“Fishing is much more than fish. It is an occasion when we may return to the fine simplicity of our forefathers.”
-- Herbert Hoover

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20:31/01. WEST COAST CRAB UPDATES: OREGON CLOSURE, CALIFORNIA TESTING RESULTS, LEGISLATIVE HEARING SCHEDULED: Now that the normal District 10 Dungeness crab commercial opener has passed with a season delay due to the presence of unsafe levels of domoic acid in crabs sampled off the California coast, Sublegals intends to provide weekly updates on what’s happening with D-crab testing and any news on the possibility and procedure for opening the season.

The Oregon Department of Fish & Game announced this week that the southern portion of the Oregon coast would be closed to crabbing for the foreseeable future due to domoic acid levels. The closure spans the coast from Heceta Head south to the California border, and covers both recreational and commercial crabbing. The closure runs in tandem with closures along the entire California coast, as well as a closure north of the Columbia River, in Washington’s Willapa Bay.

California released its most recent round of domoic acid test results this week, which suggest a downward trend in the presence of domoic acid in the crab species sampled. However, the levels are not yet low enough to warrant increased sampling as a precursor to opening the Dungeness crabbing season, and health advisories remain in place warning against
human consumption of any crab species from Santa Barbara County to the Oregon border, as well as against consuming bivalve shellfish from Humboldt or Del Norte counties. In a positive sign, the California Department of Public Health has lifted advisories against consuming mussels, clams, anchovies and sardines harvested in the Santa Cruz, Monterey, or Santa Barbara County areas, as domoic acid levels in those species are now at safe levels.

The California Joint Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture posted noticed for a hearing this week on the status of the Dungeness crab fishery and the impact of the domoic acid delay on the fleet. It will feature a panel of fishing industry representatives, and will provide the fleet an opportunity to discuss the impacts of the season delay. The meeting will occur on 3 December in Santa Rosa. See the link below for details on the hearing.

For more information, see this 18 November Umpqua Post article on the Oregon closure. California’s domoic acid testing results are available at the Department of Public Health’s website, and see this 13 November Food Safety News article for information on the closures and advisories. Details on the Dungeness crab Legislative hearing are available at the IFR website. To sign up for PCFFA & IFR’s domoic acid update e-newsletter, click here.

20:31/02. FDA APPROVES SALMON AS FIRST GMO MEAT FOR HUMAN CONSUMPTION: On 19 November, the U.S. Food & Drug Administration approved the first genetically modified animal product for human consumption, a GMO salmon engineered by scientists at the marine food firm AquaBounty Technologies. Because modified DNA is considered a drug under the federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act, the FDA was required to review and approve the product as fit for human consumption in a process that took approximately 20 years. The approval comes with the conditions that the GMO salmon is not raised on U.S. soil – production is limited to land-based aquaculture facilities in Canada and Panama, ostensibly to prevent escaped fish from infiltrating U.S. natural salmon runs and destroying the genetic integrity of those stocks. As an additional safeguard, the GMO salmon are supposedly modified in a way that makes them incapable of spawning. AquaBounty’s salmon are engineered to grow at a much faster rate than their wild and unmodified farmed counterparts, making them cheaper to raise and more efficient to bring to market.

FDA released two sets of permissive GMO labeling guidelines along with the GMO salmon approval, one set for plant products, and the other for animal products. These provide suggestions on how manufacturers could go about voluntarily informing the public whether their products contain GMO ingredients, an increasingly popular consumer concern, but one which may not necessarily move industrial food businesses to action.

PCFFA and IFR have opposed the production of GMO farmed salmon that are sure to usurp market share from healthier, more ecologically responsible wild-caught salmon. Additionally, the sterilization process used is only about 95% effective, and the chances that these fish will ultimately escape to the wild are high – and indeed, supposedly sterile farmed Atlantic salmon have already escaped from net pens along the Pacific coast and are starting to out-compete, reproduce and colonize several streams in British Columbia. The move to produce these fish outside of the U.S. will also impact U.S. fishing jobs without creating domestic replacements. PCFFA and IFR support efforts advocating for consumers’ right to know the ingredients in their food, although we are skeptical that the permissive GMO labeling requirements proposed by the FDA will result in any new information to consumers.

For more information, see this 19 November Business Insider article on the FDA approval, and this March 2014 Fishermen’s News column on the impacts of GMO salmon on the U.S. fishing industry. For the FDA’s 19 November Press Release see here.
To get involved, you may submit comments on the proposed GMO labeling programs by checking out the regulations.gov materials on the proposed guidance.

20:31/03. COSTCO REMOVES ANTIBIOTIC-TAINTED SALMON FROM SHELVES: In a move with implications for the marketability of farmed fish, Costco, the largest U.S. retailer of organic foods, has decided to remove a huge portion of salmon farmed in Chile from its shelves. Costco currently procures 90% of its salmon from farms in Chile, and will reduce that number to 40% under the new policy, which stems from increased consumer awareness of the dangers of treating farmed meat products with human drugs. Those dangers include an increase in the number of antibiotic-resistant organisms that could attack humans and the associated spread of infectious diseases. Costco will supplement its salmon purchases with farmed fish from Norway. Chilean salmon farms use 350 times more antibiotics than their Norwegian counterparts, largely because Norway has developed vaccines to inoculate farmed salmon before diseases hit their fish. Chile has been unsuccessful in developing such vaccines. By far the safest, most ecologically responsible means of producing salmon is to let nature take its course. Local, wild-caught salmon is sustainably harvested and not prone to the constant push and pull of medicating salmon to prevent or treat disease.

For more information, see this 18 November Natural News article.

20:31/04. PFMC COMMENTS ON PENDING DROUGHT LEGISLATION AND IMPACTS ON SALMON: In response to a Congressional request for information from Representatives Jared Huffman (D-CA) and Mike Thompson (D-CA), the Pacific Fishery Management Council has analyzed and commented on three pending drought relief bills making their way through Congress, specifically with regard to impacts of each bill on salmon populations on the West Coast. The PFMC generally supports the provisions of H.R. 2983/S. 1837 (co-sponsored by Rep. Huffman and Senator Barbara Boxer (D-CA)), although that bill has not gained much traction in Congress.

The PFMC expressed support for some provisions of S. 1894 (co-sponsored by Senators Boxer and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)), although it expressed concern with provisions of that bill that call for more reservoirs and increased pumping from the San Francisco Bay Delta Estuary.

The Council, however, opposes H.R. 2898 (Rep. David Valadao, (R-CA)), noting that it “appears primarily aimed at increasing water for agricultural interests at the expense of fish by permanently weakening Federal and state endangered species protections.” The PFMC noted that the negative impacts of H.R. 2898 could have far-reaching effects on salmon fisheries in Oregon and Washington, in addition to California, as many of the fish originating in California’s Central Valley are caught off the entire West Coast.

For more information, read the 13 November letter from Rep. Huffman and Thompson, which contains the analysis from the PFMC.

20:31/05. NPR STORY HIGHLIGHTS DEVASTATING EFFECT OF DROUGHT ON WINTER-RUN CHINOOK: National Public Radio (NPR) has joined the chorus of voices raising the alarm about the destructive effect of California’s historic drought on the dwindling numbers of winter-run Chinook in the Sacramento River Basin.
NPR’s Richard Gonzalez noted in his report, made on-site from the Sacramento River Delta, that this year’s winter-run numbers are abysmal, even lower than 2014’s, which were widely acknowledged by biologists to be near extinction levels.

The NPR report also highlights the strong correlation between water mismanagement and the destruction of salmon runs, with observers and advocacy groups placing blame for the dwindling numbers of California Chinook squarely on the shoulders of industrial irrigators and the legislators and lobbyists who pander to their interests.

For more information on the ongoing plight of California’s winter run Chinook, listen to Gonzalez’s report, or read a partial transcript, of the 18 November NPR piece here.

20:31/06. NATIVE TRIBES FEEL THE EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON SMALL SALMON OPERATIONS: An Oregon report this week draws attention to some of the communities that are most integrally connected to Pacific coast salmon fisheries, yet are also often forgotten in the salmon wars: indigenous Tribes of California, Oregon, and Washington. Ashley Ahearn of KLCC in Eugene, Oregon describes the plight of Quinault Tribesman on the eponymous Quinault River. With salmon runs there dwindling as they are all over the Pacific coast, Tribal fishermen find their ancestral fishing claims worth less and less every year, and fear that the loss of the salmon runs could disrupt a way of life that they have practiced for thousands of years.

California fishermen, legislators, and ecological warriors are no stranger to the interests of native Tribes either, with groups like the Hoop, Winnemem Wintu, and Yurok Tribes playing pivotal roles in the fight to restore the watersheds of river systems like the Klamath, Shasta, and upper Sacramento Rivers. Ahearn’s report, however, puts the plight of the Quinault Tribe fishermen in a more global context: the fight against climate change. The Quinault fishermen in Ahearn’s piece think their shrinking catch comes as a direct result of atmospheric carbon levels and the rising water temperatures connected to them. These Tribesmen are calling on world leaders to heed the warnings of groups like theirs in the upcoming Paris climate talks, and to take serious action to stem the tide of global warming.

For more information on the concerns of the Quinault and their hopes for the Paris climate summit, see Ashley Ahearn’s 18 November piece for KLCC radio here.

20:31/07. WARMING WATERS ALSO DANGEROUS TO SOCKEYE RUNS: California’s Chinook are not the only salmon species imperiled by rising water temperatures. Sockeye runs in the Columbia River have also experienced higher than normal die-off rates.

Observers have connected the unseasonably high temperatures this past summer in Oregon and Washington to the high fatality rates of spawning sockeye, but also lay some blame at the feet of power station operators storing warmer water behind dams. Until recently, the salmon populations of Oregon and Washington have been considered more secure than the threatened California fisheries, but these new developments show that ultimately more northerly sockeye runs face the same sort of pressures put on their southerly cousins.

For more information on this year’s die off of Columbia River sockeye, see this 17 November report by Kate Prengaman in the Yakima Herald.

20:31/08. CARME RIVER SURGES THROUGH NEW COURSE AFTER CALIFORNIA’S LARGEST DAM REMOVAL: The removal of the San Clemente Dam in eastern Monterey County has culminated in a new course for the Carmel River now that the
ambitious restoration project is complete. The dam, built in 1920, has for decades been considered one of California’s prime candidates for removal and watercourse restoration as it long ceased to serve any useful purpose and was becoming structurally unsound.

The removal project began in 2013, and cost more than $80 million, but has resulted in much excitement over the recreational and conservation possibilities in a revitalized Carmel River watershed. The project has been California’s largest dam removal effort to date, and advocates hope that it may serve as a model for other communities to push for habitat restoration for fish and other wildlife. Officials say that fishing along the new river’s course will likely go forward on a catch-and-release basis for some years, but ultimately hope that the river’s renewed flows will host populations that can support a healthy sport fishery.

For more information on the removal of the San Clemente Dam and the new life of the Carmel River, see this 17 November report from Monterey County KSBW TV.

20:31/09. BIOLOGISTS ADDRESS CONCERNS OVER INCREASED WHITE SHARK NUMBERS OFF CALIFORNIA COAST: Recent reports of prominent great white shark activity off of populated areas of the Northern California coast have raised concerns among the public about the safety of recreation in those waters, but biologists have cited data showing little cause for particular concern.

Recent sighting of groups of 20 or more white sharks in the waters near San Francisco, Pacifica, and Half Moon Bay have led some to speculate that swimming, surfing, or boating in areas near the Golden Gate may be riskier this year than usual. A popular viral video, shared widely on social media in October, showed a shark fatally attacking a sea lion mere feet from Alcatraz island, a popular San Francisco Bay tourist destination.

Biologists from the Parks Conservancy attached to the Golden Gate National Recreation Area claim that these sightings, while dramatic, do not support an actual increase in documented human encounters with or fatalities due to white sharks, and should not cause too much concern in members of the public who enjoy the ocean. They cite data that 2015 has not featured a statistical increase in human-shark encounters, which remain steady at about two per year, and so far has not yielded any fatalities, which typically occur about once a decade. They note that white shark gatherings of the size seen off of Pacifica and Ocean Beach are typical this time of year near the Farallon Islands, but that this year’s warmer inshore currents as a result of the El Niño pattern may be driving the sharks closer to land in search of food. As always, caution is called for when enjoying the ocean, but these findings may help allay some concerns and forestall overreactions from the public and government officials.

For more information on increased white shark sightings and the data behind shark encounters in California, see this report by Curran White from the December 2015 edition of the Parks Conservancy Newsletter.

20:31/10. NMFS RENEWS APPROVAL FOR NAVY SONAR TESTING OFF PACIFIC COAST. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) announced approval this week for continued sonar and other equipment testing in the waters off of Washington State. The Navy maintains it requires the testing in order to maintain force readiness for the fleet, while marine protection advocates have expressed concerns about the tests’ effects on sea life -- marine mammals in particular, many of which use natural sonar abilities to communicate.

NMFS officials have acknowledged that, while it is impossible to ensure no harm whatsoever to marine life, the Navy selects its testing areas so as to minimize any potential for
damage to sensitive species. The Navy has previously agreed to refrain from testing in areas requiring protection in the waters off of Hawaii and California amid similar concerns from environmental groups, but admits that some damage to whales and other marine mammals may still occur as collateral from the current testing regime. These tests are slated to continue through 2020.

For more information, see this 13 November article by Phuong Le in the Peninsula Daily News.

20:31/11. MOSS LANDING MAN SENTENCED IN SEA OTTER SHOOTING ATTEMPT: A 71 year-old Moss Landing, California, resident has been sentenced to 150 hours of community service for shooting an air rifle at a sea otter pup last December. The man stated that he was annoyed at the pup’s continuous wailing. Fortunately, he did not injure the animal.

Sea otters are protected by both the Endangered Species Act (ESA) and the Marine Mammal Protection Act (MMPA). These federal statutes are designed to protect threatened species as irreplaceable parts of our natural heritage, and officials pointed out that the protections of these statutes apply even to an unsuccessful attempt to harm endangered animals. The sea otters are not only an icon of Central California marine life, attracting tourists and wildlife lovers from all over the world, they have also been one of the most visible success stories of the federal protective regime, rebounding to more than 3,000 individuals from a colony of about 50 in the 1930s.

For more information, see this 12 November report by Stephen Baxter in the Santa Cruz Sentinel.

20:31/12. A SPECIAL NOTE ON WORLD FISHERIES DAY, 21 NOVEMBER, FROM IFR PRESIDENT PIETRO PARAVANNO: Here we are -- a special day to celebrate fisheries and fishermen on November 21. As each year passes, we increase our appreciation and reasons for celebrating this occurrence. Each year brings us news — good or bad — about the fisheries in the vast oceans. This occasion offers us a time to celebrate and reflect on our involvement and responsibility with the fish resources and with the people that bring us the bounty of the oceans.

The origin of World Fisheries Day occurred on the same day that an international fishermen’s organization was formed in New Delhi, India. The World Fisheries Forum (WFF) was established on November 21, 1997. On that day, fishing representatives from 18 countries signed a declaration advocating for a global mandate of sustainable fishing practices and policies. The creation of WFF was founded on the common principles of sustaining the fishing communities, sustaining the fisheries, social justice, and preserving the cultural history of fish harvesters and fish workers. . .

To read the rest of President Parravano’s message, click this link to the IFR website.

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
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