

Eastern Sierra Focus

By CJ Webb

Weather Conditions

Winter at Virginia Lakes started early October 2017 with 14" of snow and another 10" the following week. The County kept all the roads clear through November 15, the end of trout season only to have the high elevation waters freeze by November 5th. The bulk of the winter arrived between late February and late March with one storm on March 20th of 30" on Conway Summit for a total of 62" in March. April was the most unstable month in my 41 years on Conway Summit. Our daffodils are up about 5 inches and seem to be reluctant to pop out, so I'm guessing we are in for a couple more spring storms. April 23 produced the warmest day of spring, a whopping 72 degrees, clear blue sky with billowy clouds which is typical for this time of year. Looks like opening weekend will get some mixed weather at all elevations starting Thursday, clear Friday, possible snow Saturday clearing on Sunday, a typical opening weekend for the high country.

State Water Resources Board stated that Mammoth's snow pack is 70% of normal; Rock Creek 50%. The snow pack report a month ago, showed 2017-18 run-off year at the second worst in history.

Legislative News:

April 18, 2018 AB-986 Hunting and Sport Fishing Licenses: Sport fishing license duration: reduction in license fees for veterans was "Referred to Committee on Natural Resources, W. and Veterans Affairs".

In February, the U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation overwhelmingly approved S. 1520, the Modernizing Recreational Fisheries Management Act of 2017. This legislation calls for critically important updates to the oversight of federal fisheries, including adding more tools to the management toolbox, improving data-collection techniques, and examining some fishery allocations that are based on decades-old decisions. Since introduction in July of 2017, it has received strong bipartisan support from 12 cosponsors representing coastal and non-coastal states alike. In addition, a broad coalition of organizations representing the saltwater recreational fishing and boating community has endorsed the Modern Fish Act and highlighted the importance of updating the nation's fisheries management system to more accurately distinguish between recreational and commercial fishing.

CALIFORNIA DEPT. OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

The CDFW is inviting trout anglers to voice their interest, needs, and novel ideas about the statewide management of trout resources. A series of upcoming public meetings will provide opportunities to learn about

and discuss three specific topics of Interest: 1. the revision of the Strategic Plan for Trout Management (last plan was in 2003), 2. The creation of a new Strategic Plan for Trout Hatcheries, and 3. Simplification of inland trout angling regulations.

CDFW will compile public comments and use them to help guide development in all three of these areas. First meeting is in Bishop April 11, Truckee on April 18, Los Alamitos on April 26, Sacramento on May 2nd, Sausalito on May 5, Fresno on May 10th and Redding on May 15, 2018. For additional information contact Andrew Hughan at andrew.hughan@wildlife.ca.gov or (916)322.8944.

Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW):

Every year, CDFW trout hatchery releases trophy sized trout to approved waters and a chance to catch a big one. Trophy trout are categorized by the Department as larger than 2.99 pounds each but can be much larger. Their "super-catchable" trophy will run between 1.1 and 2.99 pounds each which are raised specifically to provide public anglers a chance to tie into one in approved waters once they have fulfilled their part in providing fertilized eggs for populating fish of all life stages in their statewide program of trout hatcheries. These trout require more resources than catchable-size trout. Younger fingerlings to catchable size grow quickly and efficiently convert fish food to body size and that efficiency drops with age. So by weight, 93% of all hatchery trout are catchable with most 1/2 pound or approximately 12 inches in length. In 2018, 100,000 pounds of trout released for recreational angling will be in the trophy or super-catchable size. Areas to receive them are listed on their web-site as "news Feb 28, 2018". Inyo and Mono counties will get 35 waters planted from Bishop Creek and as far north as the West Walker river. The trophy trout will be tagged with CDFW identification. Updated trout releases will be on their web-site (<http://nrm.dfg.ca.gov/FishPlants/>) or call their specific region (Inland Deserts 855.887.1275) 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, but poundage is dependent on the program allocations which should be available shortly.

Nimbus Basin closed to all fishing as of March 2018

Planning is currently underway and construction is scheduled to begin in federal fiscal year 2019. For the EIR/EIS go to (www.usbr.gov/mp/cao/hatchery). For more information contact Jeanine Phillips at (916) 358.2030.

RARE FISH RETURNS to local Waters in 71 years.

On August 24, 2017, US Fish and Wildlife Service biologists, in conjunction with members of the USFA

and the CDFW, released 86 Paiute cutthroat trout in Silver King Creek above Llewellyn Falls in the Carson Iceberg Wilderness area of the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest. The project was the culmination of two years of planning to enhance the Silver King Creek population that had been devastated by years of drought and then uncharacteristic flooding. To learn more go to (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/r5/home/?cid=FSEP RD561732&width+full>). It's a great article on the efforts of many years and many individuals to see this come to fruition. Please take a moment to read it.

CDFW stated most streams that have an approved pre-stocking evaluation are flowing well and have been stocked for the season 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 an updated 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.

Reminder to try the Anglers Guide to the Calif. Heritage Trout Challenge on their web-site 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 about the program.

CDFW Releases a Half-Million Steelhead into Feather River February 12, 2018

Hatchery trucks stocked a half million steelhead smolts on the Feather River near Yuba City. The 125,000 fish released were the first of the fish reared from eggs rescued from the FR Hatchery during last year's spillway failure.

Engineers redesigned the water in-flow system using city water for the incubating steelhead. They also brought in massive charcoal filters to purify the water and reconfigured the aeration system making the release of more than 500,000 steelhead possible.

Feather River steelhead is on the state and federal list of species of concern and the hatchery is the key in maintaining the viable run in the Central Valley. The eggs in the hatchery during the Feather River spillway event represented a year-age class of steelhead.

Mojave River Hatchery in San Bernardino County Reopens - The Hatchery in northern San Bernardino County has reopened after an extensive and much

needed overhaul to promote more efficient trout production for anglers in Southern California.

CDFW invested several hundred thousand dollars on the project, including pressure washing and disinfecting 6,000 linear feet of fish rearing ponds and associated plumbing, coating all fish rearing surfaces with Food and Drug Administration approved epoxy coating to improve fish culture conditions and installing new manifolds for the water recirculation loop to improve efficiency.

Fish production at Mojave River Hatchery has already resumed and healthy juvenile fish have been brought in from CDFW hatcheries for additional growth at the renovated facility. Millions of fertile trout eggs are also being shipped to Mojave for incubation and rearing into catchable fish for stocking later in 2018, and CDFW is continuing to stock catchable fish in Southern California from sister hatcheries farther north.

In addition to the raceway renovation and improvements, contractors upgraded the plumbing from the hatchery building, refurbished the well pump motors, and excavated the two settling ponds and installed new, UV-resistant rubber lining. The last major renovation work took place more than 45 years ago.

HOT CREEK WILD TROUT area 2nd year stocking

The CDFW has completed their electro-shocking survey of Hot Creek for the 2nd year in a row following up on drought impacts from the last few years. The results were favorable (increased numbers) but some size classes are missing and they have elected to continue with their three-year plan developed in 2016. This plan involves an annual shocking survey in 2016, 2017 and 2018 followed by the stocking of subcatchable Rainbow and Brown trout to supplement the limited successful reproduction experienced during the drought. Volunteers stocked trout by hand/bucket with fin clipped fish to aid in distinguishing hatchery fish from those naturally produced in the stream. They were stocked on November 3, 2017. More information on this unique fishery is available at <http://www.fgc.ca.gov/policy/p2fish.aspx>

CONWAY Ranch Update - February 18, 2018

On October 3, 2017 the Mono County Board of Supervisors directed staff to put out an RFP for cattle grazing activities on Conway Ranch, the RFP was issued and 3 proposals were received in response. The Board was given three options for proposals received, and 3 options relating CEQA upon identifying a preferred proposal, discussed the fiscal impact, and were provided with a background by the assistant CAO, Tony Dublino. After reviewing the proposals internally, they were distributed to agency personnel for their review and input to inform the ranking process. A meeting among County staff and representatives of BLM, CA DFW, US Dept. Fish and Wildlife and Eastern Sierra Land Trust was held on January 24, 2018. During the meeting 12

topics were discussed and agency staff was questioned as to their opinions on the various approaches proposed by the different operators. The 3 proposals received were largely consistent with the discussion of best management practices on the 12 topics. Staff is recommending a draft 10-year lease with detailed Grazing Management Plan (GMP) that would include 9 conditions and limitations of management, on/off dates, animal units, interior/exterior fencing, water system, non grazing areas and willow habitat.

Once the GMP is drafted and CEQA analysis can begin, an initial study will be performed and additional studies may be needed with an associated cost to be borne by the applicant or the County which was not included in the 2017/18 budget for Conway and staff will receive Board direction regarding the CEQA. If you would like a copy of the letter, contact me at vlresort@wildblue.net

LOWER OWENS is at **331.9 as of 4/26**. The flow should taper when DWP turns down the wheel.

ROCK CREEK LAKE road is open to the pack station. Some open water around inlet and outlet and ice fishing will be ok but watch for dark spots and be safe as it can change at that elevation very fast, but there's always the creek. Season opens April 28.

UPPER OWENS – Flows are at **246.3 as of 4/26** above the Confluence. Water is pretty clear with a fair number of 10"-13" fish but cold water has put a damper on the action. Warm up this week should get the spawn going but the spring runs have been a mystery so far. Flies to try: Stimulator #16, Extended Body BWO #16, and High-Vis Parachute BWO #18. Nymphs: #12-16 Bead Head Prince Nymph, #16-18 Pheasant Tail, Flashback Hares Ear #14-16, Red Copper John #12-14, Western Coachmen #12-16, San Juan Worms #12, Egg patterns any size, Zebra Midge #18, Copper Tiger Midge, Marabou leeches, Woolly Buggers and Matukas stripped or dead drifted.

CROWLEY LAKE – Season opens April 28th, and is ice Free with 15,000 pounds trout were stocked by Dept. of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) last fall, and hoards of anglers are expected. This will be the hot spot, most of the summer.

HOT CREEK - Water is clear and cold. Flows are at **72.2 as of 4/26**, but might increase this week with warmer weather. (Note: flows include water from the springs, not just the gauging station at the highway so this is what is really flowing through the canyon). Gate is open, and fishing is good. Seeing lots of midges early and BWOs mid days. With these warmer days Caddis should show up.

CONVICT LAKE – Ice free and heavily stocked. Again there are some nice tagged fish for the opening day derby by Desert Springs this Saturday, April 28th.

CRESTVIEW REST AREA – Opened April 5th, 2018

MAMMOTH LAKES BASIN is thawing, and the road has not been plowed. The basin is not accessible by stock trucks and will not be planted for the opener on April 28th. The Twins are open with but surrounded by snow.

SAN JOAQUIN – Road crews will start plowing around May 13th, as is the norm due to the agreement between the mountain and the Special Use Permit with Forest Service.

JUNE LOOP - The entire June Lake loop area lakes (June, Gull, Silver and Grant Lakes) are ice free and have been stocked in preparation for opening day. Grant Lake is rising steadily and has been accessible to stocking trucks the past few weeks and has been stocked. All marinas in the June Loop have boats in the water and are ready to go. Silver Lake and Oh Ridge Campgrounds are open. Rush Creek is flowing very strong and is above its bank in many areas.

The June Lake Marina will release 70 trophy trout from the stock pens.

LUNDY LAKE – Lake is ice free and work will start May 9th to ready the resort for opening in June but no exact date as yet. Back ponds are full and trees are starting to leaf. Lake was stocked. Lots of surface dimpling, so bugs are around and suggest bringing your light weight rod and some small dries for added fun when trout season opens Saturday, April 28.

VIRGINIA LAKES – The County road crew started plowing the road on the 30th of March and completed the road to Big Virginia on April 9th with both lanes clear. County requests to please observe the no parking signs along the road and/or in private driveways. The 7 hours of rain on the 5th removed all the snow on top the lakes down to surface ice so smooth you could have skated on it. There has been an abundance of small stoneflies, and midges around the snowpack but not enough water to throw fly line until more water is open. It's melting very fast with temperatures staying about in the low 40's at night and in the high 60's in the last 3 days but soon to change.

BRIDGEPORT RESERVOIR - Ice free and is full as of April 25th but may be lowered anticipating run-off. Mono County Tourism purchased 700 browns (spawners) late in 2016 from Desert Springs Hatchery in Oregon in the 1-pound range that might hit 3 pounds or more by opening weekend. Weather predictions are good with warm temps in the 60's plus and slight wind for Saturday's trout opener.

KEN'S SPORTING GOODS - Nevada Licenses

Unfortunately Nevada does not have the new license terminal on-line, and Ken's will post it when it is up and running.

EAST WALKER – Report from Jim Reid. "The flow has bounced around from 134-188-195 this past week and currently running at **165cfs** as of 4/26. Even with the

ups and downs flow-wise, the fishing has been excellent. There's lots of nymphing activity as well as streamer activity. We've also had a few good reports on dry/dropper rigs lately. The traffic down there has been increasing with the great weather and fishing we've been having. Both the upper and lower sections on the California side are doing well as are both the Rosachi and Sceirine sections in Nevada. I'd expect the flows to start coming up a bit as the weather warms. Listed are the flies currently working: Rojo midge, San Juan worm, pheasant tail, prince nymph, flash bang midge, mercury midge, miracle nymph, zebra midge, flashback emerger, Brassie, Copper John, Top Secret Midge, Micro Mayfly, Poxback Stone, Micro Stone, Sculpzilla, Matuka, Matuka Sculpin, Zuddler, Moal Leech, JJ Special, Stimulator, Chubby Chernobyl, rubber leg Stimulator, and Madam-X".

HONEYWELL POND - Conditions are great, the weeds haven't grown too much yet and the fish are in great shape! Give us a call if you want to break out the tube and hit up the pond! Call Ken's Sporting Goods in advance if you want to book some time out there.

SCAIRINE RANCH – The ranch fished excellent this week with great reports from anglers. Lots of flies working on the ranch so try red San Juan worms, pheasant tails, flashback pheasant tails, Poxback Stones, Micro Stones, Rainbow Warriors, Split Cased BWO's etc. Don't forget to call Ken's Sporting Goods if you want to book some time on the ranch.

TIOGA PASS ~ Tioga Pass (from the Junction of US 395 to the Yosemite National Park Gate) crews have removed snow up to the Yosemite National Park gate. Rock and debris removal and repairs are in progress. Avalanche danger is high as well as rockfall. There is no estimated date for reopening the highway at this time.

SONORA PASS ~ Crews are in the process of removing snow. The snowpack is estimated to be 4 to 8 feet on the highway. There is no estimated date for reopening the highway at this time. County is at the top and waiting for the other side to get there.

MONITOR PASS is opened with no restrictions at this time.

KIRMAN LAKE - Jim Reid made a recon hike up to Kirman and the road/trail is totally clear of snow and the lake is very full. Not sure how the fishing will be up there this season, it was kind of a bust most of last year so hopefully it will be better. With any luck we'll get some reports after opening weekend that I can pass along.

WEST WALKER – was running at 1330cfs on April 8th and off color but is currently **818cfs as of 4/6** with good flat water just below the bridge for about one mile starting at the BRIDGE with a bit of rough water then flat water near Chris Flat campground. I drove along the river on Tuesday with lots of people taking photos but

not an angler in sight. The only reports Ken's had from the West is that it was slow, it might be a little too cold still but as the weather warms up it should start getting better. NOTE: Winter catch and release regulations change on April 28 to the Sierra District general regulations (5 fish limit/10 in possession).

MOST STREAMS that have an approved pre-stocking evaluation are flowing well and have been stocked for the season opener. This year there are lakes that have rarely been accessible this early in the season. For those with an adventurous spirit and strong legs, Kirman, Fremont, Lane and Roosevelt Lakes in the upper West Walker River are accessible as are Parker and Little Walker just north of the June Lake loop. For catch and release fishermen, Lower Parker, Lower Walker, Rush (below Grant Lake) and hot Creek should provide good opportunity at this opener.

CalTrans Scheduled Road Maintenance

CalTrans received funding that will widen shoulders and add a northbound left turn pocket on US Highway 395 at the intersection of Virginia Lakes Road (Conway Summit). Construction is expected to begin in spring and is considered a "minor project". To check other construction for 2018 along US395 go to (www.dot.ca.gov/d9/projmgmt/projects.html) See you on the water, keep 'em wet CJ