Pacific Rivers Council
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California Fish Stocking – Frequently Asked Questions

1. **What is fish stocking?**

Beginning in April and ending in October, the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) dumps young trout (fingerlings) into lakes, reservoirs, rivers and streams. The planted, hatchery-raised fish upset the native ecosystem.

2. **Why are fish stocked?**

DFG claims to plant the fish for improved recreational opportunities. However, the fact is that fish populations would do fine without the stocking.

3. **What's wrong with stocking fish?**

Indiscriminate fish stocking has contributed to the decline of many of California's native trout and frog species, including golden trout, California's state fish.

Fish stocking creates three main problems for California's natural environment:

- Each and every time a water is planted there is risk of spreading disease, exotic organisms, or unwanted fish,
- Stocked fish prey on and compete with native species for food and habitat, and
- The planted fish are altering the natural ecosystem to the detriment of the native species.

In fact, scientists have concluded that stocking non-native trout is the single biggest factor in the decline of native fish species in the Sierra Nevada.

4. **What happens to recreational fishing if DFG doesn't stock?**

Studies in the Trinity Alps, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park, and elsewhere show that up to 80% of the lakes being planted today could maintain themselves through natural reproduction.

However, we are not asking for DFG to permanently end fish stocking. We are asking that they investigate the environmental impacts of the fish stocking program. Once the assessment is complete, sound resource management decisions can be made.

5. **Why are reforms needed?**

In California, the native trout species need help. Most native trout species are listed under the Endangered Species Act, and nearly all are threatened by fish stocking. The same holds true for many amphibian species, most notably the mountain yellow-legged frog and Cascades frog. In total, DFG's ongoing fish stocking program directly impacts over 35 fish and frog species, and many more continue to be impacted by fish that were stocked over the past 150 years.

6. **What reforms are needed?**

We aim to protect existing quality habitat and healthy native fish and amphibian populations from further degradation and secure protection of high-quality watersheds from the threat of future stocking.

The first step is for DFG to conduct a statewide assessment of the fish stocking program to identify where impacts are occurring and to which native species. This has never been done. With actual data in hand, we can begin a broader discussion of how to address the historical and ongoing impacts of fish stocking on native aquatic species.