

# Steelhead-limit reduction urged for San Lorenzo River anglers

*Fish & Fishing*  
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SANTA CRUZ — The limit on steelhead taken from the San Lorenzo River would be cut from two to one, and coho salmon would be protected under recommendations by the Santa Cruz County Fish and Game Commission.

The board also agreed late Thursday to urge the state to mandate anglers use barbless hooks to take the popular gamefish.

The state Fish and Game Commission may hear the proposal as early as August.

The last major change in regulations on the San Lorenzo came about 20 years ago when summer fishing was eliminated, said longtime anglers who attended the spirited meeting.

The issue drew about 30 fishing enthusiasts to the meeting.

Supporters of the tougher restrictions hope the move will help replenish a steelhead population that anglers say is only a shadow of what it was in the

1940s and 1950s. 7-12-96

The move is also an important political stand that fishermen are willing to make a sacrifice, said Commissioner Gary Lease.

Other users of the river will not change unless the fishermen do, agreed several people.

During the three-hour meeting, anglers stressed to the commission that they are not the cause of the steelhead and salmon decline. Hungry sea lions, pollution, lower water levels are all

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factors, they said.

The recommendation of the local board is middle ground between making no changes and supporting the even stricter restrictions as proposed by a group of fly fishermen.

Fly fisherman Thomas Hogue of Felton said he started calling for tougher laws two years ago.

Studies showed there were as many as 200,000 fish in the San Lorenzo in the 1940s. Today's es-

timates are about 1,500, he said.

Hogue had proposed eliminating all bait fishing on the San Lorenzo. It was a move endorsed by the Federation of Fly Fishers.

"If we implement this regulation, we can become a model," Hogue told the commission.

Fish often swallow baited hooks, making it difficult to release them uninjured. Fish taken on flies are nearly always hooked through the lip; barbless hooks can be removed with little or no tearing of tissue.

The proposal was strongly opposed by fishermen who use roe and other bait.

When the water is high and muddy, bait is a better method of catching a fish, said Larry Montanez of Live Oak.

The problem, he said, is a growing number of harbor seals dining on the fish.

Both types of fishermen said they were pleased with the commission's actions.

"We wanted to get something done," said Hogue.