



## **Study: Annual fishing license system could boost revenues**

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SACRAMENTO — A published study says California’s current calendar year based fishing license scheme is “economically unsustainable” and a pair of bills in Sacramento pushing for a 12-month licensing program “could be part of the solution.”

The study, prepared by Southwick Associates for the **California Sportfishing League (CSL)**, was published June 20 and makes the case for California to make 365-day fishing licenses the norm for the state’s anglers.

All fishing licenses in California expire on Dec. 31, regardless of when it was purchased. An angler buying an annual license on Dec. 30 would pay the same fee as someone who purchased the same permit on Jan. 1.

State Senators and Assembly members are currently considering bills – Senate Bill 518 and Assembly Bill 986 – to make 12-month fishing licenses available to California anglers.

“Two bills under consideration (SB 518 and AB 986) would require the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) to offer licenses that expire 12 months from the date of purchase,” the Southwick Associates study stated. “These bills, along with other recommendations offered [in the report], will help improve California’s current license revenue situation.”

Decline participation rates and the potential of inadequate conservation funding were cited as reasons why California should switch from a calendar to annual fishing license scheme.

“Considering California’s declining license sales and revenue situation, current fisheries management efforts are not economically sustainable,” Southwick Associates researchers stated in their report. “To maintain adequate conservation funding, some level of changes [is] needed to the state’s license structure, pricing and/or marketing approaches.”

The study did point out a 12-month fishing license system is not the magic bean California needs to bring back the estimated one million anglers lost in the state since 1985 – but such a scheme could help stop the bleeding and “reverse the decline.”

“The new 12-month license will not regain lost license customers and revenue but could help reverse the decline. Florida was the first state to switch to a 12-month license starting 1991. Today, there are 14 states with a 12-month license,” researchers at Southwick Associates stated in their CSL-commissioned study. “States that have a 12-month license since 2006 have seen revenues grow faster than other states.”

Offering annual license auto-renewals would help the state sustain revenues, the study added.

California should also use caution when considering a license fee increase, the study's authors stated.

"California is strongly cautioned against raising license prices without first assessing the impacts on participation and revenues. Licenses may already be over-priced and lower prices may actually boost revenues for some licenses," the Southwick Associates study stated. "Eliminating the forced inflation-based price hikes in favor of a statistical assessment that determines optimal prices based on California's actual license sales drivers and consumer demand will help boost revenues."

CSL staff shared the Southwick Associates study with Assembly member Lorena Gonzalez Fletcher, who chairs the lower house's Appropriations Committee. The Assembly Appropriations Committee is currently considering SB 518.

"CSL recommends that the committee work with the authors of SB 518 to bring the cost of 12-month fishing licenses in line with the calendar-based license or reduce the cost to the 12-month license if the angler opts-in to the auto-renewal feature immediately, and not in year two as proposed by legislation," Marko Mlikotin, CSL's executive director, wrote in a letter to Gonzalez Fletcher. "Anglers are no different than other consumers; they respond to value."

SB 518 and AB 986 are still making their respective ways through the legislative process. The Southwick Associates study aptly summarized the purpose of each proposal.

"SB 518 would price the 12-month license 30 percent higher (\$62.86) than the price of the calendar-year license (\$48.34). However, the price in the following years would then drop, matching the calendar-year license if the buyer opts for automatic renewals. Assembly Member James Gallagher has introduced similar legislation, Assembly Bill 986, which is similarly priced, but does not include the auto-renewal function. It does however offer discounted licenses to California veterans."

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