



Kings River FISHERIES NEWS

Fisheries Program Is In High Gear

*Legislature, Governor Provide State's
First Funding For Kings River Projects*

*"We want to put
that \$100,000 to work
as quickly as we can,"
William Loudermilk,
CDFG Regional
Director, told his
ExCom colleagues.*

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Inside this issue...

**Celebrating the Fisheries
Program's one year anniversary**

Spawning channel dedicated

The Kings River Fisheries Management Program's second year is at its midpoint with a full plate of plans, study work and funding.

The Program's Executive Policy Committee (ExCom) last summer accepted recommendations of its Technical Advisory Committee to move ahead with a wide range of monitoring, study, maintenance and other activities.

A high point for the young Program came at mid-summer when the California Legislature and Governor Davis approved an appropriation that included \$100,000 as the California Department of Fish and Game's first annual contribution under the Program's Framework Agreement.

The measure, SB 1704 introduced by Senators Costa and Poochigian and coauthored by assembly Members Briggs, Florez, and Reyes, passed the Senate on a 39-0 vote and was approved in the Assembly, 78-0.

"We want to put that \$100,000 to work as quickly as we can," William Loudermilk, CDFG Regional Director, told his ExCom colleagues.

Loudermilk commended the Program's other participating agen-

cies, the Kings River Water Association and Kings River Conservation District, for their efforts in helping develop the authorizing legislation and guiding it through the legislative process, as well as the water agencies' overall support of the Program.

The Program's Public Advisory Group was also instrumental in helping gain legislative approval of the appropriations bill, said Tim O'Halloran, the Program's Executive Officer.

KRCD and KRWA are in their second year of providing \$50,000 each (a total of \$100,000), as called for under the agreement approved in May 1999 to launch the Program. KRWA and KRCD agreed to provide a total of \$1 million in funding over a 10-year span.

Also appropriated by the state was \$600,000 to be used toward the local share of the soon-to-begin turbine bypass project. That project, designed to aid in fishery habitat temperature control will be constructed at the base of Pine Flat Dam. Work is scheduled to begin this winter.

The Program's five-year Implementation Plan that has been adopted by ExCom members is meant

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Happy Birthday

Celebration Commemorates Fisheries Program

First birthdays are cause for big celebration and so it was for the Kings River Fisheries Management Program

A commemorative celebration that attracted a happy audience of approximately 200 to Fresno County's Choinumni Park near Piedra June 16 marked the program's first anniversary and dedicated the Kings River's new Thorburn Spawning Channel.



A tent shaded some of the audience at the June 16 ceremony in Choinumni Park. Audience members are listening to Tim O'Halloran, Kings River Fisheries Management Program Executive Director, who served as Master of Ceremonies.

"It was appropriate that we should celebrate this year of progress," Tim O'Halloran, Fisheries Management Program Executive Officer and Assistant Kings River Watermaster, said in welcoming the crowd to the ceremony's riverside site. "This is really a starting point."

The Kings River Water Association, Kings River Conservation District and California Department of Fish and Game are partners in the program, which became reality on May 28, 1999, when representatives of the three agencies signed a Framework Agreement. Another major participant is the program's Public Advisory Group, which includes anglers and others who enjoy the Kings River.

"It's tremendous where we have brought ourselves to," said Mickey Powell, the Public Advisory Group's Interim Chairman. "We have the opportunity to make this the best tailwater fishery in California. The whole community is going to benefit."

Powell looked back over the past 13 years of public involvement in Kings River fishery issues.

"It's been a long time since New Year's Day in 1987 when 150 of us gathered at Doyle's Park and planted brown trout eggs up and down the river," Powell told the audience. Over the years that followed, he said, "there was a lot of name calling and finger pointing until Charles McNees and Mike Stubblefield (two promi-

ment anglers), and Dale Mitchell (of the Department of Fish and Game) made us come to the table."

Powell said O'Halloran was "instrumental in holding all this together, and taking the Framework Agreement and putting flesh on the bones."

Mark Borba of Riverdale, who worked on the Kings River fisheries issue for eight and a half years on behalf of the KRWA and farm water users, acknowledged that when the KRWA Fish and Game Committee was activated in 1992, "We had more than a few skeptics and, at first, reluctant participants. I think it's fair to say that, in 1992, there was mistrust and fear from all corners, farmers, fishermen and perhaps even from the government folks as to the sincerity and true agendas of all those around the table."

William Loudermilk, Department of Fish and Game Regional Manager, said he wanted "to thank the boards of the 28 member units of the KRWA for really reaching out" to put the program together.

"One of the key themes here is that a lot of times we started out in adversarial relationships but over time we started to understand each others issues," Loudermilk said. "Before you knew it, folks were really rolling up their sleeves. We're all kind of walking down the path together. In a nutshell, what started out a little bit fitfully has turned into a really positive thing."

Angler groups, said Loudermilk, "are looking toward the Kings River as a big fishery opportunity. We've found that we can get better together."

From the perspective of water users and despite economic uncertainties in agriculture, Borba said, "We farmers are committed to this positive partnership that both enhances the fishery on the Kings River and helps stabilize one of the most critical elements of our farming operations."

Borba, a Crescent Canal Company director and former KRWA Executive Committee member, recalled three distinct Kings River historical eras, including the period prior to 1927 when, in the absence of agreement, uncertainty and litigation were common. From 1927, when the Kings River agreement was signed and the KRWA was organized, until 1954 there was water use agreement but a lack of storage that made it impossible to take advantage of years of abundant runoff.

"Then, in 1954, following construction of Pine Flat Reservoir, there followed a period when water rights holders focused mainly on maximizing beneficial use of water under the new storage conditions," Borba said.

The Kings River Fisheries Management Program "is a new era on the Kings River" to which farmers are fully committed, he said.



Launching the Kings River Fisheries Management Program on May 28, 1999 with their signatures were (from left) Robert Hight, California Division of Fish and Game Director; Dean Jensen, then Kings River Water Association Chairman; and Jeff Taylor, Kings River Conservation District General Manager

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Birthday Story, *continued*

"As water rights holders," said Borba, "we have voluntarily taken on the additional responsibility of being actively engaged through contribution of water for increased fish flows during critical periods, storage space with a temperature control pool in Pine Flat of no less than 100,000 acre-feet, money (\$1 million between KRCD and KRWA over the next 10 years) and intellectual resources."

Those who use water from the Kings River to irrigate nearly one million acres in portions of Fresno, Kings and Tulare counties believe there have been important accomplishments as a result of the 1999 framework agreement's approval, said Borba.

Those include:

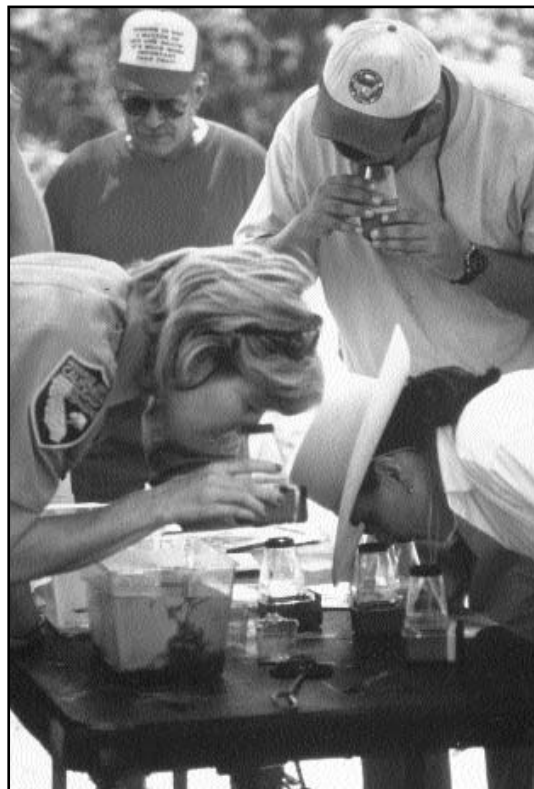
- New Kings River water management in which active engagement aimed at enhancing the Kings River fishery takes its place alongside the administration and protection of the water and storage rights of KRWA members.
- A belief that if the program can be made to work, stability will be added to water rights while avoiding court battles and keeping the decision-making process in local hands.
- A framework for fishing science that, when added to the program's adaptive management approach, will continue to add to understanding of what creates and sustains a good Kings River fishery.
- Building trust and working relationships between the agreement's three parties and the public.

The latter is important, Borba cautioned. "While we've been blessed with a good first year, hydrologically speaking, there will be times and hydrologic circumstances where it won't be clear what the right course of action should be," he said.

"Finally, besides being farmers, we water users are also members of the greater community and we, too, want the water of the Kings River put to the widest possible beneficial use," Borba said.

"While we expect and encourage the public to hold our feet to the fire regarding our water storage and economic contributions to the program, we will also be watching and expect the Department of Fish and Game to uphold its commitments, such as enforcement, and for the public to stay engaged in working with us throughout the adaptive management process," he added.

Pacific Gas and Electric Company's role in the program, in which the utility negotiated and approved a new North Fork operations agreement with the KRWA, was also applauded. 🐟



Those touring the Thorburn Spawning Channel after the June 16 ceremony join a California Department of Fish and Game biologist to take a closer look at insect life that has benefitted from the new channel's flows.

Newly Dedicated Spawning Channel Already A Success

Intended beneficiaries are already making use of the Kings River Fisheries Management Program's first major project, the Thorburn Spawning Channel.

The channel's dedication was among the main events during well-attended ceremonies in Choinumni Park near Piedra June 16.

Many who applauded the dedication afterward took advantage of tours of the half-mile long channel, along Piedra Road just downstream from Winton Park, to tour the site with Kings River Conservation District and California Department of Fish and Game biologists.

Only two months after the project's construction was completed, fish were already making use of the channel, which was completed in March for the spawning and rearing of trout. The half-mile long channel winds its way through the site. Although man made, it mimics natural conditions and provides habitat and a safe haven in which young fish can safely grow in flows that are far gentler and slower than in the nearby main river.

Along with spawning gravel, the channel includes boulders and woody debris. Oaks, cottonwoods, willows and other riparian vegetation are being planted along the channel. It will be available for use all year.

The project represents the latest in a long line of KRCD environmental accomplishments.

"KRCD's environmental work along the Kings River has been under way since the 1970s when the District began monitoring the river below Pine Flat Dam," said Jeff L. Taylor, KRCD General Manager. "These studies eventually led to broader and more inclusive investigations."

Those studies have led to close involvement by KRCD's environmen-

tal and engineering staffs in U.S. Army Corps of Engineers environmental studies and planning, including the Pine Flat Dam turbine bypass facility upon which construction is scheduled to begin soon, and other potential projects.

Along with KRCD's role in trout planting, fish census efforts, habitat monitoring and development of fishing access sites, the District naturally began examining ways to enhance the fishery habitat below Pine Flat Dam. Thus, KRCD for two years had been planning what became the Thorburn Spawning Channel when the Kings River Fisheries Management Program's framework agreement was signed on May 28, 1999.

"Sixteen sites were found to be suitable for development with the Thorburn site selected to be the first project to be developed," said Taylor. Construction was authorized by the Kings River Fisheries Management Program's Executive Policy Committee in September 1999 and work was completed by March 2000.

"KRCD's role in this important project was to provide technical support," Taylor said. The District administered the construction contract. Funding was provided by the KRCD, Kings River Water Association and an environmental grant from Caltrans, the state transportation agency.

KRCD staff member Jerry Salazar said the project's location was ideal for what the District's environmental team hoped to accomplish. Not only was the topography favorable for development of a small, meandering



Jack and Margaret Thorburn unveil the dedication sign for the new Thorburn Spawning Channel during the June 16 ceremony.

channel, but it was favorably located for construction of a headgate structure to give biologists complete control over the amount of flow through the channel. The channel's lower end was also well positioned to open gradually into the main river through a pond and give fish full access and egress to and from the spawning channel.

"This project has greatly enhanced the river's spawning and rearing opportunities," Salazar said.

It is a multi-use facility, Salazar added. As an example, he said larger trout can be planted and then grow in the channel, out of harm's way from the main river's often swift and high currents and flow.

The project is named for the owners of much of the property, Jack and Margaret Thorburn of Piedra. The Thorburns provided an easement for the channel. They were presented with a plaque of appreciation.

"This has been a great honor," Mrs. Thorburn said. "We're thrilled."

David and Esther Butzlaff provided another easement. They could not be present for the ceremony but have also been presented with a plaque. 🐟

Program In High Gear, *continued*

to be a working document, O'Halloran said. "It is subject to revision as the parties proceed with the Program, most likely on an annual basis," he said.

As such, he noted, the five-year plan includes recommendations for coming years as well as a report on the previous year's activities.

Biggest of this year's scheduled activities are test projects for juvenile trout rearing habitat. Biologist Jeff Halstead, Chief of KRCD's Environmental Division, said the plan is to develop coves, cobble jet-ties and arrangements of boulders along the river's edge between Pine Flat Dam and State Route 180.

"The intent is to create calm water in order to create habitat for young fish," Halstead said. "Young trout need shallow water." Several sites are being selected. The program will probably be expanded in the future.

"Juvenile trout are the most important and this project is the one we wanted to tackle first," Halstead said.

KRCD engineers have concluded that this project and another side channel project that had been considered near Gould Weir would have no detrimental effect on the river's flood carrying capabilities. However, designs for work at each site would be scrutinized by KRCD with an eye on flood control. KRCD will apply for all necessary permits to conduct channel work.

Unfortunately, access issues have prompted removal of the Gould Weir project from the current list. Instead, establishment of an aerial photograph data base, showing flows at 100 and 250 cubic feet per second, has been approved with funding for some other projects expanded.

Other projects that have been approved for this year's funding and implementation include:

- Maintenance and monitoring in the new Thorburn Spawning Channel near Piedra.
- Flow monitoring and telemetry work at two locations, Fresno Weir (near the Friant-Kern Canal crossing) and Dennis Cut (near Avocado Lake).
- Work in public education.
- Trout egg planting.
- Monitoring angler success in the Kings River below Pine Flat Dam as well as in Pine Flat Reservoir itself.

Other activities include research and data collection on the river's habitat, possible regulation changes, supplemental trout stocking, consideration of future minimum flow changes and ongoing development of the 5-year plan. Also being examined is research and review of flow "ramping" issues for the Kings River.

"None of these projects will create the fishery on their own," O'Halloran said. "It will take the entire Program. We want to keep focused on the big picture as the five-year plan continues to be updated and evolve."

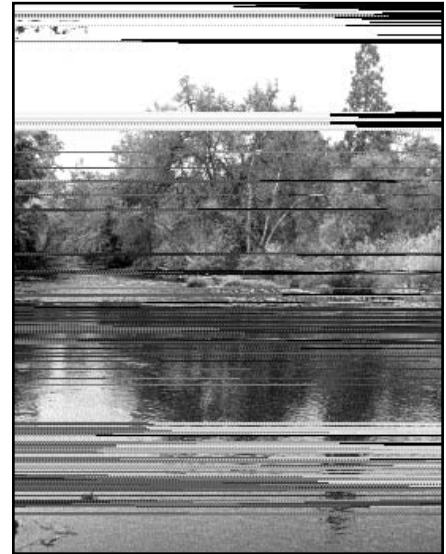
"This is a very well done and thought out plan the Technical Steering Committee has created," said KRCD General Manager Jeff Taylor.

"I like the diversity of the elements in the five-year plan," Loudermilk agreed.

O'Halloran said the Program's partners will be looking to their Public Advisory Group to aid in developing an education program.

"Who better to develop a public education program than the public themselves," O'Halloran said. "The input they have given has been invaluable."

Mickey Powell, the Public Advisory Group's Acting Chairman, said it is hoped that a web site's development will aid in the exchange of information among anglers and enlarge the base of the river's users.



The Kings River near Avocado Lake is one of the reaches receiving much attention under the Fisheries Management Program.

The Public Advisory Group has plans for its own newsletter.

"We feel very strongly that there is a need for education on the river," Powell said. He offered the concept of a "riverkeeper" position.

Meanwhile, ExCom members say they are pleased with how the Program is progressing. "The Program is working very well," said Kings River Watermaster Douglas J. Woodman, the KRWA's ExCom member. He said he is particularly pleased with good involvement in the process on the part of the public.

"It's been great," CDFG's Loudermilk agreed. He cautioned, however, that challenges are ahead. "We've been fortunate with the two good water years we've had," he said. "We've had plenty of water to work with. We'll need to get ready for drier years. They are going to be the tough ones."

At their August meeting, ExCom members and staff of the three partnering agencies heard encouraging words. "You guys are doing a good job," said Larry Nany, a member of the Public Advisory Group. 🐟

Draft Plans Released For Kings River Trout Stocking And Channel Monitoring

A pair of draft plans for aspects of the Kings River Fisheries Management Program have been released by the Executive Policy Committee (ExCom) for public review and comment.

One of the drafts represents a supplemental trout stocking plan for the Kings River downstream from Pine Flat Dam.

The other, a study plan, deals with monitoring of the new Thorburn Spawning Gravel Project near Piedra.

The Fisheries Management Program's Technical Steering

Committee presented the plans at a December 14 ExCom meeting.

The supplemental trout stocking plan discusses details and strategies to effectively double Kings River trout plantings from current levels (some 36,000 fish annually) in order to approximate historic stocking activity that routinely occurred 20-40 years ago. During the 1960s and early 1970s, the California Department of Fish and Game typically planted up to 76,000 trout per year.

The plan also discusses what would need to be done to replenish

the lower river fishery if a warm water temperature event were to occur.

The spawning gravel project monitoring program involves the Thorburn Spawning Channel, the Fisheries Management Program's first major project. The half-mile-long channel was completed last spring, just downstream from Winton Park.

Goal of the monitoring would be to determine what species of fish are using the channel and determine when they are present. Standard monitoring techniques would be used. 🐟

Technical Committee Has Two New Members

Two new members have joined the Kings River Fisheries Management Program Technical Steering Committee (TSC).

Randy Kelly is the new California Department of Fish and Game representative on the committee.

KRCD's member is now Scott Redelfs, who recently became Chief of KRCD's engineering division.

Continuing to represent the Kings River Water Association is Tim O'Halloran.

Each of the three partners in the Fisheries Management Program — KRWA, KRCD and CDFG — has one member on the TSC.

The TSC provides oversight regarding all joint science undertaken by the parties as part of the Fisheries Management Program.

The TSC works at the direction of the ExCom, and solicits input from the program's Public Advisory Group. 🐟

Turbine Bypass Nears Construction Stage

Another major Kings River fishery habitat improvement project is moving toward reality.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is ready for the long-delayed, \$5 million project at the base of Pine Flat Dam to move into the construction phase.

Kings River Conservation District Assistant General Manager Jack Sinor said the Corps is letting two contracts, one for construction of the project's valves and the other for general construction.

Plans and specifications have received final approval.

Little on-site work is likely to take place this winter, however,

because the work is not to interfere with generation of electrical energy at KRCD's Pine Flat Power Plant. Irrigation releases sufficient to produce power are likely by March, shortly after the construction contract is now expected to be awarded.

Most of the work is expected to take place during the fall and winter of 2001-02.

"It's not a big job but very complex, especially since it is right in the back yard of the power plant," Sinor said.

A series of valves and pipes will link the three penstocks that carry water through the dam to the power plant's turbines to the dam's nearby

spillway flip bucket. The new facilities will permit up to 900 cubic feet per second to be released into the river through the penstocks when flows or reservoir storage are insufficient for power plant operation.

As a result, the project will give biologists more flexibility in providing water with suitable temperatures in the river to benefit the Kings River's fishery below the dam.

KRCD has signed the local cost sharing agreement with the Corps. KRCD, with the backing of the Kings River Water Association and State of California, will be responsible for 25 percent of the cost. 🐟

Public Trust Complaint Retained

State Water Resources Control Board Staff Action Comes At Request of Kings River and Fishery Interests To Keep Issue 'In Abeyance'

State Water Resources Control Board officials have agreed with Kings River anglers and water interests that a nine-year-old public trust complaint dealing with the river's fishery should be kept open.

The staff decision reversed action on September 1 earlier that dismissed the public trust complaint, despite the requests of the angling and water user communities.

Six weeks later, a state board staff member said that State Board Chairman Art Baggett had received correspondence from the various parties asking that the complaint be kept on file.

"He has indicated that he does not wish to take any action that might jeopardize the present accord," Division of Water Rights Chief Harry M. Schueller wrote in a letter announcing the change of heart. "Consequently, the complaint will be listed as being 'held in abeyance at the request of the parties' and will not be closed at this time."

A state board staff member in July notified the Lower Kings River Committee, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance and other complainants that the agency was considering dismissing the complaint, upon which no action was ever taken.


In many respects, initiation of the public trust complaint in 1991 inspired the process that last year resulted in adoption and inauguration of the Kings River Fisheries Management Program.

The dismissal action was initiated by the state agency in July as part of an effort to "clean up" old complaints. In the notice, which came as a complete surprise to angler and water interests, the state board staff noted that the new Fisheries Management Program has a high level of public participation, and positive working relations between the public and program leaders.

The Kings River Water Association, Kings River Conservation District, California

Department of Fish and Game, Lower Kings River Committee, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance and complainant Robert Eymann joined in a letter asking the state board to simply suspend its processing of the complaint.

"By seeking to retain the complaint on file, the complainants do not intend to signal any intent to reinstate processing of the complaint," the letter to the state board said. "To the contrary, they are pleased with both the program and the relationships they have developed with respect to its implementation. They simply wish to have more experience with the program and an opportunity to evaluate its results before their complaint is closed."

Such a request for suspension of the complaint, in cooperation with the complainants, was part of the Kings River Fisheries Management Program's Framework Agreement between the KRWA, KRCD and CDFG. 

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