

FUNDING FOR FISH AND WILDLIFE

John Beuttler, Jr.
Executive Director
United Anglers of California
Vice President
California Sportfishing Alliance

BACKGROUND

Prior to my presentation, it might be of some help to you if I briefly describe the organizations which I represent. United Anglers of California was formed in 1981 by a group of concerned anglers dedicated to the restoration and enhancement of all of our state's sport fisheries. We are a non-profit organization which now represents over 10,000 anglers across the state. In addition, the organization represents sport fishing businesses and manufacturers.

To a certain extent, the sport fishing constituency of this state is responsible for the extended decline of most of this state's sport fisheries. Since we were not involved in the political resource management decisions at the state level we were, in effect, part of the problem instead of being part of the solution. One of our major goals has been to make sure anglers' interests and those of our fisheries are properly represented by working closely with the Legislature and State Resource Agencies. During the last several years four major sport fishing organizations have pooled their efforts and created the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance. This Alliance has been developed to act as the political wing of the various organizations which belong to it. The Alliance now has a full-time legislative advocate in Sacramento, working to restore, protect, and enhance our sport fisheries.

INTRODUCTION

Probably one of the reasons I have been asked to speak to you is due to the fact that United Anglers of California designed and had implemented legislation that is responsible for the Striped Bass Stamp which must be purchased by every angler who is licensed and intends to fish for this state's striped bass. Using stamps to generate funds for sport fisheries is not a new idea, but in this case an organization which represents the interests of those who fish for striped bass advocated and helped implement the stamp for the purpose of helping to save and restore this once plentiful fishery.

As you may know, the striped bass population has declined in the Bay-Delta estuary nearly 75% during the last twenty years. Today there are less than 3/4 of a million adults left in the population. Our Board of Directors felt that the situation had reached a critical stage several years ago. After much heated debate which centered around the issue of should anglers pay for the damages caused to the fishery by other sources, it was decided that since the fishery was near total collapse action must be taken at once. We successfully encouraged the Department of Fish and Game to develop Central Valleys Hatchery into an emergency striped bass rearing facility, and we urged the Legislature to pass the stamp so funds could be available to begin to restore the striped bass fishery. To date a number of scientific research programs have also been funded.

At that time we saw the artificial rearing of bass as an emergency measure which could be designed to make sure we did not completely lose the striped bass fishery. It was intended to buy time until the problems created by State and Federal Water Projects in the Delta could be analyzed and resolved. Since its inception, the stamp has raised an average of 2 million dollars a year. The stamp, scheduled to run for four years, will probably raise some 8 million dollars which DFG will be able to utilize on the problems affecting the fishery. In short, even though we felt it was not fair to punish striped bass fishermen for a decline they did not cause, given the grave situation, we had little choice.

Funding Fish and Wildlife Programs

I am not an expert on anything in particular, and especially on how to fund programs for fish and wildlife. I have done some research into this area and spent a lot of time thinking about some of the problems of which I am aware.

Not so long ago in our nation's history, Americans had such a multitude of fish and wildlife resources that they were taken for granted. There was more than enough for our consumptive needs, commercial undertaking, and recreation use. Unfortunately, this horn of plenty was exchanged for Pandora's Box. Today it is clear that man's impact upon the environment has borne a bitter harvest. Many of this state's fisheries are in an era of extended decline, while more people than ever before would like to make use of these resources. Despite the best efforts of State and Federal Resources Agencies, when declining fish and wildlife resources are interfaced with a growing user population, the yield is a shortfall.

Since I have no national expertise, let me briefly focus on the problems of this state which have culminated in many of the resource problems we are faced with. History demonstrates that as California developed and attempted to manage its water and land resources, the long-term welfare and benefit of our streams, rivers, estuaries, wetlands, riparian ecosystems and the fish and wildlife resources so dependent upon them have been given very little priority. On the other hand, major priority was given to urban, agricultural, and industrial growth which in turn necessitated massive resource development programs and projects. It is unfortunate that this development was done at the expense of our fish and wildlife resources.

As we continue to grow, greater demand is placed on the utilization of our water and land resources. This in turn places an ever increasing burden upon our natural fish and wildlife habitat. At the same time current economic constraints have forced the managers of our resources to do more with less. It seems clear that in order to meet the demand for fish and wildlife and to protect the public trust values of these resources, all remaining habitat must be protected and improved, and when feasible, degraded habitat must be restored. This calls for greater expenditures, not less, in order to meet the need for additional planning, development, and restoration programs, as well as for programs of research, and increased management activities.

In California, the bulk of the funding for the DFG is paid for by the various groups that utilize the resources managed by the department. It is only in special situations that general fund monies of the state government are used. Certainly, those in the user groups will tell you that they are paying more than their fair share. Those in the organizations I represent are no longer willing to subsidize private hydroelectric power generation, municipal and industrial water development and private agriculture unless they are willing to help us with problems they have caused to our resources. This is especially true since there has been no commensurate compensation to our user groups or to the public in regard to the use and development of its water, or for the restoration of the public's fish and wildlife resources. In addition, there has not been compensation to the manufacturers and businesses which depend upon our fish and wildlife resources for their livelihood. The answer to the question as to who should pay for the additional costs of maintaining and restoring the fish and wildlife resources of this state is that those who have benefited from the development of our natural resources, and that development which has played a role in the degradation of our fish and wildlife resources must pay their share of the bill.

Proposals for Additional Funding of Fish and Wildlife Programs

If it makes sense that land and water development projects which have affected fish and wildlife resources should offset their share of the cost, then perhaps ways can be found to do so. We feel that such expenses should be viewed as part of their cost of doing business. In many cases these expenditures must be paid by the primary beneficiaries of the land and water development. In cases where the responsibility is widespread, broad public financial support will be necessary.

Working under this premise, a fee could be placed on all irrigated land in the state. Being able to irrigate farmland by utilizing the public water resource increases the value of the property considerably (roughly 80%). A small fee on those who benefit in

this way seems fair. A tax of 1/10 of 1% on the increased value accrued from being able to irrigate the land would result in over 17 million dollars annually.

Since water development has severely impacted our fish and wildlife resources, an annual fee placed on all developed water in the state could be charged to help raise money for fish and wildlife restoration. In this way municipal, industrial, and agricultural uses could generate in excess of 28 million dollars if a royalty of one dollar per acre foot of water developed were charged.

In a similar fashion, a charge could be placed on water diverted for hydroelectric power generation. An assessment of one tenth of a cent per kilowatt hour could produce an additional 9 million dollars.

Of course these three proposals are much easier to theorize about than to implement. Getting such taxes through the State Legislature may be very difficult. Certainly a valid case can be made for each tax or fee. Perhaps if the DFG were to make such a case, sport fishing organizations could mobilize their constituency and apply enough pressure to pass the legislation.

Another possible source for funds would be to tax the public a reasonable rate for the management of their fish and wildlife resources, since the state is the trustee for these public resources. It could increase the sales tax by 0.0012% and receive nearly 150 million dollars. Another perspective which might be reviewed is that expenditures for sport fishing in this state in 1980 were a little more than 2 billion dollars. Sales tax on this figure yields net receipts of 90 million dollars. Should a reasonable portion of this money be used to help fish and wildlife? By the same token, the same should be true for monies generated by hunting and commercial fishing.

Another 29 million dollars could be raised in tax revenues if 1/4 of 1% were added to the excise tax on gas by the state. Since most people drive in order to participate in the use of fish and wildlife resources, some compensation from the gas tax might make sense.

I'm sure anglers would like to see taxes on a few other things which would benefit fish and wildlife. Small hydro-projects should be charged a fee for every kilowatt hour of energy developed. A fee could be levied on every board foot of lumber harvest which would go directly into instream restoration programs. A tax could be placed on every yard of gravel extracted from our creeks, streams, and rivers. Such money could be raised. However, before sport fishermen become involved in such a project it is necessary for us to have a good idea how much money is needed statewide for restoration.

In summary, one way to view this state's fish and wildlife resource problems is from a financial perspective. There is little hope for the long term future of these resources unless we find ways to finance programs to adequately protect and restore them. In addressing what I view as an extreme financial crisis for funding such programs in this state, it seems most appropriate that those who are responsible for the decline of these resources should do their fair share to fund restoration programs and that portion of the administrative costs necessary to offset their impact. Since fish and wildlife resources are public resources that benefit all the people of the state, it also seems reasonable for the public to pay for that part of the cost necessary to manage their resources.

The practicality of many of the fund raising programs I've mentioned may seem at odds with today's political reality. Be that as it may, in this state we have fallen twenty or so years behind the future of our declining fisheries. Action must be taken soon if we are to catch up and overtake this problem. This will require a combined effort on the part of the various resource agencies, the Legislature, and those who utilize fish and wildlife resources in order to raise the money necessary to do the job. Sportfishermen in this state are ready to support such an effort.