

Perspective: Will State Raids On Fishing License Fees Become An Annual Affair?

BY MARKO MLIKOTIN/SPECIAL TO WESTERN OUTDOOR NEWS
Published: Jun 27, 2017

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Governor, as expected, signed the budget.

<http://www.sacbee.com/news/politics-government/capitol-alert/article158475329.html>

It is no secret that California's fishing licenses are the most expensive in the country, and access to fish has become unreasonably restrictive. As a consequence, fishing license sales are in a death-spiral and fewer sales means there is not enough revenue to cover the operational costs of the state's fisheries, and most certainly not in the future.

When the state continues to impose unreasonable restrictions on fishing, and all the while sells a costly fishing license that is not even valid a full 12-months from the date of purchase, a financial crisis was longtime in the making.

Today, the Fish and Game Preservation Fund (FGPF), which funds the state's fishery and conservation programs, is experiencing a shortfall of approximately \$20 million. Unless the state comes up with a long-term solution, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) will continue to stock fewer and smaller fish due to a lack of revenue. At some point, some hatcheries may even close.

So far, no one in Sacramento appears focused on a long-term solution. Rather, the State Legislature has proposed a Band-Aid approach that proposes a combination of increasing commercial

landing fees 97% over last year, and diverting dollars from the state's general fund and other programs.

As an example, two budget proposals will have a measurable impact on the quality of fishing in California. Over \$8.7 million in funds accumulated from Lifetime Fishing Licenses will be wiped out overnight to backfill unrelated DFW operational costs, and nearly \$1 million will be diverted from fishery programs to study water diversion programs.

The state should consider a new approach that involves increasing fishing participation rates and license revenue by making fishing more accessible and affordable, rather than raiding funds or implementing temporary fixes as participation rates decline. If not, the operational cost of hatcheries will continue to rise as revenue fueled by license fees remain stagnant or decline — and this approach is simply unsustainable.

Anglers and communities dependent on recreational fishing for tourism and jobs recognize the current fishing license system is too costly and antiquated to protect recreational fishing's future. This is why the angling community stands ready to work with DFW to come up with meaningful and lasting funding solutions to ensure that our state's hatcheries are operational for future generations.

The first step for Governor Jerry Brown is accepting the reality that there is problem and the need for a long-term solution. If not, raiding fishing license fees will continue to be an annual affair.

* * *

Marko Mlikotin is the executive director of the California Sportfishing League (www.savefishing.com), a statewide organization that champions the interests of anglers and the sportfishing industry.