



## **Fishing license reform bill earns State Senate support (UPDATE)**

Parimal M. Rohit - June 14, 2017

SACRAMENTO — It is said June Gloom follows May Gray. However anglers across California probably felt anything but gloomy on June 1, thanks to the State Senate's approval one day earlier of a proposal to require fishing licenses remain valid for a full 12 months. State Senators unanimously approved Senate Bill 187 (SB 187) late May 31, opening the door for the legislation to be deliberated in the Assembly. The bill is now in front of the Assembly's Committee on Water, Parks and Wildlife.

SB 187, if approved by the Assembly and signed into law by Gov. Jerry Brown, would do away with California's practice of selling calendar-based fishing licenses. Currently the state only issues fishing licenses through Dec. 31 of a given year. Anglers pay the same fee for the license regardless of when purchased.

The proposed fishing license system, which was introduced by State Sen. Tom Berryhill, would allow anglers to purchase the necessary permit for a full 12 months, regardless of when it was purchased.

Anglers would be allowed to purchase a 12-month fishing license in 2020, assuming SB 187 clears the Assembly and is signed into law.

Fishing advocacy groups have long stated a 12-month fishing license system would spur angling activity in California.

Berryhill introduced similar bills in the State Senate in 2013 and 2015; the 2015 proposal was gutted just ahead of its scheduled vote in the upper house.

His latest attempt, so far, was more successful.

Marko Mlikotin, executive director of California Sportfishing League (CSL), said the current fishing license system has been costly for anglers and contributed to diminished angling participation in the state.

"California's costly and antiquated fishing license program is a contributing factor to an

alarming decline in fishing participation rates,” Mlikotin stated. “As fishing license sales face a death spiral, fishing’s economic contribution will continue to decline, as will revenue for state conservation and fishery programs.”

A CSL statement issued shortly after the May 31 vote pointed out 12-month licensing cycles are already in effect in nearly one dozen states and Mexico.

One of those states is Texas. The Lone Star State reportedly implemented a 12-month fishing license cycle in 2005. CSL staff stated fishing license sales in Texas increased 11.8 percent between 2012 and 2016 because of the shift to a 12-month system.

Maryland switched to a 12-month fishing license cycle in 2005. A legislative analysis of the approved policy stated a switch from calendar to 12-month cycles could result in the state receiving an additional \$20,000 annually.

“Special fund revenues are expected to increase overall as a result of additional annual recreational fishing licenses being purchased,” an analysis of Maryland Senate Bill 666 stated, adding local anglers were incentivized to purchase fishing licenses in Virginia if the state’s policy was not changed.

Other states to incorporate a 12-month fishing license cycle include Arizona, Florida, New York, Utah and Virginia.

SB 187’s most recent legislative analysis stated sportfishing licenses has been steady decline since about 2011.

“The number of annual sport fishing license sales sold by department is about 1 million. These licenses are almost entirely purchased by residents. The number sold has been reasonably stable since 2011,” the legislative analysis of SB 187 stated. “In the 1970s and into the early 1980s, resident sportfishing license sales averaged about 2.1-2.2 million, but have declined since, despite the state’s increasing population.”

California’s current sportfishing license fee is 76 percent higher than the national average, according to Berryhill. The state senator added license sales declined by 55 percent in the past 35 years; the annual license fee increased by 840 percent in the same time period. He stated a switch from a calendar to 12-month system would help reverse the trend of declining license purchases in California.

SB 187 now moves to the Assembly for consideration. A successful vote in the lower house would take the bill to Brown’s desk for signature.

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