“Nature is neutral. Man wrested from nature the power to make the world a desert or to make the deserts bloom. There is no evil in the atom; only in men’s souls.”

------ Adlai Stevenson

IN THIS ISSUE

FISHERMAN’S PERSPECTIVE: HUMAN INTERVENTION IN SALMON RESTORATION.............. 20:02/01
BILL SEEKS TRANSFER OF SNAPPER MANAGEMENT FROM NMFS TO STATES ................. 20:02/02
PFMC SHUTS DOWN WEST COAST SARDINE FISHERY ............................................. 20:02/03
USDA TO PROPOSE ORGANIC STANDARDS FOR FARMED SEAFOOD ..................... 20:02/04
U.S. OVERFISHING AT RECORD LOW.............................................................................. 20:02/09

AND MORE…

20:02/01: FISHERMAN’S PERSPECTIVE: PRIORITIZING HUMAN INTERVENTION IN SALMON RESTORATION by PCFFA PRESIDENT DAVID BITTS, F/V ELMARUE: It appears to this ignorant fisherman that there are currently three major threats to the continued flourishing of Central Valley fall Chinook salmon stocks, which are the bread and butter of California and Oregon salmon fisheries. Those threats are: 1) the ongoing drought; 2) changes in ocean conditions; and 3) potential changes to hatchery policies and practices in the Central Valley. Solutions to the first two threats are largely (but not entirely) beyond human control, but the third is totally within our ability to respond.

Central Valley watersheds and the Delta are currently so compromised by dams, diversions, and the associated plumbing and flow issues that three levels of human intervention are required to get young salmon to San Francisco Bay in sufficient numbers to provide for ocean fisheries – even though most of the returning adults spawn in gravel every year. First, hatcheries were built and are operated in the Central Valley. We note here that hatcheries were not constructed, as is commonly believed, to mitigate for the salmon habitat lost by dam construction, but to compensate fisheries for the effects of that lost habitat, i.e., reduced naturally produced salmon populations. Second, when people noticed that a large percentage of fish released at the hatcheries were entrained in diversions and winding up at the Central Valley Project and State Water Project pumps, the State began trucking hatchery fish to release points downstream of most diversions, which dramatically improved survival rates. Third, to avoid the massive predation on freshly released, disoriented young fish right at the release points, the fish are now released into net pens, where they are protected from predation while acclimating to brackish water. Net pen acclimation produces another substantial increase in survival.
Unfortunately, fish that are trucked to the estuary do not imprint on their native hatchery as well as fish released upstream, so they stray within the Central Valley at a substantially higher rate. Straying is evidently a mortal sin in the eyes of some experts; never mind that in the first Salmon Framework Plan of the Pacific Fishery Management Council, written in 1984, CDFG noted that Central Valley fall run salmon were already genetically homogenized. Better they should perish at the pumps than return to the wrong hatchery, or, worse, spawn in gravel as most of them do.

I’m not saying genetic homogeneity is a good thing; it’s not. I’m simply saying that unless you have a feasible plan for getting fish downstream successfully, which plan I sure haven’t heard, restoring genetic diversity in the Central Valley is a distant dream. If you pursue that dream without a plan, you put us at serious risk of winding up with essentially no fish – but at least they’ll be pure. So let’s fix the rivers and diversions and plumbing first, then go to work on genetic diversity with a reasonable chance of success.

20:02:02: REPUBLICAN BILL WOULD REMOVE NMFS’ GULF COAST RED SNAPPER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY DESPITE SUCCESSFUL RESTORATION: Republican Senator David Vitter (R-LA) introduced a bill this year that seeks to transfer management of the Gulf Coast’s successfully restored red snapper fishery to state Marine Resources Agencies. The bill, S. 105, is in committee. The fishery is currently managed through the federal government’s National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and through the Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council (Gulf Council). Commercial red snapper fishermen and women oppose the bill and allege the true purpose of transferring management authority to states is to reallocate snapper quota to the recreational fishery and to shut down or severely curtail the commercial fishery.

Last year, representatives of the five state marine resources agencies met in a closed-door proceeding to discuss a framework for a state-controlled red snapper fishery. Commercial fishermen were not invited to that meeting, on which the bill is based. Southeastern Fisheries Associations Executive Director Bob Jones blasted the plan as a “power play orchestrated through Senator Vitter’s office by a Texas angler’s club and a couple of state fish agency directors.”

Aside from an arbitrary exercise in federalism, it remains unclear what proponents of the bill seek to accomplish by transferring managing authority from the Gulf Council to the states. Gulf Council policies successfully brought the snapper fishery back from near decimation over the last five years. The stocks are now healthy and productive. State marine agencies hold seats on the Gulf Council and have voting rights that influence the management of the fishery. Transfer of management authority would not save the feds any money, as Senator Vitter proposes paying for the state research and management with federal funds derived from the current snapper management activities. Under the bill, each state could assume exclusive jurisdiction of the snapper fishery in its state waters, as well as in the exclusive economic zone extending from its shores, which may dissuade cooperative efforts to manage a species that has no regard for state boundary lines. For more information: S. 105 text: https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/105/text?q=%7B%22search%22%3A%5B%22snapper%22%5D%7D; Bob Jones’ quote available at http://gulfseafoodnews.com/2015/03/25/managers-propose-controversial-plan-for-red-snapper-fishery/; Gulf of Mexico Reef Fish Shareholders’ Alliance Press Release: http://shareholdersalliance.org/documents/SnapperTakeover.pdf

20:02:03: AS EXPECTED, PFMC VOTES TO CLOSE REMAINING 2014-15, ALL OF 2015-16 WEST COAST SARDINE FISHERY; CHILE ALSO CLOSES SARDINE FISHERY: Pacific Fisheries Management Council (PFMC) voted this week to shut down the West coast sardine fishery after assessments confirmed that stocks currently fall below the minimum biomass required to sustain a directed fishery. PFMC subsequently recommended closing what remains of the 2014-15 season immediately. Regulations require an abundance measure of at least 150 metric tons to permit sardine fishing; this year’s assessment came in closer to 100 metric tons. This represents a decline from a record biomass assessment of close to 1 million metric tons in 2006. Incidental bycatch of sardines will be permitted in other commercial fisheries, such as mackerel, herring and market squid, allaying fears that
those fisheries would be shut down as a precautionary measure. PFMC also allowed a small tribal sardine fishery in Washington.

PFMC’s press release attributed the decline in sardines to natural population swings and ocean conditions; it did not blame fishing practices for the population decline. The industry sees the closure as evidence that the current management scheme is an effective one, by limiting fishing during times of natural population decline as to pave the way for natural repopulation.

The move comes at nearly the same time as Chile imposed an all-out ban on its sardine fishery in the Biobio region. A stock assessment there found a higher incidence of smaller fish, contributing to an overall reduction in biomass. The ban was imposed this week and will be effective through April 17. Eight of Chile’s national fisheries were recently declared in a state of collapse or exhaustion. For more information: U.S. closure: http://www.pcouncil.org/2015/04/36387/council-votes-to-close-2015-2016-pacific-sardine-fishery/; Chile closure: http://www.undercurrentnews.com/2015/04/14/chile-closes-sardine-anchovy-fishing-in-bio-bio-region/; http://www.seafoodnews.com/Story/971660/Editors-View-Pacific-Sardine-Closure-Shows-Management-Works-but-Oceana-and-Pew-Wont-Accept-That (Subscribers Only)

20:02/04: USDA TO PROPOSE ORGANIC STANDARDS FOR FARMED SEAFOOD: The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced this week that it will be promulgate draft standards by which aquaculture operations in the U.S. would label their products "Organic." The standards will be published by year’s end. The move is of concern to commercial fishermen, who provide wild seafood that may compete for shelf space, and ultimately market share, with "organically" farmed products. Whether an “organic” product is more healthful or sustainable than a wild product is not indicated by typical USDA-approved organic labeling. However, there are myriad issues with the current state of ocean aquaculture, long-reported by Sublegals, that indicate farmed fish fitness for human consumption is less than that of equivalent wild-caught seafood products. These include problems with net- pen escapes which impact native stocks, genesis and transmission of disease and parasites into the wild, antibiotic and pesticide use, and feed sources.

USDA is faced with several concerns in determining exactly what constitutes an organically farmed seafood product, including whether the product was raised entirely on organic feed (i.e., no GMO feeds, such as from soy or yeast) and whether environmental effects of the aquaculture operation should impact achievement of “organic” status. Moreover, USDA is advised on the proposed standards by the organic aquaculture industry itself, a conflict of interest that will call into question the adequacy of the standards once they are published.

The Alaska fishing industry had sought at one time to have the state’s wild-caught salmon as “organic,” but that ran into stiff opposition from organic growers who insisted organic certification could only be for products where production is under complete control. While it is true that production of all organically-labelled products (USDA certified) are not under complete human control, such as honey, the organic growers, nevertheless, prevailed in blocking an organic label for wild salmon. In comments to the USDA’s organic standards board, PCFFA suggested the creation of a “wild” label to take in products naturally-produced but from the wild. That strategy did not succeed, either. The U.S. fishing industry is represented on the organic standards board by fisherwoman Anne Mosness of Bellingham who has fought efforts of the aquaculture industry to get their products certified as organic.

Currently Canada and European nations have more lax standards allowing the organic label to be applied to aquaculture products whether or not they are in fact organic. These are allowed to be sold in many states with the organic label, even though they are not USDA certified. In California, as a result of legislation carried by former State Senator (now Congresswoman) Jackie Speier, only fish with a USDA certification can be sold as “organic” in the state. USDA is expected to soon release draft regulations for public comment. It is uncertain how long it will take until final regulations are put in place. For more information, see the 16 April AP Seattle Times story: http://www.seattletimes.com/nation-world/usda-to-propose-standards-for-organic-seafood-raised-in-us; the PBS Newsour piece at: http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/usda-propose-standards-organic-seafood-raised-u-s/; and the
20:02/05: PFMC SETS SALMON SEASON; SEPTEMBER COMMERCIAL FISHERY IN CALIFORNIA TO REMAIN OPEN: The Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) last week finalized its recommendation to the National Marine Fishery Service (NMFS) on the 2015-2016 commercial, recreational and tribal salmon fisheries for California, Oregon and Washington. The final season reflects strong ocean abundance forecasts balanced against a concern for those stocks on the Endangered Species list, including Sacramento River Winter Run Chinook (SRWC). Concerns about impacts on age-2 SRWC, which have minimal contact with the fleet, fueled concerns in California and Oregon that PFMC would shut down California’s September fishery completely. Successful negotiations between state and federal biologists and the fishermen and women comprising PFMC’s Salmon Advisory Subpanel averted that crisis. The final season has been characterized as featuring “surgical carve-outs,” with portions of June and July closed in exchange for at least some fishing in September. Actual closures vary by management zone along the coast. For more information: http://www.pcouncil.org/2015/04/36482/draft-council-adopted-salmon-management-measures2015/; http://www.currypilot.com/News/Local-News/Fish-on-130-day-salmon-season

20:02/06: CLIMATE CHANGE CAUSING HABITAT REDISTRIBUTION; FISHERIES THREATENED: British fisheries in the North Sea are realizing the effects of climate change on fish stocks, and the effects are not good. A recent study found that plaice, lemon sole, and haddock are redistributing their ranges northward to account for a 1.3° Celsius increase in North Sea temperature over the last 30 years. The subject species evolved to inhabit the shallow, muddy bottom of the southern North Sea. Unfortunately, the seafloor becomes rockier and deeper at higher latitudes, and these fish are not adapted to that terrain. “[T]here’s really not anywhere to go. They’re kind of squeezed off the edge of a cliff,” said study author Dr Steve Simpson of Exeter University. “In terms of being commercially viable, I doubt these fisheries can continue for much longer.” The study notes that landings of cold-adapted species reduced by about 50% since the 1980s. For more information: http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/apr/13/plaice-fish-risk-depletion-rising-temperatures

20:02/07: FOOD POLICY WATCHDOG FILES PETITIONS TO BLOCK GMO SALMON: National food policy organization Food & Water Watch filed this week two petitions that seek to block the U.S. Food & Drug Administration’s approval for human consumption of a genetically modified Atlantic salmon. The salmon, branded as AquAdvantage by seafood company AquaBounty, is modified to grow faster than its natural counterparts, such that it would be ready for market much sooner than the four years necessary for a natural salmon to reach marketable size. Food & Water Watch filed both a Food Additive Petition and a Citizen Petition, wherein it argues that the GMO salmon is injurious to human health and should be prohibited as a food additive. AquaBounty’s initial application for approval of the AquAdvantage salmon is still in review with FDA. For more information: http://www.seafoodnews.com/Story/971486/Two-Food-and-Water-Watch-Petitions-Will-Try-to-Derail-AquaAdvantage-Salmon-at-FDA

20:02/08: NEW ENGLAND COD STOCKS DEPLETED; FEDERAL FISHERY RESTRICTIONS TO CONTINUE: Cod fishing restrictions will remain in place for at least another year, according to the Maine Division of Marine Fisheries. Under the restrictions, which were imposed last November, recreational fishermen are prohibited from landing or retaining cod. Commercial fishing operations saw their trip limit reduced from 800 to 200 pounds. The cod fishery in New England is severely depleted. Ocean abundance assessments estimate the stock at only 3-4% of that which is required to sustain a fishery. For more information: http://www.patriotledger.com/article/20150415/NEWS/150417735/12662/NEWS
20:02/09: FEDERAL FISHERIES MANAGER: U.S. OVERFISHING AT ALL-TIME LOW: The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued this week its annual fisheries report to Congress, in which it declared that overfishing in the U.S. is at an all-time low and that domestic stocks are generally healthy. Only 16% of national fisheries are currently characterized as overfished. NMFS credits the science-based management approach implemented under the Magnuson-Stevens Act as the true driver of U.S. fisheries’ achievement of sustainability. For more information: http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/mediacenter/2015/04/04_StatusofStocks2015.html

20:02/10: LARGE TURN-OUT TO HONOR GRADER: Over 300 people turned out at the San Francisco Bay Model in Sausalito last Friday evening, 10 April, to celebrate Zeke Grader’s 40-year career as executive director for the PCFFA and IFR. Individuals came from Maine and Connecticut, Washington, DC and Texas, Anchorage, Vancouver, BC, Seattle and San Diego in a celebration for Grader, but for much of the work done by PCFFA and IFR, as well. On hand were members of the fishing fleet, along with public officials, family and friends.

Emceed by former Gulf of the Farallones Sanctuary Manager Ed Ueber, it featured tributes from Congressman Jared Huffman, who was on hand with former Congresswoman Lynn Woolsey, with videos from former Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and Congressman Mike Thompson. It also featured a few words from his mentor, Bill Kier, along with two of IFR’s first AmeriCorps public policy interns, Ingrid Morken and Molly Liedke, along with others. A month earlier, Grader has honored by Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and former Congressman George Miller when he was presented a lifetime achievement award by The Bay Institute. For more information, see the article by Dan Bacher in The Daily Kos at: http://www.dailykos.com/story/2015/04/12/1377266--Fishery-Legend-Zeke-Grader-PCFFA-Executive-Director-Honored-At-Sausalito-Gathering, also see the interview of Grader from last year by former California Resources Secretary Huey Johnson at: http://theforcesofnature.com/movies/zeke-grader-2.

YOUR NEWS, COMMENTS, CORRECTIONS: Submit your news items, comments or any corrections to Editor at: tслоane@ifrfish.org, or call the IFR/PCFFA office with the news and a source at either: (415) 561-FISH (Southwest Office) or (541) 689-2000 (Northwest Office). If you have any trouble subscribing or unsubscribing, contact IFR/PCFFA directly at: tслоane@ifrfish.org. “Sublegals” is a registered trademark of the Institute for Fisheries Resources. All rights to the use of these trademarks are reserved to IFR. This publication, however, may be freely reproduced and circulated without copyright restriction. Articles taken from Fishlink Sublegals may be freely reposted or reprinted with attribution to “Fishlink Sublegals.” If you are receiving this as a subscriber, please feel free to pass it on to your colleagues.

####