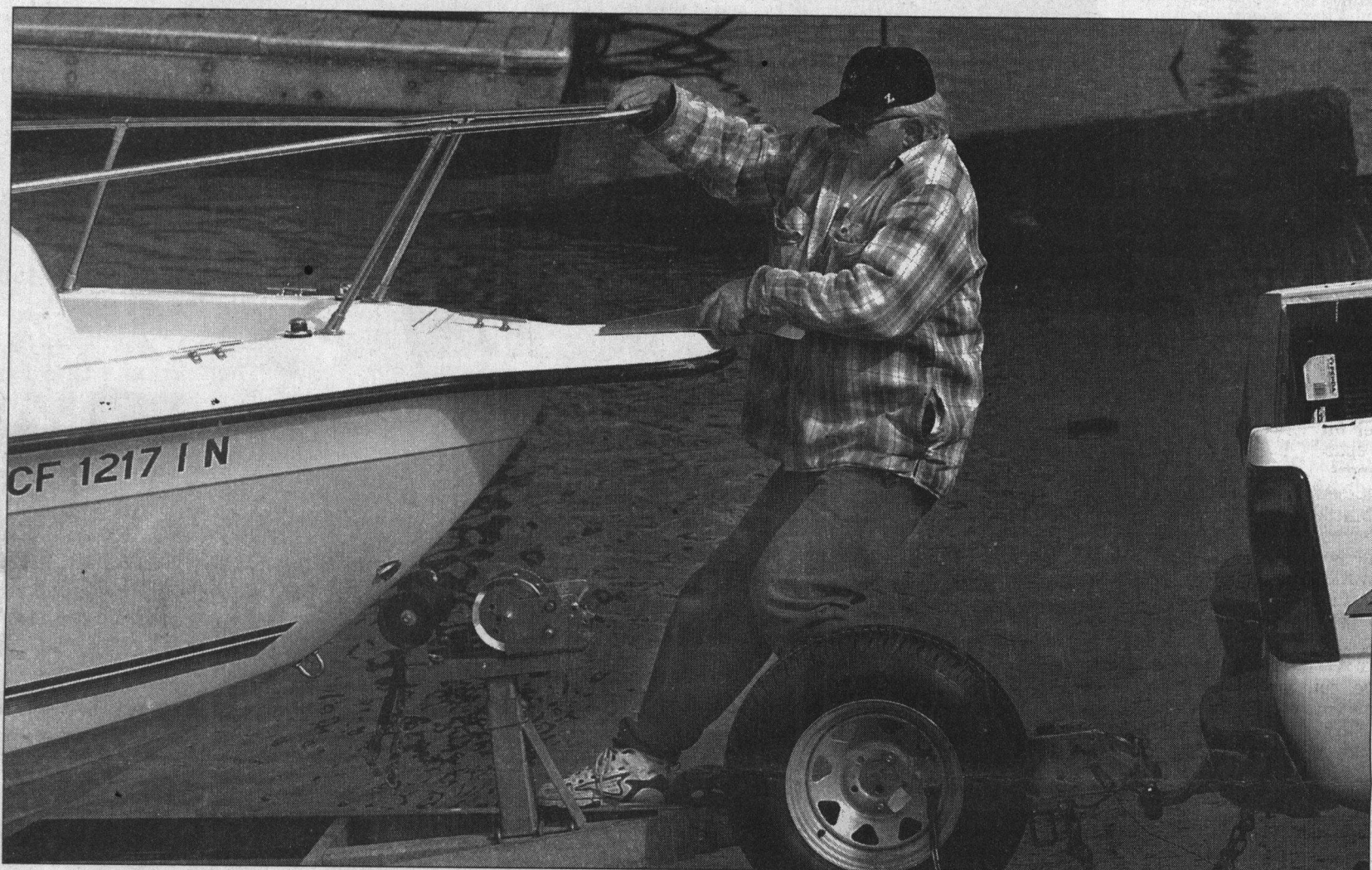


ANGLERS, START YOUR BOATS



John Dare of Santa Cruz readies to launch his boat for a day of halibut fishing Wednesday at the yacht harbor.

Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

Salmon season marks end of dry spell

By **HEATHER BOERNER**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

From the Santa Cruz Municipal Wharf to the Moss Landing marina, area anglers have high hopes for Saturday's opening of salmon-fishing season.

A state-imposed ban on rock cod fishing coupled with a sandbar that sealed Santa Cruz harbor for two weeks around the new year made this winter a quiet time for most recreational fishermen.

SANTA CRUZ Todd Fraser, owner of Bayside Marine, a bait and tackle shop at the harbor, knows something about the lure of fishing. He said everyone is "chomping at the bit" to get back on the water.

"For those of us who love fishing, it's been a long, dry spell," said Harvey Bien of Tom's Sportfishing in Moss Landing. The wait is nearly over.

The harbor on Wednesday was filled with fishermen cleaning their boats,

spooling their rods and stocking up on gear.

Bob Turner launched his boat to head out to check some crab traps but was looking forward to some rod-and-reel fishing.

"Everyone's ready," he said. "We haven't been doing anything all winter but preparing."

But Turner is a little leery of the crowds expected Saturday. Hundreds of anglers will descend on the harbor starting around 4:30 a.m. to connect with the party boat operators.

That doesn't include the hundreds of boat-owning anglers who will shove off from the harbor's boat-launch ramp. Last year's opening day drew more than 500 launchers.

Turner said he's planning to wait until later in the day to head out.

"It's just going to be impossible," he said.

The Santa Cruz Port District is not

booked for the weekend only because it doesn't take reservations, though they are considering starting a boat-launch reservation system.

Kimbra Eldridge, harbor operations manager, said extra workers will be on hand Saturday to help with truck and trailer parking and make sure guest berths are open.

Local sportfishing companies have been sold out for opening weekend for up to four months. Tom's Sportfishing has sold out its 25-person boat both Saturday and Sunday, and is planning a second trip out Saturday afternoon.

Santa Cruz Sportfishing's boat, the Makaira, is booked through the weekend, as is Shamrock Charters. Both launch from the harbor.

On the wharf, Dino Stagnaro said Stagnaro Fishing's two boats, which carry 63 people between them, are nearly booked solid, with only a handful of spots open.

"We're all praying for fish," he said. "If there are no fish this weekend, it could mean people won't come back. Then we'll struggle."

There are early indications, however, this weekend will be a good one for salmon searchers. According to Bay Marine's Fraser, anglers at Pleasure Point, Pajaro and near Moss Landing have caught and released some salmon already, and there appears to be bait fish in the local waters, which draws salmon.

The weather is also expected to cooperate. Diana Henderson, a forecaster with the National Weather Service in Monterey, said highs are expected to be in the 70s, lows in the 40s, with light winds at 10 to 15 mph.

And, she said, there shouldn't be any showers "outside the bathroom."

Contact Heather Boerner at hboerner@santa-cruz.com.