



Kings River Fisheries News

Joining together to improve the Kings River fisheries.

Winter 2003-04

Kings' Fisheries Program Now In Its Fifth Year

The Kings River Fisheries Management Program has entered its fifth year right on track and with a plan to review where it has been in order to determine where future efforts should go.

"We have made tremendous progress," said Kings River Watermaster Steve Haugen, who earlier this year became the Fisheries Management Program's second Executive Officer. "Most importantly, these achievements have come about because all parties have been willing to work together. We have come a long way."

Planning, monitoring, public involvement, and projects and activities aimed at improving and protecting the river's fishery habitat have all been successful elements of the program's first four years. Participants continue to feel optimistic that the Kings River program has become a national model.

Its partners are the Kings River Conservation District (KRCD), Kings River Water Association (KRWA) and California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG). They signed the Fisheries Management Program's Framework Agreement on May 28, 1999, in an attempt to substitute cooperation for contentiousness that had arisen in the past. The 28 Kings River

water units and other agencies are also participating.

A fourth leg of the stool was added when the program's Public Advisory Group, then headed by angler Mickey Powell, blossomed into an effective, constructive voice.

"None of this would have been possible without the positive and helpful work of the Public Advisory Group," said Haugen, who took over as Executive Officer last spring when former Watermaster Tim O'Halloran left the KRWA to take a new job. Haugen has been involved with the Fisheries Management Program's technical aspects from the start, both at KRWA and previously as a KRCD staff member.

The program established a temperature control pool of 100,000 acre-feet in Pine Flat Reservoir and initiated enhanced minimum flows in the Kings River between Pine Flat Dam and Fresno Weir, northeast of Centerville. KRWA now provides minimum flows of at least 100 cubic feet per second (c.f.s.) at Piedra, an amount twice that required in most years under a previous minimum flow agreement. Minimum flows of 35 c.f.s. over Fresno Weir and into the lower river are provided.



Other agreement provisions included contributions of \$50,000 per year each by the KRCD and KRWA into the program to fund improvements and other activities. The CDFG has been able to match that contribution with state funding.

The program's two biggest successes have been its active involvement in the Thorburn Spawning Channel's development near Piedra and support of the Corps of Engineers' construction of the new Turbine

continued on page 4

Kevin Wren Heading Public Advisory Group

Kevin Wren, who has chaired the Kings River Fisheries Management Program Public Advisory Group for the past year, knows the importance of valley water from both sides.

In his profession, Wren designs, installs and sells irrigation systems to
continued on page 2

Welcome Back To Fisheries News

The Kings River Fisheries Management Program is an environmental success story in the making and one that we feel you need to know more about.

As a result, the Kings River Conservation District and its program partners, the Kings River Water Association and California Department of Fish and Game, are pleased to again bring you Kings River Fisheries News.

We are delighted that the program's Public Advisory Group has agreed to participate with a regular column and other contributions in our newsletter's periodic issues.

We hope you - anglers and the broader public alike - will find Fisheries News useful and informative.

Gravel Placement Aids Kings River Fish Habitat

For a second consecutive year, efforts to improve the Kings River's fishery habitat in the Fresno County foothills near Piedra have been given a boost in the form of hundreds of tons of gravel.

Deposits of small rock were divided between two locations in the river downstream from Pine Flat Dam and near Piedra in another project of the Kings River Fisheries Management Program.

In October 2002, similar work under auspices of the Fisheries Management Program led to 2,150 tons of gravel being deposited at three other sites. One was downstream from the Corps of Engineers bridge, downstream from Pine Flat Dam. A second was above the confluence of Mill Creek. The third was downstream from Winton Park.

Partners in the four-year-old program are Kings River Conservation District (KRCD), Kings River Water Association (KRWA) and California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG).

The program's Public Advisory Group reviewed and supported the gravel placement program, one of the projects called for under the most recent five year plan. (Please see related story, front page.)

"Gravel is an important tool in increasing spawning habitat available for trout in the river below Pine Flat Dam," said Randy Kelly, California Department of Fish and Game's Technical Steering Committee member. Gravel also enhances habitat for aquatic insects.

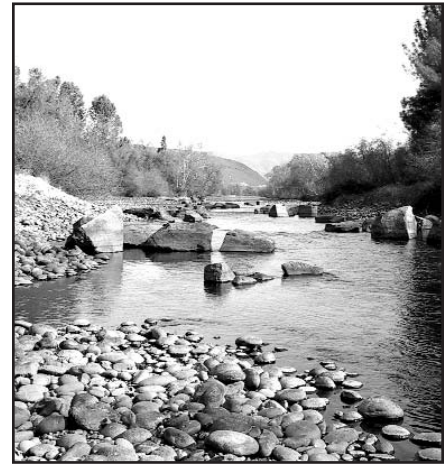
The river itself will do much of the work in moving the newly placed gravel downstream into natural spawning habitat formations and locations.

"Gravel was placed strategically in locations that have high water velocities," said Kings River Conservation District General Manager David Orth. "Higher flows will move the gravel around."

Construction of Pine Flat Dam a half century ago blocked natural downstream migration of gravel from the higher mountains.

Heavy equipment was used to deliver gravel and place it in the streambed. KRCD and CDFG engineers and biologists supervised the work.

A year ago, another related project resulted in boulders being placed strategically in eight locations downstream from the dam.



The concept behind boulder placement projects is to enhance habitat by decreasing streamflow velocity, creating areas of deeper water near the boulders and recruiting spawning gravel downstream of the boulders. Boulders provide refuge from predators and increase habitat for insects, which serve as food for fish.

Work during the fall of 2002 also included development of artificial coves and jetties along the river to help shelter young fish from the river's higher flows and to provide cover.

Channel ripping took place at five sites, also to improve habitat. 🐟

Kevin Wren, continued

farmers, many of whom make use of the Kings and other rivers as a source of water, for Cal West Rain.

In his leisure, he is an angler who greatly enjoys and appreciates the Kings River.

"I've been fishing for a long time," Wren, a Fresno native and resident, says.



"I started attending the Public Advisory Group because I wanted to see the fishery improved," he says. "My primary reason initially was not to be involved but to see what was going on."

His involvement grew, however, and led to Wren's election early this year as the Public Advisory Group's second Chairman, succeeding Mickey Powell of Visalia. Wren said he made it clear at the time of his election that his term was to be for one year.

He would like to see participation in the Public Advisory Group increase from the approximately 20 individuals who are regularly involved.

"We really need to get our numbers up," Wren said. "The people who are there are pretty much all fly fishermen. Charles McNees is the only regular attendee who spends a lot of time fishing on the reservoir."

He would particularly like to see interest among spinner-bait anglers, a group that makes heavy use of the most accessible reaches of the river between the bridge below Pine Flat Dam and Cobbles Weir.

"We need to bring them into the picture more," said Wren.

All anglers and those interested in the health of the river should take part, he believes.

"If they want to see fishing improved, they ought to be involved," Wren said. "It is the only reasonable way to make improvements."

The Public Advisory Committee meets at 6:30 p.m. on the fourth Tuesday of each month in the offices of the Kings River Conservation District and Kings River Water Association, 4886-4888 East Jensen Avenue, Fresno. Its meetings are public. 🐟

ANGLERS CORNER, The Fishery's Condition

Kevin Wren, Public Advisory Group Chairman

As the Kings River Fisheries Management Program nears its fifth anniversary, this is a good time to take stock of how far the effort has come.

There is no question that a tremendous amount of time, study, financial resources and just plain hard work have been devoted to the river's fishery through unparalleled cooperation and consensus building between all of the river's diverse interests. That is a significant accomplishment.

On the other hand, the Kings River's fishery is still not meeting its potential. We are finding fingerlings but not the juvenile fish required to enable a self-sustaining fishery. It may be fishing pressure. It might be predation. Perhaps the answer is in water conditions. The question is: What happens to those fish?

Finding the answer and coming up with a solution will pose a significant challenge to the program's three agencies - the Kings River Conservation District, Kings River Water Association and California Department of Fish and Game - as they plan projects and activities for the next several years.

We are getting to the point where we need to make some decisions on what we have and where we need to go. We don't want to get 10 years down the road, having spent millions of dollars, and find that we are still doing experiments. We need to move forward on getting it fixed. Perhaps an answer may be to look at what is being done on other valley rivers with tailwater fisheries, such as the Merced and Tuolumne.

Of course there are institutional difficulties. The Department of Fish and Game is being pounded by the state's budget crisis. The Fisheries Management

Program's own Technical Steering Committee must juggle its fishery study and implementation workload with other non-fishery job responsibilities.

Still, the goal of many of us who take part in the Fisheries Management Program's Public Advisory Group is to see the Kings have a reasonable strong fishery that is self-sustaining.

Is that going to be possible without a change in fishing regulations? Probably not. Fishing pressure could make that almost impossible to obtain.

Would more enforcement help? You bet. Enforcement along the Kings has lagged for some time although in the past year I have been pleased to see more wardens patrolling and checking licenses.

The bottom line for all anglers is to involve themselves in the Fisheries Management Program process. The agencies have been willing to listen and go along with our requests - or to explain why something can't be done. They consult regularly with us. Of course the agencies want to see things improved because a better fishery is good for their self-interest. We are being heard and an effort is being made, that is far better than continuing lawsuits.

One final note: All who fish the Kings River wish to thank and congratulate Mickey Powell and Tim O'Halloran, the recipients of this year's Conservationist of the Year Awards. Mickey was instrumental in building bridges between anglers and the water user agencies when the program was beginning. We credit Tim, the Fisheries Management Program's Executive Officer for four years before he left the Kings as Watermaster to take a new job, with much of the program's success.

Fisheries Program Posts A Busy 2002-03 Record

The Kings River was an active place for fisheries-related projects and activities over the past year.

Along with gravel placement, development of coves and jetties, channel ripping and placement of boulders (please see related story, Page 2), the Kings River Fisheries Management Program implemented or carried out a wide range of other work.


"It has been a real busy year," Jeff Halstead, Kings River Conservation District Environmental Programs Coordinator, told members of the Executive Policy Committee while summarizing the Fisheries Management Program's 2002-03 fiscal year.

The program is managed by the Kings River Conservation District,

Kings River Water Association and California Department of Fish and Game.

Other activities and projects during the 2002-03 fiscal year included:

- Construction of two permanent streamside incubator boxes for trout eggs.
- Contracting with the California Conservation Corps to create reservoir habitat by anchoring brush to the lake bottom and planting grasses in the reservoir fluctuation zone.
- Completing a second set of aerial photographs, from Pine Flat Dam to Reedley, with the river flow at approximately 250 cubic feet per second. Earlier aerial photography recorded the same reach of the river with flows at about 100 c.f.s.

- Completing installation of telemetry and monitoring equipment to record temperatures and flow at Fresno Weir, a critical location in managing low flows and temperatures at times (usually in late summer, fall and early winter) when there is little or no irrigation demand.
- Creation by the Fisheries Management Program's Technical Steering Committee of a full monitoring program. Monitoring activities include evaluation of aquatic resources, potential problems and "before and after" conditions of specific projects.
- Maintenance in and around the Thorburn Spawning Channel.
- Other evaluation activities. 

Fisheries Program's Fifth Year, *continued*

Bypass Project at the base of Pine Flat Dam to better manage temperatures of water being released to the river's fishery during periods of low flows.

The cooperative program's Executive Policy Committee this past summer adopted its most recent 5-year plan, one that in 2003-04 will stress monitoring and analysis of data that has been collected over the improvement projects that were part of the program's first four years.

"We are hoping such a programmatic review will help identify habitat enhancement actions that can be recommended in the future," Haugen said.

The change in course was prompted by questions that arose earlier this year whether or not various habitat projects undertaken in past years are proving effective. Similar inquiries popped up over effectiveness of existing monitoring programs and other environmental issues. The Public

Advisory Group concurred in this year's strategy.

Budgeting was approved for some capital improvements in the new five-year plan and one of those, gravel placement, has already been completed (please see related story). Other capital projects include boulder acquisition and stockpiling, placement of half-logs in the Thorburn Channel and reservoir projects. The latter was expanded at the request of the Public Advisory Group to include planting of Florida-strain bluegill in the reservoir.

Other funding was provided for the review process and monitoring, public education, permitting and maintenance activities.

The program's annually revised 5-year plan reflects adaptive, flexible management, considered from the start to be the Fisheries Management Program's key. Decisions are based upon the best available scientific and

technical information. Changing needs, opportunities and constraints are expected to all have a hand in guiding and adjusting the program.



Program implementation is occurring in phases and considers natural variations in water availability when establishing flow, temperature and reservoir carryover storage targets. Fishery needs are balanced with other beneficial uses, keeping established water rights in focus. The Framework Agreement defined the program as "an enhancement program that will, among other benefits, extend trout habitat suitability throughout the year in most years, and for longer periods in every year than existed historically." ■

Advisory Group Is Instrumental In New Signage

Helping anglers understand and be aware of fishing rules and regulations is an important part of the Kings River Fisheries Management Program.

The program's Public Advisory Group played an instrumental role over the past year in the purchase and installation of fishing regulation signs.

"The Public Advisory Committee played a key role," said Steve Haugen, Fisheries Management Program Executive Officer and Kings River Watermaster.

"They worked with Fish and Game in getting the language approved. They got the signs ordered.

They did everything. We wrote the check for them," Haugen said.

Helping coordinate the effort for the group were David Peck, Berian Davies, Kevin Wren, Roger Miller, Angelica Velazquez, Jonathan Kennedy, Kevin Ridge, Brian Beal, Dawn Carlton, Mac McDonald, Wayne Thompson and Jeff Halstead. "They worked with the wardens on where to locate the signs and did the installation at strategic fishing access sites," Haugen said. "They did a great job."

The signs are expected to aid CDFG officials in enforcing regulations.

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