"It was always the biggest fish I caught that got away."

-- Eugene Field

**IN THIS ISSUE**

20:25/01: Shell Oil Abandons Artic Drilling ........................................................................1
20:25/02: Drought Relief Legislation Before Senate Committee 8 October ..........................2
20:25/03: Klamath Salmon Healthier after Trinity Water Releases .....................................2
20:25/04: National Fish Hatchery to Transport Chinook to McCloud River ..........................2
20:25/05: SoCal Inaugurates First Restaurant Supported Fishery Program .........................3
20:25/06: 10th Circuit Court of Appeals to Review ESA Provisions ......................................3
20:25/08: Oregon Brewery First to Win “Salmon Safe” Award .............................................4
20:25/09: Culling of Cormorants in Full Swing On Columbia River .......................................5
20:25/10: Giant Sequoias Threatened by Drought .................................................................5

**20:25/01. SHELL OIL ABANDONS ARCTIC DRILLING OPERATIONS:** In a move widely hailed as a victory for environmental interests, Shell Oil has now abandoned exploratory drilling efforts in the U.S. portion of the Chukchi Sea off Alaska’s northwestern coast. Environmental protesters have opposed the operation due to its potential to threaten the pristine ecosystems of the far North, including potential repercussions for Alaska’s economically crucial fish stocks. Those opponents notably staged an on-the-water attempt to hinder a Shell icebreaker from leaving port in late July.

Shell’s foray has been plagued with accidents, mishaps, governmental reviews, and the grounding of one of its rigs, at several points during the exploration. The final straw for the corporation came when their exploratory deep drilling failed to return any oil. In total, Shell spent more than $7 billion on the project in hopes of establishing a new series of oil fields in the region. Experts projected that if the enterprise had succeeded, Shell’s operation would likely have been the first among many, as other energy companies would have sought leases to exploit the area’s potentially vast reserves of oil and natural gas.

**For more information** on Shell Oil’s abandoned efforts to drill in the Chukchi Sea, see the [29 September article from Associated Press](#).
20:25/02. DROUGHT RELIEF LEGISLATION BEFORE SENATE ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE 8 OCTOBER: The Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources is set to hear competing drought relief bills specific to California on Thursday, 8 October, alongside other bills on Alaskan and west-wide water issues. Of note for the west coast salmon community are H.R. 2898 by Representative David Valadao (R-CA), and S. 1894, by Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Barbara Boxer (D-CA). A drought relief bill by Rep. Jared Huffman (D-CA) also exists but will not be heard on 8 October. PCFFA is strongly opposed to H.R. 2898, which would eviscerate Endangered Species Act protections for winter-run Chinook salmon in the Sacramento River. Those protections also serve Sacramento River fall run Chinook, the economically valuable salmon caught in California, Oregon and Washington’s commercial fisheries. Many expect that the Committee may attempt to craft a compromise bill between H.R. 2898 and S. 1894, which could result in rolling back salmon protections. Rep. Huffman’s bill, which promoted water conservation and recycling projects to fend off the impacts of the drought, was not selected for consideration by the Republican-controlled Committee.

For more information on the hearing, the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources website. See also this 30 September Tacoma News Tribune Op/Ed by Seattle-based commercial fisherman and PCFFA Board member Jowl Kawahara.

20:25/03. HEALTH OF KLAMATH SALMON REBOUNDS AFTER TRINITY WATER RELEASE: After a month of releasing cooler waters into the Klamath River system from the Trinity Dam, Klamath salmon are showing signs of renewed health and vigor. Earlier this year, warmer water in the river resulting from high summer temperatures threatened spawning conditions and encouraged the growth of “ich,” a single-celled parasite that inhibits salmon respiration, and which was a key cause of a massive fish kill in 2002. State officials authorized the release of nearly 51,000 acre-feet of cooler water from behind the Trinity Dam in order to protect the fish and discourage the growth of these parasites.

Yurok Tribe biologists confirmed the effectiveness of the releases in a recent study, stating that the releases appeared to be working and that only a minimal number of fish showed signs of “ich” afterwards. The team likewise noted that the release followed a similar intervention last year, and the trend towards healthier salmon populations seems to be growing as a result.

Similar releases have come under fire from industrial irrigation advocates, who claim that water from Northern California’s Cascade river systems should be used to support agricultural operations farther south. The evidence of the positive impacts of these controlled releases on Northern California’s endangered salmon populations is excellent news in the fishing community’s fight against agribusiness for these over-committed water resources.

For more information on the Trinity water releases and the health of Klamath salmon, see Will Houston’s 25 September Eureka Times-Standard article.

20:25/04. FEDS HATCH PLAN TO TRUCK WINTER-RUN CHINOOK TO MCCLOUD RIVER: In a complex and controversial plan, federal officials outlined their intent to transport winter-run Chinook salmon smolts from the Livingston Stone hatchery below Shasta Dam to previously inaccessible spawning habitat in the McCloud River above the dam. The plan involves careful trapping and subsequent loading of returning adult fish onto a fleet of trucks specially outfitted for the purpose, with the intent of repopulating the winter-run Chinook’s ancestral spawning streams rendered inaccessible by the dam for the past eight decades.
Officials envision the plan as an insurance policy against the loss of the winter-run. The McCloud was chosen because its waters have remained relatively cool even amid consistently record-setting high temperatures and desperately needed cool water releases from several inland reservoirs this year. Once the fish mature, a series of floating traps are envisioned to keep them from entering Shasta lake and reaching a dead end at the dam. The fish will then be trucked back out to the Sacramento River system.

Government estimates posit that a mere five per cent of winter-run smolts reach maturity and the ocean, making the winter-run of Chinook critically endangered. Advocates of the “trap and truck” program therefore hope that the captive population will provide enough of a boost to help ensure a vibrant winter-run in years to come. Opponents, on the other hand, paint the program as something of an expensive boondoggle. Time will tell how successful this ambitious plan will be.

For more information on the National Fish Hatchery’s fish transport plan, see this 24 September article by Ryan Sabalow in the Sacramento Bee.

20:25/05. SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA INAUGURATES CALIFORNIA’S FIRST RESTAURANT-SUPPORTED FISHERY PROGRAM: In a program labeled “Dock to Dish,” sixteen Santa Barbara commercial fishermen have joined a program to supply fresh local seafood directly to local chefs. Michael Cimarusti, co-owner and Executive Chef at the Los Angeles eatery Providence, masterminded the initiative with the goal of combining freshness, sustainability, and an emphasis on local marine economies.

Cimarusti particularly stresses the economics. He claims the program is meant to support local fishermen as much as it protects marine ecologies, and supply and profit sharing are intended to operate on a cooperative basis. Cimarusti says the program is meant to “revive a traditional ‘know your fisherman’ culture, which has all but disappeared here over the last few decades. It’s time to bring the incredible flavors, textures, and health benefits of locally harvested seafood back to our communities.”

Dock to Dish programs have been instituted elsewhere with some success, and Cimarusti’s program is based on a similar initiative in New York started in 2012. For now, the LA program will run in conjunction with Santa Barbara’s Community Supported Fishery operation, which aims to increase the distribution of fresh local catch while maintaining strict sustainability standards.

For more information on the new Dock to Dish program, see this 31 August press release from Dock to Dish Montauk.

20/25:06. 10TH CIRCUIT COURT OF APPEALS TO REVIEW ENDANGERED SPECIES ACT PROVISIONS: In a closely watched case for the environmental and fishing communities, a Federal appeals court has agreed to review a ruling by a federal District Court Judge that held that a population of Utah prairie dogs was not eligible for federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) protection due to their status as being present only in one state.

The District Court judge’s reasoning was based on the rationale that the ESA is grounded in the Federal government’s power to regulate interstate commerce. Since the removal of the prairie dogs in Utah was limited to only one state, and arguably had no connection to interstate commercial activity, the District Court Judge’s opinion removed protections for the species under the ESA.
Environmentalists, as well as fishermen that depend on fragile marine populations, are apprehensive about the implications for the ESA if the District Court ruling is allowed to stand, as the ESA as it stands plays a critical role in protecting threatened wildlife populations, as well as the habitat they share with more abundant species. In the case of Sacramento River Chinook salmon, for instance, ESA protections for the winter-run have been critical in ensuring an abundance of the fall-run Chinook salmon on which the commercial fishery is based. 

For more information, see this 28 September article from the New York Times.

20:25/07. EXPERT PANEL REVEALS FUNDAMENTAL FLAWS IN CALIFORNIA TUNNEL PLAN: A panel of experts convened to discuss the potential ecological and social impacts of California Governor Jerry Brown’s plan to build two massive water diversion tunnels underneath the San Francisco Bay Delta Estuary so as to convey Sacramento River water 250 miles south to the San Joaquin Valley voiced deep concern about the feasibility and net benefit of the project, which California votes rejected in its previous form back in 1982. Glaringly, the Tunnel Plan would convey an additional 250,000 acre-feet of water to San Joaquin Valley industrial irrigators and southern California cities at a cost of $16 billion – the equivalent of “16,000 acre feet of unreliable, untreated water per $1 billion of capital cost, an incredibly low return on investment. For comparison, the highest cost alternatives like desalination plants deliver over 50,000 acre feet of highly reliable, purified water for the same capital investment,” said Jeffrey Michael, Ph.D. of the University of the Pacific.

The project has devastating implications for central valley salmonids, which spawn in the two main rivers that feed the Delta Estuary. The “Twin Tunnels” would “jeopardize the continued existence of endangered and threatened species of fish and adversely modify their designated critical habitat by taking away freshwater flows for winter-run Chinook salmon, spring-run Chinook salmon,” said Robin Wright, Senior Counsel for Friends of the River. That is the same flow and same habitat that support fall-run Chinook salmon, on which California’s $1.4 billion commercial and recreational salmon fisheries are based. Much of the water that would eventually flow through the tunnels would actually come from the Trinity River, a tributary to the Klamath River, California’s second-largest salmon stream.

The Environmental Impact Statements for the Tunnel Plan is open for public comment until 30 October. Voice your opinion on the Tunnel Plan by email at BDCPComments@icfi.com, or by writing:

BDCP/California WaterFix Comments
P.O. Box 1919
Sacramento, CA 95812

For more information, see this 29 September Daily Kos article. This past week, several organizations, including IFR and PCFFA, have submitted public comments opposing the California Department of Water Resources’ Point of Diversion Change Petition. The point of diversion change is a critical step toward construction of the Tunnels. View a copy of our comments, submitted with our allies at the National Resources Defense Counsel as well as Restore the Delta, at the State Water Resources Control Board website.

20:25/08: OREGON BREWERY FIRST TO WIN “SALMON SAFE” APPROVAL: the Pacific Rivers Council has awarded Hopworks Urban Brewery, a microbrewery in Portland, the first-ever “Salmon Safe” certification issued to a beer making operation, making it the nation’s first beer that officially bolsters salmon populations simply by drinking it. The certification recognizes industrial operations that consciously take salmon into account in dealing with their
industrial refuse. Beer brewing is a water intensive operation that requires as much as four cans of water to produce one can of beer. Hopworks was awarded the Salmon Safe certification for treating all of the storm and wastewater that flows through its facility and back into salmon rivers that provide the breweries water.

For more information, see this 2 October Smithsonian Magazine article.

20/25:09. CULLINGS OF CORMORANTS IN FULL SWING ON COLUMBIA RIVER:
The controlled culling of cormorants continues on the Columbia River. No longer taking place under cover of darkness, Oregon Fish & Wildlife-sponsored hunters took to the Columbia River last week near Astoria in daylight. The cormorants have been tapped for population control principally to protect salmon runs, as the birds are opportunistic predators fond of snapping up juvenile salmon. The government has approved the removal of 11,000 cormorants for 2015.

For more information, see this 23 September article by Vince Patton on KUOW.org.

20/25:10. GIANT SEQUOIAS THREATENED BY DROUGHT: Fish are not the only sector of California’s wild heritage feeling the pinch from the drought. Scientists have begun to take note of increased deaths and illness among California’s iconic giant sequoias.

Scientists in the Giant Forest and Sequoia National Park have noted a sizeable amount of dead trees and brown, unhealthy foliage among specimens in both areas. Now that the drought is well into its fourth year and dry conditions continue to persist, tree biologists are hoping increased rains this coming winter will help alleviate some of the conditions threatening the giants.

Giant sequoias grow up to 300 feet tall, and each can syphon up to 800 gallons of water daily from aquifers already under stress from low levels and ever-demanding human use. Some of the longest-lived organisms on earth, the trees can live up to 3,000 years, and the once-widespread redwood forests of California are now reduced to a few regions after logging interests devoured masses of the trees in the 19th and 20th Century building booms in the state.

For more information, see this 24 September article on the threat the drought poses to California’s ancient giants from the Associated Press.

YOUR NEWS, COMMENTS, CORRECTIONS: Submit your news items, comments or any corrections to Editor at: tsloane@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: tsloane@ifrfish.org. Sublegals is a weekly fisheries news bulletin service of Fishlink. “Fishlink” and “Sublegals” are registered trademarks of the Institute for Fisheries Resources. All rights to the use of these trademarks are reserved to IFR. All photos are by IFR unless otherwise accredited. 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.

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