

Board Backs Waddell Creek Fish Farm

By Wallace Wood
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California's first proposed fish farm operation won a recommendation for approval yesterday from the county board of supervisors.

By a 4-to-1 vote, the board boosted the plans of Pacific Marine Enterprises to harvest silver salmon and steelhead trout on Waddell creek near the northern county line.

The state Department of Fish and Game will consider PME's application to catch and market fish hatched in the creek which return from the ocean to spawn.

"We've got nothing to lose and everything to gain," was the most common comment about the fish farm plan from supervisors and members of the county Fish and Game commission.

There was opposition to the plan, however. The local Rod and Gun club and other sportsmen's organizations fought the plan on grounds it will set a dangerous precedent.

Much opposition evaporated weeks ago, however, when PME dropped its insistence that the beach in front of the creek and an area three miles in diameter from the shore be closed to fishermen. Instead, PME agreed

to allow sport fishing on the private creek as well as removing its request for closing the other areas.

Vincent Quartararo of the county F&G commission told supervisors that such fish farms are already in operation in Sweden, Germany and Italy, and are a great success.

Paul Schmidt, representing PME, outlined plans for raising and releasing up to 200,000 fish yearly into the ocean. He said the firm hopes at least 5 per cent of these will return to spawn.

Schmidt said that if the rest of the fish are caught elsewhere by fishermen, the firm will have no claim on them.

PME already operates a pilot hatchery near Scotts Valley, and Supervisor Robert Burton described the operation as "impressive."

Besides Quartararo, commercial fisherman Malio Stagnaro repeated the theme, "we have nothing to lose," since the salmon or steelhead would add to the piscatory population of Monterey Bay. He was preceded by Dave Sachau of the F&G commission, who said much the same thing.

Forrest McDermott, representing a number of sportsmen's groups, said that the prece-

dent of allowing a harvesting operation will be a dangerous one, "that could apply statewide."

Lou Bacigalupi asked Schmidt how many persons would be employed in the fish farm operation, but the PME man could only answer that "it depends on the extent of our success." He noted another such harvesting operation on the northwest coast has 75 employes and supplies large amounts of fresh fish throughout the country.

Quartararo said that 64 per cent of all fresh fish is now imported into the U.S. and noted that a housewife "has to take out a mortgage on her home to buy a pound of salmon."

Russ McCallie, Seaside supervisor, moved to recommend approval of the operation. He said he agrees with F&G commission members that "this is the first group that hasn't come to us for money, but is willing to invest their own. I feel this is a tribute to the applicants."

Only Supervisor Henry Mello voted against the motion. He said the county should wait to see what position the state will take on the idea.