservation issues regarding this Alaskan resource. The main issue currently facing Tongass is the impending delisting of the forest from no-road regulations, a policy switch that the Bush administration announced last December.
5. Pit River: Relicensing process is now in the hands of FERC. The issue of most interest to anglers is the decision on Pit 3 -- it appears that most flow recommendations are *higher* than what most anglers would like. On the other hand, higher flows are probably beneficial to the fish.

6. Feather River Aquatic Insect Study Results: These results are discussed on the PFF website this month.

II. NCCFFF Network Updates

1. Klamath Hydro Relicensing: Report on progress of the Klamath Hydroelectric Power relicensing application. The NCCFFF (Northern California - Nevada Council) submitted a letter asking that PacifiCorp modify its license application to include specific language addressing angling concerns regarding the degradation of fishing habitat.
2. A. New Zealand Mud Snail Update: A number of angling and conservation groups have coordinated to produce posters concerning the NZMS problems facing several California waterways. Because of budget shortfalls, the DFG is unable to fund this project, but there is agreement that all rivers that see significant numbers of waders should be posted.
B. Sacramento Valley Environmental Water Caucus: This is a coalition of many environmental groups interested in preserving the habitat and water quality in the Sacramento River Valley. Currently, they are trying to prevent the export of water from the Sac (see handout).
3. Battle Creek Restoration: There are 8 dams on Battle Creek. There is a current plan to remove 5 of these dams to re-open a significant portion of the creek to the native salmon and steelhead runs. However, a significant number of conservation and commercial groups with interests in the restoration are asking for a plan which removes all 8 dams. None of these dams are very large and some of them no longer generating electricity.
4. Steelhead Committee Projects:
A. Alameda Creek Project: Goal of this project was to use the removal of a barrier on Alameda Creek as a pilot project. However, the project is not getting much support from CalTran and it turns out that there are 5 additional barriers (mainly highway related) between the proposed project and the Bay. The project will continue to pursue possible avenues for a demonstration project.
B. Lawsuit lodged by irrigators: Agricultural interests have been suing NOAA to classify steelhead and local rainbow trout as the same species on the Columbia-Snake River system. There are complex motives behind this move, but essentially if the irrigators are successful, it would mean that current water releases to protect steelhead and salmon runs would be jeopardized since the "steelhead" would no longer be "endangered." A summary of this issue is in "The Osprey." The ominous link to Northern California water issues is that this tactic of lumping resident rainbows with steelhead was first used by Central Valley irrigators in their attempt to limit water releases intended to aid annual spawning runs.
5. A. California Wild Heritage Campaign (Cal Wild): This coalition's main mission is to secure legislative protection for wild lands and rivers on public property. They are currently working on getting the Black Butte River (a tributary of the Eel River) listed as a Wild and Scenic River. The Cal Wild representative, Michael MacWilliams, is also an avid fly fisherman and a Stanford teacher. He has a presentation on California River conservation which would be a good addition to our speaker line-up.
B. Guest presentation by Joseph Bogaard of "Save Our Salmon", an advocacy group that is attempting to preserve northwest Salmon fisheries. The NCCFFF agreed to support this organization through contacts and letter writing.
6. Lower American River Operating Group: This NCCFFF group was formed in response to last year's fish kill. The fish kill occurred after river levels were raised for a period of time

which unfortunately resulted in salmon and steelhead spawning in areas that were subsequently de-watered when the flows dropped. They have been very successful in getting the Bureau of Reclamation to manage the flows and cold-water pool available in Folsom Reservoir. See me if you wish to see the Draft Policy Document on American River flow management policies which resulted partially from this group's efforts.

III. Presentation by Bureau of Reclamation Biologists

Since our meeting venue was held right above the Nimbus Dam, the NCCFFF invited biologist John Hannon and Brian Deason to present their work on steelhead spawning on the Lower American River. Both individuals work for the Bureau of Reclamation.

As mitigation for the blockage of vast amounts of spawning habitat, the Bureau both operates the Nimbus hatchery and finances efforts to study (and hopefully assist) the natural spawning of salmon and steelhead downstream from the Nimbus dam. Both John and Brian spend a lot of time on the river during the steelhead season gathering data on spawning fish. The highlights of their presentation:

- Peak spawn in 2002 and 2003 occurred February 18-21.
- Hatchery fish return about 1 month earlier than the wild fish. Average weight of fish entering the hatchery is about 7 lbs.
- The area with the highest density of redds (nests) is near Upper Sunrise Island.
- This year there was a conscious effort not to de-water redds.
- On redds that were de-watered, they discovered that subsurface water flows keep the eggs alive up to 5 weeks after the surface water has disappeared.

IV. Other Activities

After the meeting critique and wrap-up, everyone walked down to the Nimbus Hatchery to meet the hatchery manager who gave a small (candid, off the record) talk. In addition, fly shop owner Bill Kiene arranged for two of his guides to give the group a short primer on fly-fishing for American River steelhead.

The theme for the next meeting will probably focus on the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta. The venue will be announced later.