

Department of Fish and Game

Current Issues

Fall 2010

Salmon Hatcheries

Salmon hatcheries currently exist in the Central Valley, the Klamath-Trinity Rivers Basin and along the coast north of San Francisco Bay. Most hatcheries are managed to mitigate for loss of spawning and rearing habitat above a dam. However, some hatcheries operate to enhance the number of salmon available for fishing, and one hatchery, the Warm Springs Hatchery on the Russian River in Sonoma County, is operated as a conservation hatchery, which has the goal of contributing to the recovery of a listed species. At this hatchery the focus is on the Central Coast coho salmon. Hatcheries are operated by the Department of Fish and Game (DFG) in partnership with various mitigating agencies, such as the Department of Water Resources (Feather River), PacifiCorp (Klamath River) and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (two Central Valley hatcheries).

There is increased interest and pressure on how hatcheries are managed as salmon populations continue to decline, and fishing seasons are closed or restricted. The National Marine Fisheries Service requires Hatchery and Genetic Management Plans (HGMP) to be written for all hatcheries when the production from that hatchery could impact listed salmon or steelhead. Fishing organizations are interested in having hatcheries managed at a level that maximizes both fish production and their survival to advance ocean and river fisheries. The management of salmon hatcheries influences salmon recovery and the salmon population status.

Those relying upon hatcheries to meet a mitigation requirement support continued operation to meet their legal requirements. Fishing organizations want hatcheries to focus on producing enough salmon to allow for fishing, but do acknowledge protection and recovery of native populations is essential if fishing is to be preserved. Environmental and academic organizations want hatcheries to revise their practices to focus on preserving the genetic diversity of salmon and to minimize the impact hatchery operations are having on the recovery of naturally spawning fish.

DFG believes each hatchery has its specific purpose, and different options or restrictions that are influenced by location, funding sources, physical capacity and its original function help to manage the hatchery effectively. DFG is working on several fronts to improve salmon hatchery management by having hatchery operators develop draft HGMPs for all salmon hatcheries, participating on the policy team of the congressionally mandated salmon hatchery reform project initiated in 2010, partnering with fishing organizations to determine how the Central Valley hatcheries can be managed in unison to enhance the fall-run Chinook salmon fishery, integrating hatchery needs into the Bay Delta Conservation Plan to re-evaluate Central Valley hatcheries and, finally, collaborating with PacifiCorp to revise management of the Iron Gate Hatchery consistent with the Klamath Hydroelectric Settlement Agreement.