



Bill to change California fishing licenses applauded by locals

SB 187 aims to make licenses valid for 12 months

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Fishing enthusiasts around the state may soon have reason to celebrate, as a widely-criticized law is set to be scrapped following the passage of a bill authored by Senator Tom Berryhill (R-Twain Harte) in the California Senate.

Senate Bill 187 creates a 12-month fishing license, bringing the current system of calendar-year licenses to an end.

Existing law mandates that fishing licenses be based on a calendar-year cycle, with no extra time or prorated rates given for purchases made later in the season. For example, a fishing license purchased in October is only valid through Dec. 31 of that year, meaning the angler has less time to use his or her license than one purchased in January. The current system is one of the primary causes of a decline in license sales, revenue which funds fishery and conservation programs.

Under Berryhill's proposal, licenses would be valid for 12 months from the time of the purchase.

"Twelve-month fishing licenses are such a simple idea that would greatly improve the quality of life for so many Californians," Berryhill said on Thursday, following the Senate's unanimous decision to approve the bill May 31. "I want to thank my Senate colleagues and I look forward to working with members of the Assembly on this important issue."

Recreational fishing contributes more than \$4.6 billion annually to California's economy, providing a major source of outdoor tourism, jobs and tax revenue for state and local governments. License sales have plummeted as rates increase, however, with the number of annual licenses sold decreasing by 55 percent since 1980.

Bilson's Sporting Goods in Turlock stopped selling fishing licenses in 2007, said owner Brad Bilson, after the store noticed a decline in purchases. It was actually costing the shop more money to sell the licenses than it was making in return, he said, and Bilson blames the current fishing license system for the reduced sales.

"If you bought and paid for an annual license, you should be able to fish for an entire year," said Bilson. "I'm totally in favor of a 12-month license."

Bilson believes that offering a 12-month license, rather than a calendar-year license, would promote fishing throughout the state and likely increase the number anglers.

“I think more people would buy a license,” he said. “Now, they might sell less one- and two-day licenses, but I think it’s a good thing that they want to change it.”

Turlock resident Ricardo Lemus, an avid fisherman, stated that under the current system, he often feels rushed or obligated to use his license if he has purchased it later in the year than usual.

“Lots of people have jobs or have other things to do besides fishing, and it feels like a waste of money if people were to purchase the license and not use it at all,” said Lemus. “I would definitely like to see it changed, that way it gives men and women a chance to fish for that whole year, whenever they choose to.”

SB 187 now goes to the State Assembly for a final vote. If passed, the legislation would make California the 12th state to sell 12-month fishing licenses.

“This bill would not only improve access to recreational fishing, it will protect California jobs dependent on outdoor tourism,” said Berryhill. “Labor unions, state and local chambers of commerce, anglers, tourism groups and everyday Californians recognize that California’s antiquated fishing licensing program has proven to be a barrier to participation.”

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