

LOCAL NEWS

THINGS LOOKING UP FOR HOT CREEK FISHERY

CDFW stages intervention

By Giles

On Thursday, October 6, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) will take historic action to stock Hot Creek, a Wild Trout Water, with 6,000 diploid (able to reproduce), sub-catchable rainbow and brown trout. The stream will be stocked with 12,000 fish every year hereafter until annual population surveys indicate that there are 6,000 fish per mile of stream. The decision comes after reports from local guides and non-profits that the fish population is in serious decline.

Per CDFW Code, a "wild trout" is any fish that was born in a stream, as opposed to a "native trout," which is a fish found in its native historic waters, or a hatchery fish, which was born and raised in a hatchery and may be released into a stream during a stocking event. The brown and rainbow trout that made Hot Creek a Blue Ribbon Wild Trout Fishery are Wild, not native.

Jeff Weaver, Senior Environmental Scientist for CDFW, told The Sheet that CDFW has no record of Hot Creek being stocked prior the October 6 event. However, their records only go back to 2001, and the creek was designated "catch and release" in 1980. That designation was later changed to "Wild Trout Water" in 2007. The decision came with legal code that prohibited stocking unless it was deemed necessary to sustain the wild fish population.

Several local guides and anglers told The Sheet anecdotally that they had seen evidence of hatchery fish making their way into the stream prior to the formal legal designation as a Wild Trout water in 2007. "There is always a possibility that things may have happened without our knowledge," said CDFW Senior Environmental Scientist Mike Giusti. "That was before the designations were coded, and we know the stream was stocked at some point because the fish are non-native, so they had to be put there by someone." When asked if heightened scrutiny at the hatchery due to the stream's formal designation as a Wild Trout Stream in 2007 was a factor in the observed pop-

ulation decline in the fishery, Giusti was skeptical. "We observed a record fish population at around 12,000 fish per mile, in 2008. The real decline has been in the last 3 years, not the last ten. We feel confident the drought is the primary culprit here."

Per CDFW Code, a designated Wild Trout Water must be open to public angling and able to support populations of fish "of sufficient magnitude to provide satisfactory trout catches in terms of number or size of fish." Kevin Peterson, who has been guiding fly fishing clients on Hot Creek for thirty-two years, and is the current owner of Hot Creek Ranch, says the quantity and size of the fish has been in decline for the last three to four years.

In early Summer 2016, Peterson and Mark Drew of California Trout expressed heightened concern for the fishery to Mike Giusti and Jim Erdman of CDFW. CDFW determined that new data was needed to confirm the decline of the fishery. California Trout collaborated with Hot Creek Hatchery and began collecting dissolved oxygen samples and temperature readings along the river in early summer. They compiled their findings and presented them to CDFW, which then conducted a population survey in late August, the first since 2008. That survey indicated there were fewer than 1,000 fish per mile of stream in Hot Creek.

CDFW determined that Hot Creek is no longer sustaining itself as a Wild Trout Fishery, and that swift action was necessary to save and sustain the wild fish population. According to California Fish and Game Code, CDFW can legally stock diploid fish in Wild

Trout Waters to "establish thriving and self-sustaining native and wild trout fisheries in wild trout waters..."

Levi Keszey of California Trout told The Sheet he observed normal temperature and dissolved oxygen patterns for a healthy trout stream. "Those things alone don't explain why there are fewer fish and especially fewer big fish." According to Keszey, the drought has diminished seasonal flows and allowed sediment to build up in the stream. The sediment fills the deep, cool holes where big fish like to hide and obscures the gravel streambed where they lay their eggs during spawning season. No gravel, no spawning, no more sustainable fishery. Giusti echoed these concerns, and said they're hoping for another good snow year, so that the spring-fed stream experiences high flows and gets flushed out in time for the trout to spawn.

Giusti and Peterson said that the stocked fish will all be small, from one to three inches, and will look just like their wild cohabitants except for their clipped adipose fins. "These aren't the giant hatchery fish that look like they've been in the mail for a month. They're going to live and grow in a

stream and be beautiful," said Peterson, who added he was very grateful and impressed by the alacrity of CDFW's response to the crisis on Hot Creek.

Mark Drew said the decline of fish in Hot Creek is a direct consequence of the drought. "It's a good example of how healthy streams and rivers are tied to local livelihoods. It's not just the fish who are feeling the burn, it's local businesses and communities... and we support the department's action, as it is our understanding that it is within their legal code."

"At the end of the day, Hot Creek has been in decline, and a lot of people are working really, really hard to get it back on track," said Peterson, who is hopeful. "The best thing recreationists can do is take care of these fish. When you take a fish out of the water to take a picture, hold your breath. When you need to breathe, the fish probably does too."

Volunteers interested in stocking the stream should contact Kevin Peterson in his cell phone, at 760.937.0519. Meet at 9 a.m. at the paved parking area at the bottom of lower Hot Creek, by the interpretive area, on October 6.

PROVIDING FINANCIAL SOLUTIONS FOR ALL ASPECTS OF YOUR LIFE.

Eric P. Wasserman
Senior Financial Advisor
549 Old Mammoth Rd, Ste 12
P.O. Box 1917
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546
760-924-2600
www.wfainet.com

FINANCIAL NETWORK
Wells Fargo Advisors Financial Network, L.L.C. Member SIPC

ShredPro inc.
"Confidential Secure Document Destruction"
760-920-0022
STOP IDENTITY THEFT IMMEDIATELY!

When can you shred real estate records?
Never. These should be kept in your permanent records.

All shredded documents Recycled

These recommendations on record retention are general guidelines. They are NOT advice for any specific circumstances.

TRY OUR DELICIOUS EGGS BENEDICT OR FLORENTINE

Breakfast Club

BREAKFAST BLOODY MARYS & MIMOSAS ONLY

GLUTEN FREE PANCAKES

COME IN FOR A GREAT HOMEMADE LUNCH & BREAKFAST

HAVE SOME CHAMPAGNE WITH YOUR BREAKFAST

Open 6:30am-1:30pm Daily 760.934.6944 Open 6:30am-1:30pm Daily

Next to Shell Mart, Hwy 203 & Old Mammoth Rd., Mammoth Lakes