

Chi Council for the Clear Lake Hitch
Minutes of April 22, 2009 meeting at the Lake County Ag Center

Submitted by Victoria Brandon, Chi Council secretary

Present: Phil Murphy, Bill Combs, Peter Windrem , Tom Smythe, Victoria Brandon, Linda Juntunen, Greg Dills

The minutes of the March 25, 2009 meeting were accepted as presented

Tribal report Combs: reported that the lesions seen on the majority of hitch caught for tagging were caused by "anchor worm," a disease of goldfish originating in Japan that has been seen in this country for a long time, supposedly "not linked to mortality" but "dangerous and devastating." Juntunen suggests consultation with Lee Morgan. Smythe: maybe that was what had been observed on threadfin shad. Are warm temperatures involved? Does Vector Control have information? Dills will check with them.

Windrem: tagging demonstration last month was fascinating, Dietrick McGinnis has photos. Combs: everybody learned a lot, standard methods didn't work, had to go back to old tribal ways for trapping. Erik Ringelberg (fish biologist) saw things he'd never seen before. Although there's no grant funding for next year's work the tribes are going to find a way to do it anyhow, since that's when the data from this year's tagging can be gathered. Water chemistry data is now being evaluated. Smythe: has spreadsheets with Ph and temperature information that he'll send to Dietrick, and will pull hobos this weekend.

Conservationist of the Year award. The Board of Supervisors will present this major honor to the Chi Council during next week's Board meeting (10:15AM on April 28): Windrem will accept it for the group, and will provide a brief description of our activities -- including the number of individual volunteers, organizations, and tribes that have participated, the number of observations we have recorded, etc. Smythe (with assistance from Dills) will edit his movie footage into a 3-minute film to be shown during the event, and Windrem will send a letter of invitation to our full volunteer list. We want as many volunteers as possible to attend, and a strong tribal presence too.

Review of 2009 migration reports:

Kelsey: the strongest run we've ever seen. Murphy: has watched the hitch run for 15 years, never seen anything like it

Adobe: plenty of fish, about as usual

Scotts: nothing, but several observations from Cooper creek in the Scotts watershed.

Juntunen & Smythe: lots of mallards after run, going after eggs or fry. Murphy: mallards started showing up when eggs appeared. Dills: mallards in Hendricks but no hitch.

Middle: a very few scattered observations

Seigler: zero

Hill: dry

Manning: zero. Combs checked daily

Forbes: no reports

Burns Valley: no reports
Hendricks: zero
Cole: a few scattered observations

Windrem: distributes a chart showing the time of the runs during past five years correlated with the frost protection season. 2006 was the last wet year and also the last time significant numbers were seen anywhere but Adobe/Kelsey (though none in Middle or Clover). Chart demonstrates that runs almost always end before the frost protection season and well before irrigation season. He has also compiled a list of probable causes for the population decline, with two primary categories: (a) loss of spawning habitat due to gravel mining and creekbed channeling in the 50s and 60s, rock weirs constructed to protect bridge footings, and other miscellaneous barriers, and (b) impacts from non-native species in Clear Lake including Inland silversides, threadfin shad, and Florida strain of largemouth bass.

Flow velocities. Smythe: they can manage 8 ft/sec, barely. Only a few fish can negotiate such a strong flow and only for a brief period of time -- and they are exhausted afterwards. Interestingly enough 8/ft /sec is also the maximum salmon can negotiate.

Windrem suggests that since the proper name for hitch is "hitch" and not "chi" (according to Nelson Hopper, an authoritative tribal elder from Big Valley) it might be a good idea to change the name of the organization. Brandon: only downside is that by now "Chi Council" has established a certain level of familiarity.

Murphy: what's different about the other creeks with no hitch? Something chemical?
Windrem: when a streambed is disturbed does that alter the suitability of the habitat in the long term? Smythe: there were no hitch in Kelsey during the wet period in the mid nineties (speculation that they were spawning on the north rim of the lake), and they then came back in huge numbers, so the absence of runs didn't indicate a general decline in population. Windrem: maybe the total population has been so far reduced that two streams provide enough total spawning habitat, and since they like to school up they occupy only as many streams as needed. Next year we *really* need to recruit someone (like a grad student) to do scientific measurements.

Smythe: wants to organize a work day at the detention structure some time this summer to widen the notches in order to reduce flow velocities. Will need volunteers and some special equipment including a concrete saw, a large (6 inch) side wheel grinder with diamond blade, and generator. A Saturday morning date will be set later.

Next meeting: at the Ag Center, 3:30PM on Thursday May 28.