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# Farmers And Fishermen Unite to Restore Delta, Stop Peripheral Canal

By *megan*

Created 05/10/2011 - 12:01am

Posted on 10 May 2011



**By Dan Bacher**

Corporate agribusiness "Astroturf" groups and their political allies have waged a media campaign over the past few years to portray the battle to save Central Valley chinook salmon and Delta fish populations as one of "fish versus jobs" or, more recently, "farmers versus fishermen."

"California residents are being denied access to water not because of a drought, but because the Democratic Congress has decided that a three inch minnow is more important than jobs in the San Joaquin Valley," said Representative Devin Nunes (R-Visalia), one of the most vociferous opponents of Endangered Species Act (ESA) protections for Sacramento River chinook salmon, Delta smelt and other imperiled fish, in a statement on July 27, 2010 (before Republicans became the majority in the House).

In reality, family farmers and fishermen, along with California Indian Tribes and grass roots environmentalists, are now working closely together to preserve the imperiled Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta and the fish and communities that depend on a healthy Delta for their livelihoods.

To protect Delta agriculture from the threat of increased water exports and rebuild the West's iconic salmon runs and other fisheries, U.S. Representatives John Garamendi, Mike Thompson, Jackie Speier and Jerry McNerney and a member of George Miller's staff convened with farmers, recreational and commercial salmon fishermen, conservation groups and community members at the historic "Farms&Salmon Summit" on Wednesday, April 27, at the Antioch Community Center in Antioch.

Before a standing room only crowd, farmers and fishermen urged political leaders to stop the construction of the peripheral canal and to take action to restore imperiled salmon, striped bass and other runs and thwart threats to Delta and Sacramento Valley agriculture. Likewise, the Representatives highlighted the importance of keeping farms and fisheries both healthy and relying on good science in California water plans.

## **A broad-based attack on northern California water rights**

Dante Nomellini, a Delta water rights lawyer who moderated the event, emphasized that

the current threats to the Delta were made possible because of the breaking of the promise by the Bureau of Reclamation and Department of Water Resources (DWR) that only "surplus water" would be exported from the Delta.

"We are threatened by a broad-based attack on the water rights of the water users of northern California," said Nomellini. "When the federal and state water projects were initiated, the agencies said that they would only take surplus water, would provide salinity control, and that if additional water was needed, they could recapture it from the projects."

DWR based its project on the development of 5 million-acre feet of water from North Coast rivers that was never developed, due to massive opposition from North Coast residents. Nomellini said that northern California water is being "stolen" from northern California residents by water exporters.

"People can steal billions of dollars of water and nobody cares," said Nomellini. "But if you steal a six-pack of beer from 7-11, you will be prosecuted."

The four Representatives and a staff member from Congressman George Miller's office spoke next.

"I have lived in the Delta since 1977 and this is one of the first times that we have pulled together the farming community and fishing interests," said Representative John Garamendi (D-Walnut Grove). "There is a symbiotic relationship between the agricultural community and aquatic interests. We have to work together to protect the Delta - the solution is not to export more water out of the Delta."

### **Wild Salmon Caucus formed in Congress**

Congressmen Mike Thompson (D-St. Helena), an avid fisherman and hunter, announced that he and other Representatives have formed a "Wild Salmon Caucus," a bipartisan, bicameral body to restore wild salmon populations on the West and East Coasts.

Thompson serves as Democratic Co-Chair and Don Young of Alaska serves as the Republican Co-Chair in the House of Representatives, while Senators Ron Wyden (D-Oregon) and Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) serve as the Senate Co-Chairs. "We have 25 members now, but we need more," Thompson said.

Thompson emphasized the importance of decisions regarding the Delta and salmon populations being based on good science. "When science goes out the window, everything goes out the window," said Thompson.

Jackier Speier (D-San Mateo) noted that salmon fishing and agriculture are both integral components of the California economy, with a loss of \$1.4 billion and 23,000 jobs caused by the Central Valley salmon collapse in 2008-2009 that was spurred by increased Delta water exports.

"Salmon and other fish are an important source of food and jobs," she said. "I appreciate that water is critical for the farming industry as well."

The comments by Congressional leaders were followed by two panels of farmers and

fishermen.

### **Bret Baker: "I'm a pear hugger."**

Brett Baker, a pear farmer and fishery biologist from Sutter Island, began the first panel by giving a power point presentation showing the decades-long links between Delta agriculture and fishing. Baker showed photos of his dad and grandfather proudly showing striped bass and salmon they had caught many years ago.

"Stripers and salmon co-existed successfully in the Delta for over 100 years," emphasized Baker, countering the disinformation campaign by west San Joaquin Valley water contractors that striped "predation" has led to the decline in stripers.

"It broke the heart of my father when I came home from UC Davis and told him I had changed my major from business to fishery biologist."

"My dad, said 'So you're going to be a tree hugger now.'"

"That's right," Baker told him, "A pear tree-hugger."

Dick Pool, administrator of <http://www.water4fish.org> and secretary-treasurer of the Golden Gate Salmon Association (GGSA), gave a power point presentation showing a graph charting the dramatic decline of the salmon fishery since 2002 – and then outlined 10 priority solutions needed to restore Central Valley salmon.

Pool said the Sacramento River fall chinook run crashed from nearly 800,000 fish in 2002 to 39,500 fish in 2009. "That is the largest single salmon crash in our nation's history," he explained.

### **Jeff Hart: Local people are best water stewards**

Jeff Hart, owner of Hart Restoration Inc.&Hartland Nursery in Walnut Grove, said water has for too long been looked at as a commodity –and proposed a new way of looking at water.

"There needs to be a discussion where water is looked at in an ethical or moral way," he stated. "I suggest that we have a discussion on the ethical rights of water."

He also emphasized, "Local people are the best stewards of the watershed. Water should first be used first by people in the watershed."

Jeff Sutton, from the Tehama Colusa Canal Authority, reported how Sacramento Valley farmers, fishermen and environmentalists worked together to solve problems with fish passage at the Red Bluff Diversion Dam. He said the new \$220 million pumping plant and state of the art fish passage project will provide for improved fish passage while providing a reliable water supply for farmers.

Gene Buchholz, owner of Hook Line and Sinker in Oakley, said he experienced an annual \$250,000 loss in income from the closing of salmon season on the Sacramento during the closure.

### **Dredging Delta channels - not a canal - is the solution**

Mark Wilson, owner of Wilson Vineyards in Clarksburg, said the westside water contractors are trying to transfer their problems to the Delta.

“We keep hear that the problem is the Delta,” he said. “The folks of the west side are pretty successful at making us on the Delta the problem –rather than them.”

Rather than going forward with what he described as the “Orwellian” idea of a peripheral canal, Wilson said that the state should start dredging Delta river channels. This would provide material for rebuilding levees, along with restoring the capacity of the Delta channels to move water.

Al Medvitz, co-owner of McCormack Ranch in Rio Vista, put the situation of the Delta in the larger context of a world faced with problems of providing food for a growing population.

“We are in an emerging world food crisis,” he emphasized. “We are facing a time where we cannot set aside the question of sustainability. The idea of moving water to Southern California is from the 1880's. This Nineteenth Century concept is not appropriate for the Twentieth Century.”

Cathy Hemley from Greene & Hemley Farms in Courtland concluded, “We need to think like a fisherman. We need to think like a farmer. We need to make California sustainable.”

Other panelists who spoke include Dave Bitts, a commercial salmon and crab fisherman from Eureka, Barry Canevaro, Captain of The Fish Hookers Sportfishing in Pittsburg, and Darrell Ticehurst, of Coastside Fishing Club in Hillborough.

After audience members asked the Congress Members and panel members questions, all of the participants enjoyed the free "Delta Bounty Reception" hosted by Coastside Fishing Club Grill Crew, Giusti's Place, McCormack Ranch, and Rivermaid Trading Company.

Kudos go to Jim McCarthy of McCarthy Consulting for organizing the Farms & Salmon Summit!

Bruce Tokars of Salmon Water took his video camera to the Farms & Salmon Summit to record the event. To view the presentations, go to <http://vimeo.com/channels/farmsandsalmonsummit>

## **Golden Gate Salmon Association Stakeholders Recovery Proposal**

### Salmon Stakeholders Top 5 Priorities

1. Incorporate the Water Board Delta flow standards in the BDCP and Delta Stewardship Council programs
2. Provide state support for the June 2009 Biological opinions including their legal defense in court by the Attorney General
3. Provide full participation and partnership in the BDCP process for salmon stakeholder representatives
4. Give the Department of Fish and Game the full responsibility and resources for salmon and other fisheries management including scientific evaluation project development, project management and funding.

- 5. Put ecosystem and salmon recovery as a high priority in implementing the co-equal goals and the CVPIA legally mandated salmon doubling requirements

**Salmon Stakeholder Short Term Priorities**

- Improve and expand trucking of smolts around the Delta and acclimating them in pens
- Attain full salmon production at the Mokelumne hatchery by closing the cross channel gates during peak adult migrations
- Install upriver temperature and flow standards for the fall run in the Sacramento, Feather and American Rivers
- Implement the water board fishery improvements in the stalled FERC Feather River and Oroville relicensing case
- Run all salmon hatcheries at mitigation capacity and implement hatchery practices which will allow the wild runs to rebuild

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*Dan Bacher is an editor of The Fish Sniffer, described as "The #1 Newspaper in the World Dedicated Entirely to Fishermen."*

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