



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Biologist Rick Chapman checks new arrivals.

^{FISH + FISHING} 35,000 salmon delivered to Big Creek Hatchery

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SWANTON — The state gave local commercial fishermen a gift Saturday — 35,000 king salmon that will be released by the Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project in a few weeks.

The fish delivered to the Big Creek Hatchery here were about four-months old and tiny, small enough to fit in your hand. But they are expected to grow to 15 pounds.

Also known as Chinook salmon, king salmon are a mainstay for commercial fisherman. Some have been reported to reach a weight of 100 pounds.

And Rick Chapman, a board member of the Salmon and Trout Project, predicted fishermen would catch about 3,500 of them in a couple of years.

The state Department of Fish and Game delivered

the young salmon via a 600-gallon tanker truck here and to several other hatcheries that have never reared king salmon, said Jack Harrell, a Salmon and Trout Project volunteer.

The gift came about because the state-owned Feather River Hatchery in Oroville, a hour north of Sacramento, exceeded its quota of fish needed to ensure a strong spawning season, Harrell said. As a result, the state was willing to deliver the king salmon elsewhere as an experiment to increase the fish's number in the Monterey Bay area.

"We convinced them we'd take good care of them," Harrell said.

Project volunteers, with the Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute, Commercial Fisherman's Stamp Committee, Moss Landing Commercial Fisher-

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Fish delivery

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mans' Association and the Monterey and Santa Cruz Sport and Commercial Fishing Groups, will release the young salmon into salt water at Moss Landing in several weeks.

Harrell said that when the salmon is transferred from fresh water to salt water, the fish are able to encode the location where they are released.

The fish then return to that location at spawning time, he said.

Project volunteers will gather returning fish yearly for spawning at the tanks north of Davenport. The eggs then will be collected, hatched and released at Moss Landing all over again, Harrell said.

Rearing king salmon locally should reduce the demand on the salmon coming from the Sacramento River system, Harrell said.

The number of salmon coming from the central valley has deteriorated since the drought, Harrell said.

According to the state, the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers provide 60 to 80 percent of king salmon for the Monterey Bay area.

"We're doing this for the commercial fisherman," Chapman said. "Everyone likes chinook. We want to see fishermen catch them by the thousands."

Only 10 percent of the released salmon must return for spawning to keep the process going, Chapman said.

Harrell said the number of king salmon should gradually increase over the years if the pilot program successfully hatches king salmon eggs.

The Project hatchery just north of Davenport has made an effort to restore the number of Coho salmon, native to Scott Creek and San Lorenzo River.

Coho, caught mainly for recreation, is near extinction despite efforts by project volunteers, Harrell said.

"They're just not coming back out of the ocean," Harrell said.

Two years ago, the Project released 10,000 Coho salmon in Scott Creek, and only 1 female returned for spawning, Chapman said.