

# Eastern Sierra Focus

By CJ Webb

## *Weather Conditions*

Winter at Virginia Lakes started mid October of 2016 with 16" of snow and another 18" the following week. The County kept all the roads clear through trout season; only to have the high elevation waters freeze by early November. The bulk of the winter arrived between late December and late February with one storm on March 20th of 24" on Conway Summit (2017), with April as the most unstable month in my 41 years on Conway Summit. Winter is over, but no one bothered to "friend" Mother on Facebook that according to the calendar its spring and she needs to refocus on Daffodils, and the wonders of the season.

State Water Resources Board stated that the snow pack is **227%** above average that means full reservoirs, rivers and streams for a longer duration this summer once the temperature triggers the start of run-off. Mammoth is sitting at a record 590 inches as of April 16th.

## **Department of Fish and Wildlife:**

***DFW is warning anglers to be aware of high water, fast currents and flooded terrain in and around the Owens and Walker Rivers. The LADWP and Walker Irrigation District are doing everything they can to limit impacts to fishing for the opener but water management does not follow anthropogenic time-lines and caution should be exercised by anyone visiting the Owens and other water bodies during the spring 2017 fishing season.***

*Stocking allocations will be at the same level as last year (605,000 pounds) and the Mono County Enhancement Program will be stocking rainbows from Desert Springs, Oregon again, and they should be larger than 2016 around 6-9 pound range.*

*CDFW stated most streams that have an approved pre-stocking evaluation are flowing well and have been stocked for the season opener. Glass Creek and Deadman Creek are still under snow and will not be accessible for the opener.*

*Also, those with an adventurous spirit and strong legs, Kirman, Fremont, Lane and Roosevelt Lakes in the upper West Walker River area are accessible as are Parker and Little Walker just north of the June Lake loop. For catch & release anglers, Parker, Walker, Rush and Hot Creek should provide good opportunity for this opener.*

*CDFW has a free downloadable app for Freshwater Sport Fishing Regulations application at <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/regulations>. It tracks your current GPS location and will tell you the regulations of*

*the water where you are standing and regulations for waters within a designated area or approximately a five-mile radius.*

*Also another new offering from CDFW is the Anglers Guide to the Calif. Heritage Trout Challenge at <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/Fishing/Inland/HTC> - This program encourages anglers to "Take the Challenge," explore new waters across the state, and appreciate the diverse recreational fishing opportunities California has to offer (go to the site and read more about the program).*

## ***Feather River Hatchery closed until Further Notice***

*The hatchery's infrastructure and public viewing areas were damaged by high floor waters, silt and debris, making it unsafe for the public to be on the grounds or access the river via hatchery property. Hatchery Manager Anna Kastner, stated staff is focused on keeping the hatchery salmon and steelhead alive, and facility cleanup efforts won't be completed for some time. On February 9-10, more than 60 people from CA DFW, NOAA Fisheries and other agencies successfully transferred more than five million Chinook salmon to an annex hatchery nine miles away. Fisheries staff also constructed an emergency filtration system for the remaining salmon and steelhead at the Oroville facility with minimal losses at the hatchery.*

## ***Nimbus Hatchery Releases 420,000 American River Steelhead – March 8, 2017***

*Thanks to DFW, nearly a half million young steelhead recently started their journey to the ocean. Staff at Nimbus Fish Hatchery nursed the young steelhead through several potentially devastating conditions, including drought-induced high water temperatures last summer and winter flood conditions that nearly cut off usable water supplies and carried dangerous levels of silt into the hatchery's normally clean water distribution system. "The released fish will be returning to the American River over the next two to four years, and we are proud and relieved to have brought them this far," said Gary Novak, Hatchery Manager. All young steelhead were released into the American River just upstream of the I Street Bridge in Sacramento. Due to the high water conditions, the fish are expected to make excellent time traveling down the River to the Bay and eventually on to the Pacific Ocean. Losses to predators are believed to be lower during turbid water and high flow conditions.*

**LOWER OWENS** is at **627.4cfs**. This should taper the flows when DWP turns down the wheel.

**ROCK CREEK LAKE** is frozen and the road will not be open past the Sno-park gate. Road crew has run into deep snow (8 feet or more) as they blow the upper

sections. Only one lane is open and not wide enough to allow two-way traffic.

**UPPER OWENS** – The River is running at 79cfs and will probably continue to rise from this point on. There are still a few big fish left in the river but they are holding in the highest reaches above the Long Years section. DFW has been planting the river with catchable sized trout below the Benton Crossing Bridge. Currently this section is still closed to fishing. Added water from Big Springs and Hot Creek combined with leeching from the river banks has stained the water and we will soon see flooding on the banks. Check for current road conditions as there may be thick muck and puddles on the side roads.

**CROWLEY LAKE** – Ice Free with 15,000 pounds trout were stocked by Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) last fall and spring, and hoards of anglers are expected. This will be the hot spot, most of the summer along with the Bridgeport Reservoir due to heavy run-off in most of the streams/ivers. Weather predictions are good with warm temps in the 60s and a little wind for Saturday.

**HOT CREEK** - is free of weeds and clearer than it's been in many years. Fishing is fairly good after 10am until around 3pm with baetis hatches when the weather is good. More fishable water has opened up due to the lack of weeds that had been choking the fishing action. CADFW stocked Hot Creek with 6,000 diploid rainbow and brown trout to boost the fish population that has taken a hit from multiple consecutive drought seasons. The creek will annually receive 12,000 of these sub-catchable trout until surveys show that the fish-per-mile average gets back to around 6,000.

The creek was designated for catch-and-release in 1980 and that designation was upgraded to "Wild Trout Water" in 2007 which means legally, stocking fish was illegal unless it was to sustain a diminishing population. More information on this unique fishery is available at <http://www.fgc.ca.gov/policy/p2fish.aspx>

**CONVICT LAKE** – Ice free and heavily stocked with water temps around 50 degrees F. There are some nice tagged fish for the opening day derby by Desert Springs.

**CRESTVIEW REST AREA** – Opened April 5<sup>th</sup>, 2017

**MAMMOTH LAKES BASIN** is mostly frozen, and the road has not been plowed. The north side of Twin Lakes has some water showing from the outlet south along the middle of the lake. The basin is not accessible by stock trucks and will not be planted for the opener.

**SAN JOAQUIN** – Road crews will start plowing around May 13<sup>th</sup>, but this is just a rumor due to the snowpack the skiing may continue through mid to late May.

**JUNE LOOP** – Road is clear with minor repairs completed. Lakes are all ice free and ready for Tubers but be prepared for cold water so dress appropriately. Lakes were all stocked in preparation for opening day. Rainbows have been observed spawning

in some of the inlets and the CDFW discourages anglers from targeting these fish.

**LUNDY LAKE** – road was plowed the 29th of March and the lake is ice free but low (4 steps from full at the outlet dam). Lake was stocked and ready for Saturday's opener. Watch for boulders and small rocks along the road.

**VIRGINIA LAKES** – The County road crew started plowing the road on the 10th and is 2 1/2 miles from US 395. Due to some equipment issues resulting in down-time as repairs are made, the road will not be open by this weekend. The parking area near US395 will be available but the **ROAD CLOSED SIGNS** will be in place above the parking area. Efforts will continue throughout this week and beyond with snow removal towards opening these and other roads. There is a lot of snow, let me repeat that, there is a lot of snow at the lakes, and you might consider packing your snowshoes, skis and ice skates once you hike the 3 1/2 miles to the lakes. You might consider welding a 3 foot extension on your auger as the ice is thick, do I need to repeat that!

**BRIDGEPORT RESERVOIR** - Ice free and on the low side anticipating run-off. Mono County Tourism purchased 700 browns (spawners) late last season from Desert springs Hatchery in Oregon in the 1-pound range that might hit the 2-pound mark by opener.

**EAST WALKER** – The flow is 421cfs right now and has been there for several days. Since the flows have dropped, Jim at Ken's has been getting some pretty good reports. Of course he has also been getting some not so good reports but said there are definitely some very nice fish being caught right now. It's difficult to say how long the flows will be this low but some time on the water right now before it goes up might just be time well spent. He has seen some phone photos of some fat browns that had to be well over the 5 or 6 pound mark and had a couple anglers report 12 to 18 fish days down there this past week. Most of the action seems to be on streamers. The nymphing has been pretty tough for most anglers, and only been getting reports from the California side as the road beyond the bridge is still closed due to rock/mud slide. They anticipate having the road open by the 28th but this may change. Flies to try include: Zuddler, Zonker, double bunny, Sculpzilla, JJ Special. Nymphs too try are dark lords, wd-40's, flashback emergers, San Juan worms and Zebra midges for the best action.

**HONEYWELL POND** - The pond is fishing excellent with good water conditions with minimal weed growth. Most of the fish are 12-16 rainbows with a couple browns showing up on occasion. Ken's heard some good reports on streamers as well as small midge patterns with dry/dropper rigs. Most anglers are reporting 15+ fish per half day lately. The pond is limited to 4 anglers per day

so call Ken's Sporting Goods in advance if you want to book some time out there.

**SCEIRINE RANCH** – Haven't had any reports of anglers lately but check with Jim or Ricky at Ken's Sporting Goods.

**TIOGA PASS** ~ County road crews are busy plowing the lower sections of 120 as snowpack is between 8-15 feet on the highway with 50 foot snowdrifts in some locations. There is no estimated date for opening at this time.

**SONORA PASS** ~ County Road crew has started from the west side with a snowpack of approximately 5-12 feet on the highway. No date is predicted date as yet.

**MONITOR PASS** plowing crew started from the west side and they are working on the road from both sides of the pass, no date has been given for when it will open.

**WEST WALKER** – is running very high at **894cfs** and off color with good flat water just below the bridge for about one mile near Chris Flat campground. I drove along the river on Tuesday (just under 600cfs) with lots of people taking photos but not an angler in sight.

Winter catch and release regulation changes on Saturday to the Sierra District general regulations (5 fish limit/10 in possession).

See you on the water, or ice! CJ