



Perspective: Fishing Policy Predictions

Perspective: Will 2017 be a grand year for fishing, politically speaking?

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The California Legislature will consider game-changing opportunities in 2017 and if the past is any indication, the recreational angler's right to fish will face continued threats. Whether it is a political agenda, indifference or the failure to recognize the economic benefits of recreational fishing, state policymakers will consider public policy that will make fishing less accessible and more expensive. This is more than a prediction, it is a certainty.

Lawmakers' failure to recognize that recreational fishing contributes over \$4.9 billion annually in economic activity has had real and lasting consequences. Annual fishing license sales, just one way to measure participation, has declined over 55 percent since 1980 while California's population has increased over 60%. As such, the California Sportfishing League (CSL) has stepped up, and prides itself on challenging those who would further restrict recreational anglers and serving as the "*angler's government watchdog*."

Policy predictions for the new year, both opportunities and challenges:

Legislative Reforms: Last year, the California Sportfishing League (CSL) sponsored four bills in the state legislature that sought to make fishing less expensive and more accessible to California youth and veterans, and to transition California's calendar-based fishing license program to one that is valid for a full 12-months after the date of purchase. Despite earning bipartisan support in policy committees and no public opposition, the Department of Fish and Wildlife quietly conveyed their opposition to the powerful Senate Appropriations which resulted in this bill being put on the shelf. Ironically, the Appropriations Committee Chairman's district hosts the Fred Hall Tackle Show and one of the largest sportfishing fleets in the state. Look for such bills to be reintroduced in 2017.

New Taxes on Fishing Equipment and Boats: In 2017, the State's Fish and Game Preservation Fund will face a \$20 million budget shortfall, the Administration is considering increasing taxes and fees on hunting and sportfishing equipment, boats and personal watercraft as a means to close the budget gap.

Fishing Tackle Ban: In 2016, CSL lead a petition drive (with more than 5,000 anglers signing on) to oppose a state plan to ban fishing tackle that contain common metals, such as lead, copper or zinc. More details on proposed regulations could emerge in 2017.

Fishing License Sales: While the El Nino of 2016 may have generated some great catches due to swelling rivers and lakes, and warm ocean waters, this does not appear to have translated into increased fishing license sales. Expect sales to continue their downward spiral due to costly fishing licenses and limitations on fishing imposed by the CSF&W administration.

Marine Protected Areas: In 2016, the current California Fish and Game Commission denied that years ago promises were made that MPA fishing bans (over 800 square miles of Pacific Ocean) would be temporary. Even if the state fails secure funds to evaluate whether fishing bans increase fish populations, expect them to remain in place permanently.

Protecting Bass Fishing: In 2017, expect greater political pressure to be placed on the Legislature and the California Fish and Game Commission to decrease bass and striper populations by increasing take and reducing minimum size. Less fish means more water for politically connected water users.

Protecting Access: Despite assurances by the Fish and Game Commission that they would clamp down on unconstitutional local ordinances, the Commission has limited authority to enforce such action. Look for continued efforts on the part of cities and counties to restrict or ban pier and jetty fishing.

Considering all these opportunities and challenges, California anglers and the sportfishing industry who depends on them for sales should band together as never before. Recreational angling should be appreciated not only as a fine form of family outdoor recreation, but also for the billions of dollars in economic activity it generates to protect California jobs and local tourism. We hope you agree.

Please accept our best wishes in 2017 and be assured that CSL will continue to champion your right to fish in the new year!

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