21:07/01: 2016 Salmon Projections Point to Dismal Fishing Season ........................................... 1
21:07/02: Crab Update: Congressmen, Fishermen Make Case for Disaster Relief ......................... 2
21:07/03: CA Legislature to Hold Hearing on Pending Delta Decisions ........................................ 3
21:07/04: Recent Tests Show B.C. Salmon Free of Fukushima Radiation ..................................... 3
21:07/05: Senator Pushes for Hatchery Genetic Management Plans ............................................. 3
21:07/06: Fishing, Environmental Groups Sue over Weak Water Protections ............................ 4
21:07/07: Administration to Propose Offshore Drilling Plan for Atlantic Coast .......................... 4

21:07/01. 2016 SALMON PROJECTIONS POINT TO DISMAL FISHING SEASON:
Pacific Fishery Management Council (PFMC) projections for ocean abundance of Chinook salmon out of California’s Central Valley and Klamath River watersheds were released last week and suggest another poor salmon season for California commercial fishermen. Ocean abundance for Central Valley Chinook salmon is estimated at 299,600 adult fish, with modelers suggesting that the prediction might be overly optimistic. That abundance figure represents about half of last year’s Central Valley projection. Klamath River projections came in at 142,000, about a third of last year’s prediction.

About 150 commercial and recreational salmon fishermen attended a 2 March meeting of the California Ocean Salmon Project, which assembles the salmon ocean abundance predictions. The low abundance levels will influence the time and area over which the 2016 salmon fishery extends, and the meeting was the first opportunity for many in the industry to consider possible season
permutations, which won’t be finalized by the PFMC until its April meeting. It is clear from the small populations and from increased concerns for endangered salmon populations that the season will be severely restricted, another blow to an industry already on its heels from the unprecedented closure of the Dungeness crab season.

For more information, see this 29 February Sacramento Bee article on the dismal abundance numbers, this 2 March Santa Rosa Press-Democrat article on the meeting, and this 2 March KCRA Sacramento story. Photo of the Sacramento Salmon Superhighway by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, public domain.

21:07/02. CRAB UPDATE: CONGRESSMEN, FISHERMEN MAKE THEIR CASE FOR CRAB DISASTER RELIEF: Congressional Representatives from two California coastal districts and commercial fishermen turned out on Friday 4 March at San Francisco’s Fishermen’s Wharf to make the case for a federal fishery disaster relief declaration and appropriation designed to mitigate impacts on the fishing industry from the unprecedented closure of the Rock and Dungeness crab fisheries in California. The commercial fishing industry is reeling from the continued closure of one of the state’s most productive fisheries due to the persistent presence of domoic acid in waters off the state. Although a state-run testing program has shown that crabs are beginning to clean up, the $65 million-per-year commercial fishery remains closed.

Representatives Jackie Speier and Jared Huffman co-authored an appropriations bill introduced this week that triggers when the Department of Commerce issues a fishery disaster declaration. The bill, which provides $138 million to offset losses to commercial fishermen, processors and other allied industries, and another $6 million for domoic acid research and sampling, will face a hard fight in this fractured Congress. But that didn’t stop Representative Speier from making the case: “Commercial fishermen and local businesses have been economically devastated by the closure of the Dungeness crab season,” she said in a statement when the bill was released Thursday. “Some of them are on the brink of losing their boats.”

Representative Huffman reiterated the call at a press conference Friday: “Fishermen have set the gold standard for how fisheries ought to be managed. They have done nothing wrong,” he said at the press conference on Friday. “This is one of the detrimental effects we’ve seen from climate change.” PCFFA Board member and San Francisco Community Fishing Association President Larry Collins made clear that “this is devastating for the California fishing fleet,” and suggested that the decline of the commercial fishing fleet will impact all Californians eventually, noting that “it’s a food security issue for the state.”

For more information, see Sublegals 21:05/01, and this 3 March KRON4 article. Photo of Reps. Speier and Huffman and commercial fishing industry representative Larry Collins by Evan Wynns.
21:07/03. CA LEGISLATURE TO HOLD HEARING ON PENDING DELTA DECISIONS: California State Senator Lois Wolk is set to hold on 11 March an oversight hearing on several monumental decisions set to be made that will dictate the future of the San Francisco Bay Delta Estuary, and the species, people, and industries that depend on it. Over the next several months, federal fishery agencies and President Obama will likely finalize their positions on the proposed “Cal Water Fix,” a proposal to construct water export tunnels on the Sacramento River that will capture essential freshwater flows before they reach the Bay Delta Estuary so as to ship the water south to benefit industrial agribusinesses. The Tunnels will have enormous consequences for the salmon and salmon fishery that depend on ample freshwater flowing through the Delta, which enables both juvenile and adult Chinook salmon to complete the migratory portions of their life cycle. Those same freshwater flows also have impacts on the abundance of Dungeness crab and herring populations.

To get involved, attend the hearing, which is entitled “Pending Delta Decisions and their Potential Economic and Other Impacts on San Francisco & the Bay Area.” It takes place at 10:00 AM on Friday 11 March at the Milton Marks State Building, 455 Golden Gate Ave. San Francisco, CA. Public comments will be taken. Get out to the hearing to fight the Tunnels and to stand up and demand promised flows and promised healthy salmon, herring, and crab fisheries.

21:07/04. RECENT TESTS SHOW B.C. SALMON FREE OF FUKUSHIMA RADIATION: Despite having been found in seawater (albeit in minute trace amounts), recent tests by the School of Earth and Ocean Sciences at the University of Victoria in British Columbia, Canada, show that salmon and steelhead are free of the radionuclides indicative of radiation from the Fukushima nuclear disaster of 2011, in which radiation was released from a Japanese power plant destroyed by a massive earthquake and tsunami. Radiation from other sources, potentially including atmospheric weapons testing or the Chernobyl disaster, tested in at extremely low levels in seven fish, but the results of the study raised no health concerns. The study will continue, with Dr. Jay Cullen stating that his group will "continue to monitor the water and fish because this information is … useful for determining what the risk might be to the ecosystem or to humans who rely on fish."

For more information, see this 23 February The Globe & Mail article.

21:07/05. SENATOR PUSHES FOR HATCHERY GENETIC MANAGEMENT PLANS: Senator Maria Cantwell of Washington State is demanding accountability from the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for delays in finalizing Genetic Management Plans (GMP) for hatcheries operated by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS). GMPs are required under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) to protect the genetic diversity of endangered or threatened species raised in confinement, such as several runs of salmon and steelhead on the West Coast. Cantwell’s push to speed up the GMP process is fueled by a fear that the failure to promulgate the GMPs gives hatchery opponents a legal hook to shut down hatchery fish production, which could have devastating impacts for an already-struggling commercial fishing industry. Many GMPs have been languishing for as long as a decade,
waiting for final approval from NMFS. For their part, NMFS has stated that it will devote more resources to finalizing GMPs. So far NMFS has only approved 52 out of 391 Hatchery Genetic Management Plans.

For more information, see this 23 February press release from Senator Cantwell.

Photo of Coleman National Fish Hatchery by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, public domain.

21:07/06. COMMERCIAL FISHERMEN, ENVIRONMENTAL GROUPS SUE EPA OVER WEAK WA WATER PROTECTIONS: Fishing and environmental groups, including PCFFA and IFR, on 3 March filed a lawsuit and quickly moved for summary judgment against the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for failing to update Washington’s water pollution standards as required by the Clean Water Act. The standards have not been updated for over a decade, and are largely inaccurate because they are based on an underestimation of the amount of seafood potentially containing toxic materials, like PCBs, arsenic and mercury, that Washingtonians generally ingest.

The standards are supposed to protect human health, and are based on the amount of seafood an average Washingtonian eats annually. Because seafood bioaccumulates some toxins present in the water column, humans ultimately ingest the same pollutants that are in the water. The thinking goes that to adequately protect human health, water quality standards must restrict pollutants to the point that the average person would not ingest dangerous levels of pollutants by eating an average amount of seafood. In fact, these standards are supposed to protect the most vulnerable populations, i.e., those who eat more than state average amounts of seafood.

Unfortunately, Washington’s estimates of how much seafood a person in the State ingests are grossly inadequate, assuming that most people eat about one fish fillet per month. The EPA agrees that this greatly underestimates the amount of seafood many people eat, especially Native American Tribes that depend on seafood as the primary source of their protein (and also coastal commercial fishing families). However, EPA has failed to force the Washington Department of Ecology to revise the fish consumption standards – hence the lawsuit. “EPA’s inaction gives a pass to polluters and allows too much toxic water pollution,” said Glen Spain, PCFFA’s Northwest Regional Director. “This hurts the livelihoods of fish-dependent families, communities, and industries.”

For more information, see this 2 March press release from Puget Soundkeeper. The Plaintiffs’ complaint and motion for summary judgment are also available from the Puget Soundkeeper website.

21:07/07: ADMINISTRATION TO PROPOSE OFFSHORE DRILLING PLAN FOR ATLANTIC COAST: President Obama’s Administration is expected in the coming weeks to unveil a proposal to open federal waters in the southern Atlantic to offshore oil and gas drilling for the first time, spurring local residents to organize opposition. The Department of the Interior’s plan would parcel out federal waters off of Georgia, Virginia and North and South Carolina, and auction leases for the drilling rights. While state legislators are mostly enamored of the scheme, only Virginia Lieutenant Governor Ralph S. Northam has publicly voiced his opposition. But coastal residents see the dangers in the plan, specifically pointing to the potential for catastrophic human and environmental disasters that come with the territory of offshore drilling – most recently the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Spill the Gulf of Mexico, which had devastating impacts on the Gulf’s commercial and recreational fishing industries, with fishery closures and a long-lasting erosion of consumer confidence in Gulf seafood.
Legal authority to pursue the drilling plan is a relatively recent development. In 2006, a new law required oil companies to pay royalties directly to the states off of which drilling operations occurred, resulting in a $10 billion windfall to Louisiana. The potential for similar payouts induced coastal lawmakers elsewhere to push Congress to end a decades-long moratorium on offshore drilling off the Pacific and Atlantic coasts, which it did in 2008. The door is now open for oil and gas exploration in those waters.

For more information, see this 3 March New York Times article.

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.

#####