



## **Perspective: Political Environment Invites Rough Waters For Anglers**

BY MARKO MLIKOTIN/SPECIAL TO WESTERN OUTDOOR NEWS

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After every election, California's recreational fishing community would be wise to assess the political environment in our State Capitol to determine what impact it will have on fishing and an outdoor industry that generates over \$4.6 billion in economic activity each year.

For starters, what has not changed over the years is that we still fish in a state where one governor after another has failed to recognize that communities dependent on recreational fishing for tourism and jobs are threatened by their failure to address a very real and troubling trend — California has one of the costliest fishing licenses in the United States. When this is combined with increasing limitations on when and where one can fish, California's fishing participation rate continues to rank dead last in the country. This distinction is underscored by the reality that annual fishing license sales have declined over 55 percent since 1980, as the state's population has increased over 60 percent.

Sadly, the State Legislature is no more attentive to this crisis. Once again, they failed to reform the state's costly and antiquated fishing license program that has experienced declining sales and revenue. All the while, they rejected real solutions like establishing an annual fishing license that is valid a full 12 months from the date of purchase, as opposed to a failing one that expires on Dec. 31 each year. If they are deserving of any credit, it should be for stalling an effort to ban lead fishing tackle.

As disheartening as all this is to political observers, there is a glimmer of hope that the State is poised to act in 2019. How-ever, this depends on our newly-elected Governor Gavin Newsom. In early 2018, the Department of Fish and Wildlife Director asked for CSL's assistance in organizing a "R3 stakeholder group," a panel of sportfishing leaders tasked with developing a strategic plan to Retain, Recruit and Reactivate angler participation. The director's report should be released soon and meaningful reforms are possible, provided the report provides a real critical analysis of the problem and offers specific solutions. If not, it will collect dust on some bookshelf and rightly so.

So, what does the future hold for recreational anglers with the election of Governor Newsom and Democrats gaining two-thirds of both houses of the State Legislature? With this super-majority, Republicans can no longer block anti-hunting and fishing legislation, and Democrats can override most any veto by the governor. This means that political advocacy organizations like the California Sportfishing League will take on added importance if we are to protect your right to fish and enjoy the great outdoors.

The bottom line is this: real reforms are possible only if Governor Newsom takes the initiative. Perhaps naïve, but we are going to give our new governor the benefit of the doubt that as a businessman he will figure out what others have not — reforming

California's failing fishing program means more sales and more revenue for fishing and environmental restoration programs. Why not be bold? Real solutions have been tested in many other states and their participation rates are on the rise. If Newsom fails to act, as did his Republican and Democratic predecessors, hold on tight. We forecast rough waters for California anglers for years to come.

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