

Chi Council for the Clear Lake Hitch
Minutes of March 26, 2008 meeting at Lake County Agricultural Center

Submitted by Victoria Brandon, Chi Council secretary

Present: Irenia Quitiquit, Linda Juntunen, Greg Dills, Jay Rowan, Peter Windrem, Mary Manning, Tom Smythe, Carolyn Ruttan, Jeff Lynch, Robert Geary, Erin O'Farrell, Lisa Thompson, Al Moorhead, Kathy Windrem, Paula Britton, Mindy Nicoletti, Paul Kolb, Sandy Moura

Introductions: on behalf of the Council, Windrem welcomed special guests Quitiquit (Robinson Rancheria Environmental Director), Rowan (DFG lake and reservoir biologist for a large territory including Lake County), and Thompson (fish biologist from UC Davis).

Windrem reported on the 2008 (March 15) field trip, which Geary also helped to lead: "quite a few" hitch were observed on Kelsey and Adobe creeks.

Observations to date:

Cole: Dills reported seeing a substantial school (the first this year) on March 25, and passed around photographs.

Kelsey: a second wave of spawning seems to have begun. Both Smythe and Windrem (accompanied by Thompson) saw large schools today below detention structure, and some above as well.

McGaugh: nothing reported this year, and water now very low.

Adobe: Lynch & Geary have seen lots (not yet entered in the database). Moorhead reported seeing large numbers starting March 11, sometimes more in evening than morning, calling this one of the longest sustained runs he can remember. Manning says the run seemed to be declining until yesterday, when she saw 500 or so, oddly enough without visible bird predation. Smythe & Windrem have both been seeing large schools ever since March 10.

Scotts: only one observation this season, reported at Kelly's Camp March 25

Hendricks: nothing seen by Dills. Manning recommends using a spotlight at night.

Middle: Smythe has seen none, but a few reports have been made by other DPR personnel, including one observation upstream from the (previous) barrier at Rancheria Rd. Kolb reports a single sighting of a dead fish.

Clover: no confirmed observations. Geary says an obstruction at the Second St bridge on the historic channel seems to be complete, although fish can still access spawning territory via the diversion channel.

Schindler: nothing

Seigler: nothing

Smythe says that when he was planning the weir construction project (2003? 2004?) he regularly saw substantial schools in both Middle and Clover creeks.

Grants. Quitiquit announced that Robinson Rancheria has been awarded the substantial Tribal Wildlife mentioned at the February 27 meeting, as have Upper Lake Habemotolel and Big Valley: altogether, Lake County tribes have received three out of the six grants in California this year. This will pay for 1000 fish tags and associated equipment, a 1500 sq ft fish hatchery to be constructed in a barn at the rancheria, and additional staff time for observations. The tribe is seeking practical advice from Pyramid Lake trout hatchery.

DWR restoration projects. Smythe reports that the Middle creek weirs have filled in well; he hadn't thought they were passable yet but apparently the fish think otherwise since upstream sightings have been made. He reports OHV users driving over the weirs and displacing rocks. Robinson Rancheria-funded modifications to the Clover weir have filled in so completely with gravel that flashboards can't be installed: some removal might be necessary. Suckers have been seen upstream from this former barrier but no hitch yet. The modification has opened miles of spawning habitat. The Main St bridge on Kelsey creek is a complete barrier, but correction would be extremely expensive (perhaps \$150,000), and no state funding for hitch projects exists. Brandon: county Fish and Wildlife CAC has \$10,000 set aside for this purpose that might be used for project design or match for larger grant.

Thompson describes her ongoing work at Eagle Lake near Susanville, where the local CRMP and DFG have been doing restoration work for 20 years to restore rainbow trout habitat, which may allow a natural spawning cycle to resume after years of hatchery restocking. A new less invasive tagging program started two years ago, using a circular antenna (a big loop of wire) anchored across the creek beds: Robinson's upcoming tagging project will employ similar technology. Thompson is working with Greg Giusti to set up an information-sharing workshop that might also include Rick Macedo & Peter Moyle. Giusti has obtained funding for a summer intern to assemble a hitch bibliography: looking for a grad student with anthropology background who could also collect oral history.

Windrem: guessing that the hitch return to natal stream to spawn, which if true will make it harder to reestablish populations in streams where they're now absent.

Thompson: a certain proportion of anadromous fish stray: around 5 percent among wild salmon and 10 percent for hatchery fish. Smythe: sometimes there's no hitch run

for five years in a given stream, followed by strong resumption.

Kolb: will captive fish spawn in a pond? Thompson: wild-captured fish are hard to maintain in hatchery, took 4 years for coho to spawn in captivity. She recommends collecting roe and raising the fry in captivity from the beginning rather than trying capture adults for breeding stock. As a corollary, captive-bred fish have a hard time adapting to life in the wild.

Rowan is a regional lake and reservoir biologist whose territory contains 150 lakes & reservoirs including Almanor and Tahoe. Thompson suggests that habitat improvements in the lake might help protect hitch from predation. Rowan: lakebed habitat is naturally excellent, with lots of weeds. Brandon: could we learn more about the hitch in the lake by getting by-catch information recorded by commercial fishermen? Rowan: a few hitch are caught, but fishery areas were selected to avoid hitch and splittail. Geary: will commercial fishermen allow observations? Rowan: probably, but they go out at night, and the season is nearly over for the year.

Ruttan reports on the emergency measures the county has just adopted against a quagga/zebra mussel invasion, which include purchase of decontamination equipment and mandatory inspections of watercraft. Volunteers are needed to inspect boats, staff phone lines, observe boating traffic, distribute brochures, etc.

Next meeting: Wednesday April 23, at the Ag Center. In the meantime, volunteers are urged to continue their observations.