

Eastern Sierra Focus

By CJ Webb

Watch for Deer Migration - STAY ALERT!

Winter 2015-2016

Winter arrived normally to the delight of ski resorts and holiday skiers with a chance to breathe clean air and fill the local facilities with hope it would be at least a normal winter. It did have its ups and downs but overall came out at around 91/92% of normal as of March 22 for the Central Sierra. Northern Sierra was at 101% and Southern Sierra 74-75%. Total reporting stations listed were 89 with an average snow water equivalent in inches at 24.9".

Early April warmed up giving dainty darling Daffodils a false sense of security that their blooms would be enjoyed for weeks to come. But several storms spanned the Sierra with rain and light snow above 8,000 feet. Lakes above 9000 feet still have ice, so be prepared for all conditions and don't forget the auger. Waters at that elevation are blue with water showing at inlets and outlets and ice is pulling away from the shoreline. Wind also pushed the storms into the higher elevations assisting the snow melt and runoff. Mother Nature never fails to constantly remind us she is in control as the Eastern Sierra weather is always her unpredictable baby.

News -

New Obama Administration Habitat Rules Grant Limitless Discretion to Federal Agencies - April 9, 2016

Today, the House Committee on Natural Resources held an oversight hearing on the expansive new definitions and revised criteria for designating critical habitat under the Endangered Species Act. "These rules will now make it even easier for the feds to absorb larger and larger swaths of land and water from local, state government and private citizens. It's going to hurt people, and unfortunately those people who are going to be hurt have almost no recourse toward this particular situation", Chairman Rob Bishop stated. "The rules usurp Congress legislative and constitutional prerogatives, and create sweeping new authorities to designate critical habitat at the agencies sole discretion. The Services have essentially granted to themselves authority to designate any area that may, someday in the future, become suitable for a species--even in places where there is absolutely no evidence currently that the species have existed there. In the future, expect the agencies to ask Appropriations for Tarot cards and Ouija board so they can do the work under this expanded rule," Bishop stated

SB 345 - The latest legislation and the first hearing for the Sport-fishing Stimulus Act of 2015 (SB 345; Berryhill, R-Twain Harte) failed to pass the legislature after the third reading. DFW licensing statistics show license sales up from 2014. Revenue from hunting and fishing license sales for 2015 was \$86.9 million which represents about one-quarters of the department's annual budget.

DFW stated wildlife officials confirmed that New Zealand mud-snails were found in the low-flow section of the Feather River in Butte County and biologists are currently in the process of sampling other waters for snail populations in the area including Lake Oroville.

DFW reports 2016 stocking will be increased by 20% due to budgetary problems within the department through the legislature. This will bring us up 30% of the 40% that was cut 2 years ago. Stocking will probably be done every other week but that could also change and pan-size stockers will be running half-pound or more.

DFW's Jim Erdman, head-man for Eastern Sierra fisheries stated, "We're looking at 586,000 pounds this season, unless we have a last minute storm, access to most of the lower elevations will be excellent for stocking. We stocked Crowley Lake last fall with 25,000 pounds of sub-catchable rainbows and they should be showing up in the 1-pound-plus range for the opener."

DESERT SPRINGS trout farm is on line for 24,400 pounds of trout up to 8 pounds. Additional funding for increasing the numbers might also be on the table. All Mono County waters were heavily stocked prior to the trout opener by DWF and Desert Springs out of southern Oregon.

FISH and GAME COMMISSION members that actively participate in fishing and hunting seem to be on a decline, this support is vital in making sound judgments regarding the Fish and Wildlife's resources. With the recent resignation of Jim Kellogg, an active hunting and fishing enthusiast and commission member of 14 years, resigned due to environmental concerns being given a higher priority than hunting and fishing issues. "I'm leaving pretty much out of frustration," said Kellogg, the longest-serving member of the commission. "I am just tired of being the only one fighting the fight for hunters and fishers. The first 12 years, I won most of the battles, and the last couple of years, I lost almost every battle." There seem to be a new orientation of the Commission that reflects the interests of urban residents toward non-game activities such as wildlife viewing, hiking, photography and visits to wildlife preserves", reports Tom Martens in his latest column "The Good Fight" in the 2016 March/April issue Cal Fly Fisher. It's worth a read.

DFW Employees Talk Out - An employee of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife expressed his concerns and provided insight as to the internal problems and of spending that has plagued the Department and giving cause to staff to speak out as to what is actually going on within the management and what their concerns are regarding these issues. "The unsigned letter was sent to Western Outdoor news was published on April 22, 2016 and printed in it's entirety with no significant editing". Top items mentioned were "mismanagement of funds missing \$24 million from the Hiff Fund creating the budget deficit, unnecessary staff training, DFG name change to DWF and the reasons, CTO, uniform allowance, Senior Hatchery Supervisors, budget and positions, pay, closing hatcheries, all coming down to the main point they want to bridge the gap of mistrust between hatcheries and the Region, mainly Region 2, to get to know their staff and realize they are not just numbers and just trying to do their jobs that they are passionate about, love and hired to do."

CALTRANS staff, Cedrik Zemitis stated that the "Rock-fall Project" will resume on US395 along Mono Lake starting mid-July to avoid the bird nesting season. The project also includes a plant establishment program on the six slopes to reduce erosion, establish healthy soil, and promote successful revegetation. Be prepared for daily lane closures with delays no longer than 20 minutes Monday thru

Thursday from 5am to 8pm and Fridays 6am to 3pm with flaggers and a pilot car. Notices will be posted when the dates are determined.

CONWAY RANCH - A series of public meetings were held in hopes that sometime at the end of the period, a "strategic facility plan" was the result. Recently the Conway Ranch Strategic Facility Plan (CRSFP) was prepared and it will provide direction and strategies for maintaining and enhancing the conservation, economic, recreation and cultural values of the Ranch. In this plan (30 pages) it discusses the Baseline Conditions along with a Master Vision and Funding the Projects for Agriculture, Irrigation, Aquaculture, Education & Outreach, Recreation, Preservation & Historic Assets and Access & Roads. Under the heading Aquaculture, topics are raceways, water supply, fish origin and destination and aquaponics.

The Introduction and Executive Summary explains the primary need for a CRSFP is due to its complexity. It possesses environmental, social, and economic values of regional importance. The Plan will lay the groundwork for when projects, if any, should be funded, how they would be funded. If you would like to read the entire document, email me at vlresort@wildblue.net and I will send you a link for a copy.

Remember to check the regulations prior to fishing unfamiliar water concerning limits, size, and other restrictions.

ROCK CREEK LAKE is frozen with four sections around the lake that have open water. Fly fishing was nil. Mosquito flats road has not been plowed to hiking parking area. Resort scheduled to open by Memorial weekend. Creek flow has been good up to the 27th. Owners Jim & Sue King are doing their last snow survey up on the Kern Plateau and hopefully will provide good news.

CROWLEY water level is higher than the beginning of last season. Because of the excellent food source in the 5280-acre reservoir, the hatches have been fair to good so expect a lot of these fish from previous years might be wild fish produced in Crowley's tributary waters. Fish will be spread out but in most areas if higher water temps are on the table. Check with Crowley Lake Fish Camp for current list of flies and areas to fish. Come prepared and ready for another great season on the lake. Watch for a second Crowley Cam at the Fish Camp boat ramp soon with streaming video.

Woohoo!

UPPER OWENS water conditions are improving and hatches are good. Flows are running around 41-43cfs and clear early am. Dries: experiment with the standard top water fluffs. Nymphs: Zebra midge #18, purple Psycho Prince nymph #16-18, red San Juan worm #12, flashback hares ear #14-16, pheasant tail #14-16, Western coachman #16. Streamers: Doc's Twin Lake Special, and Olive Woolly Buggers #10-14 or anything big and furry.

CONVICT was heavily stocked with 4,000 pounds of trophy trout for the opener. The Fred Hall Show Derby will feature tagged trout, with \$1200 in cash and merchandise opening weekend, and they also plan to host an additional 4 derbies throughout the summer. Try the inlet and outlets with some rubber-leg Woolly Buggers in black, olive or purple. It's been a long dry winter and they are easily amused.

HOT CREEK flume is at 38cfs and water conditions are poor, but will produce when the temps are at their peak. Baetis hatch has been out around 11am most days so switch to something with flash after 12noon. The warmer the day the better the fishing! Trout are mostly taking small midges early but nothing too flashy. Dries: Parachute Caddis size 20, extended body blue winged olive 18 and CDC Baetis Dun #18. Nymphs taking fish are WD-40 #18-20, Zebra Midge 18-22, Miracle Nymph #20-22, Tungsten Black

Beauty #22, Grey or Olive Scud #16, and Cold Turkey baetis #18. Streamers - no go.

Please DO NOT WADE in Hot Creek to avoid spreading the New Zealand Mudsnaill to other waters. Please protect this resource!

MAMMOTH BASIN - County road crew is currently clearing the basin and Twin Lakes is only one that has thawed, all the others are still frozen but getting lighter. The Town will be getting 22,000 pounds of trophies heading for lakes Mary, George, Mamie and Twin Lakes this summer.

SAN JOAQUIN - Road to Agnew Meadows, Devils Postpile, Rainbow Falls is projected to open by between May 11 and **May 19th**.

JUNE LAKE loop has been open since March 18th. June Lake's annual Monster Trout Derby will award prizes for several categories throughout the loop including Rush Creek. Contact Ernie's Tackle and Ski, or the June Lake Chamber of Commerce for more information. Local landings will be hosting a series of season-long monthly derbies focusing on trophy trout which is good for cash and merchandise prizes (June Lake marina, Big Rock Resort, Gull Lake marina and Silver Lake resort). Tie on some dark streamers using quick action near weedy areas by the west end of the lake (as always) also near the south shore. There are a lot of deer moving into in the area, so stay alert and avoid "wrecking" your trip.

GULL LAKE iced out in March and was stocked with 4,000 pounds for the opener. Some really nice trophies so bring your best bugs and drop them near the reeds. Check in at the shop and get the latest info on patterns.

SILVER LAKE iced out late March and was stocked by DFW and 400 pounds of large rainbows from Desert Springs of Oregon. Fishing was good overall according to non-fly anglers. My suggestion is to hit the inlet and outlet for browns cruising for larger morsels to whet their appetites. The lake level looks great.

RUSH CREEK: Flows above Grant Lake are up visually but no report as to measurements.

GRANT LAKE is low but anticipating some run-off, but there is still a lot of water to fish, always try the south shore (drive) or the inlet (park and walk) for trophy's cruising for smaller fish. Check with Ernie's or the Grant Lake Marina for current info.

LUNDY LAKE is ice free and down due to snow pack holding until the temps rise at higher elevations. The road is open all the way to the resort. The lake will come up when Edison lets the lake rise to meet their water requirements. The resort will open around mid June from the latest report. You can hit the ponds for some great dry fly action or the inlet on the south west side of the lake. These are always a good option to late run-off conditions. No report on whether DFW planted due to the possibility of the truck getting stuck and no one around to assist.

VIRGINIA LAKES ROAD has been open all winter to Rand Road due to the lack of snow. The County started plowing the road to Big Virginia and 1/4 of the way to the parking lot on the 27th. Two sections of the road between Trumble Lake campground and Big Virginia had snow depths up to 6 feet. It should be open by the 30th to accommodate all the fishermen.

BIG VIRGINIA is frozen and there is some water showing at the outlet and a 6-8 inch crack runs along the entire east shore and the 80% of the lake is ice blue. The ice will break down fast due once the warm weather returns. There will be loads of entertainment on the mountain with skiers and snowboarders taking advantage of the snow conditions and recent storms. The road starting at the Trumble Lake campground has 2 or 3 large drifts over 5 feet to get through. County has a loader up there and took another small blower this morning 4/27/16 to finish the last 1/4 mile to the Lake. Half the parking lot is snow free but the other side has about 2 or 3 feet on snow.

LITTLE VIRGINIA is frozen with minimal open water at the outlet and less at the inlet. Lake is ice blue and ice is pulling away from the north shore. Weather has been cloudy, snowy, windy and cold most of the week prior to the opener with one storm waiting to

celebrate the event. Night temperatures were between the high 20's to low 30's. Go out on the ice early am to avoid getting wet. If there is a lot of snow covering the edge be sure and kick it with your feet to see if it's solid or not, and depending on the days' temperature, be careful returning to shore. My advice, DON'T GO OUT! Storm due on Saturday afternoon. Dress warm.

TRUMBLE LAKE is frozen with snow all around the lake, very little water is showing at the north shore, and the lake is ice blue. Snow remains throughout the campground. No one fished it on opening day 2015 due to the weather. It will thaw first as it also has water around the southeast shore. Saw snow midges earlier in the week before the series of storms hit, but trout would have needed cataract surgery to see any action through the ice.

EAST WALKER flow continues to bounce between 55-74cfs several times this past week but hasn't hit the 100 mark yet. The fishing is fairly tough but most anglers are reporting at least getting into a couple fish, and many of them seem to be in the 16 to 20 inch class. Being in stealth mode is very important as the fish are very spooky. Lots of bows hangin' in the Miracle Mile, and good news of browns running between the bridge and Murphy's Pond on Hwy. 182. We have a lot of eagles and several ospreys that are hanging out in the area and I think this has a tendency to make those fish wary of predators. Jim Reid reports "we still haven't heard much about streamers even though typically this is a great time of year for them, if you want to give streamers a try we would recommend dead drifting them under an indicator and going with patterns like a Zuddler, Moal leech, JJ special, dead drift crayfish. Most of the successful anglers are getting fish either nymphing or fishing dry/dropper rigs. Patterns to consider include: top Secret Midge, Copper John, San Juan worm, Zebra midge, Rainbow Warrior, Silver Streak, Micro Mayfly, Chubby Chernobyl, Madam x, Henrys Fork Stone, and Chernobyl Ant. Nymphs: Zebra's, Tungsten Psycho, Hogan's S&M nymph, Top Secret Midge, Miracle Midge, and Mickey's Copper Tiger. Water is almost ready for streamers; if you try 'em use a shorter leader with something red or yellow as the point fly. They seem to see bright colors during murky conditions.

BRIDGEPORT RESERVOIR and the feeder creeks are very low but fairly clear. Lake was stocked and DFW bows are ready for some action. Also, last season an unexpected load of catchable browns appeared out of nowhere and I'm wondering how hungry and chubby they are. The Rez fished fairly well from boats and shore but mostly on bait last year and 2016 hails to be better with the additional snow-pack. Tube the drop-offs with Lo-Bergs, leeches and perch patterns. Also try Callibaetis nymphs, broken back midges, and flashback pheasant tails for good action. The Rez should fish great early in the season and better after run-off fills the lake. Check with Jeff at the marina for flies, boat rentals and current fishing info. It was uncertain if run-off provided enough water to put boats in the marina. Also check with Ricky or Jim at Ken's.

WEST WALKER flow hit 626cfs on the 18th and has slowed due to latest blasts of weather and is currently 405cfs. Flows will continue to rise with the temps the next two weeks. Prior to the start of run-off the anglers had no fishing pressure and lunkers holding in the deeper pools took a variety of flies. Fly anglers were reporting 3 to 4 pound rainbows being caught and released. Look for great action in the deeper spots where water is flat along the curves and edges and try Woolly Buggers, leeches and stone nymphs. Don't overlook the flats with good riffles for the surprise of your life. These areas are always missed, and can sometimes produce the best fish. Mono County stocked 400 pounds of 1 1/2 to 3 pound rainbows just before opener. North County Chamber and Mono County will be making 7 plants during the season mostly in July and August to support their 2 fishing derbies, "How Big is Big" and "Size Doesn't Matter". Check their website for details (Northern Mono County Chamber of Commerce).

KIRMAN LAKE - Reports stated the weather is going to be great for the week after opening, as we had a couple days over last weekend that produced some moisture with colder temperatures.

Bring everything especially Seal Buggers, Matukas or Mini Leeches with an AP emerger or soft hackle dropper.

TIOGA PASS Mono County – The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has been working on clearing snow, removing rocks, and repairing the road to open State Route 120 West to the east Yosemite Park entrance gate. It is anticipated that the road will reopen from winter closure on Friday, April 29th, 2016 at noon, weather and safety permitting. Caltrans' number one priority is safety for the traveling public and highway maintenance crews. State Route 120 west will remain closed at the Yosemite Park gate. This partial opening is dependent upon favorable weather and verification that the highway is safe for users. If the area is impacted by inclement weather Caltrans may not be able to open the highway as anticipated. Please check local highway conditions before planning to use SR 120 west.

Please note: Tioga Pass might finish the resurfacing project on State Route 120 but no info was available.

SONORA PASS – Not open as of the 27th (subject to storm closure) and currently closed. Road crews are working to open it, and there is a slight possibility of opening by Friday the 29th.

MONITOR PASS opened on March 18th (subject to storm closure) has been closed off and on for every snowflake that comes over the crest and may reopen in soon. Phone 1.800.427.7623 and punch in the highway number.

See you on the water smokin' reels, CJ (16.4)

Update 11am 4.28.16, on Conway Summit another 6" dropped early this morning with wind pushing the system in around 2am and up to 8am. Wet snow will put a lot of water into all waters. A series of storms is due in this coming week, gotta get "Mother" some migraine meds.

April 28, 2016

Caltrans Postpones the Opening of CA State Route 120 West. Mono County Due to storm activity, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has decided to postpone the opening of the lower gate on State Route 120 west to the Yosemite National Park entrance. Caltrans will reassess the weather and road conditions next week to determine if the highway is safe for the traveling public. For the latest highway information please visit the Caltrans Quick Map site at quickmap.dot.ca.gov or call the Road Condition Hotline at 1-800-427-ROAD (7623).