

Chi Council for the Clear Lake Hitch

Minutes of May 23, 2007 meeting at Lake County Agricultural Center

Submitted by Victoria Brandon, Chi Council secretary

Present: Nick Voegtly, VB, Peter Windrem, Paul Kolb, Bill Rett, Judy Barnes, Greg Giusti.

Windrem called the meeting to order at 3:30PM. Introductions were made.

The minutes of the April 18, 2007 meeting were approved as corrected.

Stream barrier removal. Windrem: the new bridge under construction at the Merritt Rd crossing on Kelsey Creek will result in the complete removal of the culverted low water crossing. The barrier at Main St (which is total despite the presence of a non-functional fish ladder) will be more of a problem: Tom Smythe says the wall in the channel can't be removed, since it's necessary to support the bridge, which was endangered by undercutting after dredging at Clear Lake State Park narrowed the channel, resulting in removal of gravel. Construction of rock weirs downstream might work, but before moving ahead proof that the work done on Middle Creek weirs was effective is needed. Except for salmon, steelhead, or rainbow trout fishery restoration funding is so scarce that working through the tribes is the only realistic option. During the past winter there wasn't enough water to determine whether the Middle Creek weirs below Rancheria Rd actually worked. We need a migration barrier database with photographs: Brandon will start compiling this immediately. Windrem: we need a picture of the Decker bridge obstruction on Scotts Creek, which is on private land hence accessible only with permission or by kayak. In 2004 Robinson Rancheria got a Tribal Wildlife Grant to mitigate the diversion barrier at Clover Creek, but the work hasn't been done yet.

Windrem: a crescent-shaped inlet at CLSP was the historic mouth of Kelsey Creek but is now a dead end: nonetheless this past March a large school of hitch hung out in the channel for several weeks. (see 4/18/07 minutes for more on this) Rett: in 2006 saw lots of hitch in low reaches of Manning Creek, but none farther upstream: a dam there has been rumored, said to belong to Steve Devoto. Windrem: Robinson Rancheria has promised to forward all the data that they have compiled for inclusion in the Chi Council database.

Organizing scientific studies. After 4 years of amateur observations we need some hard science. Is the population really declining as it appears to be, and if so why? Do hitch ever spawn along the shores of Clear Lake? Schools are seen but no egg masses have been reported from the lake. We need tracking and tagging: how long does each female spend in the creek? During a spawning period of several weeks are we seeing a continuous series of different fish, or the same ones hanging around? Why do they seem to have such a strong preference for Adobe Creek? Why are there none at all in Schindler or Seigler Canyon? Barnes: what is the impact of non-natives? Predation, competition. Rett: how about trying to find a grad student seeking a PhD project? Windrem: Jon Ambrose has started to coordinate contact with scientists to try to devise a program to answer some of these questions and find funding sources.

Greg Giusti joined the meeting at this point, and described a January 2006 meeting with Peter Moyle, Lisa Thompson, and Rick Macedo who all have a great personal interest in hitch. There have been scattered studies on the Clear Lake ecosystem, but no so far no concerted effort to get UC Davis to direct its attention here. Giusti is now advocating for university funding to support a full-time Clear Lake fisheries position. In the meantime a DFG representative

should be part of the team. Although a DFG survey in the 1970s identifies Clear Lake fish by species and by creek, most information is scattered and fragmentary: we need to investigate the literature, find out what reports exist and assemble them, and when possible post to the Chi Council website. We also need funding for a grad student and technicians to start a regular information-sharing program, with the goal the establishment of an endowed "Clear Lake Institute". Somebody with scientific expertise should be looking at the Lake every day. Giusti wondered if the decline in the hitch run is connected with the 2007 threadfin shad population collapse, which has been so drastic that an estimated 70,000 western grebes have left Clear Lake. Shad are filter feeders like hitch, so it's possible that the same natural cycle or changed management practices are affecting them similarly. The water is also exceptionally clear this year. Brandon: according to Chi Council data the pattern of sightings was somewhat different in 2007 compared to 2006, but the numbers don't seem noticeably lower.

Windrem: we started by supposing that barrier removal will improve the situation, but maybe this assumption is incorrect. Giusti: maybe hitch are not obligate annual spawners, meaning that when conditions aren't right reduced observations might not reflect an actual population decline. He suggests getting information from commercial fishermen: have they observed more or fewer hitch in nets this year, and do they seem to be in good condition? We should organize a community informational workshop with participation from several scientists.

Barnes: would catch limits help? Windrem: an exception should be made for native take. Kolb: special regulations apply to hitch, which may be taken by hand or hand held dip nets as long as they are put to a useful purpose and any other fish caught in the nets are released. He suggests all take be forbidden with a tribal exception. Giusti: any change in the rules would need state Fish and Game Commission approval. Rett: in March he saw a compact school of what looked like hitch in the lake just offshore from Konocti Harbor, in the shade of the Clear Lake Queen. Giusti: many fish like to hang out near structures. Nobody knows if schools stay together throughout the year. Kolb: would endangered species status provide conservation tools? Giusti: federal status requires recovery plan, and although state requirements are not quite so stringent we could easily turn allies into enemies by seeking listing and so he doesn't recommend it. He suggests that mosquito abatement people could provide observations: they are trained biologists, out on the water every day, and collecting lots of data that might fill some gaps. Voegtly: has there been infrared photography of lake? It would show underground water sources. Brandon: Tom Smythe would know. Giusti reiterates that it's time to make a serious effort to compile a scientific bibliography. Voegtly offers to help. Giusti will make contact with DFG biologist Jay Rowan.

Water management plans. Windrem: the Chi Council should have input, and a representative should attend the meetings held by the RCD in connection with their ongoing studies of the Middle, Scotts, and Kelsey Creek watersheds. General agreement but no volunteers.

Captive breeding. DFG approval is essential before any Chi Council involvement. Giusti: a Paiute community is doing a captive breeding project on a similar fish, and it might be possible to interest Clear Lake tribes in a breeding project; they would not need to work through DFG which would simplify things considerably. In the meantime Kolb is doing it on his own in an aquarium, where he has some fry not yet confirmed as hitch.

Announcements. Brandon: did a presentation at Cache Creek Discovery Day on May 19 and will do another at Kids in the Creek on May 29. Giusti: has facilities to make big posters for display; Brandon will provide photos and text.

Next meeting will be at 3:30PM June 27, tentatively at the Ag Center; Brandon will confirm.

Meeting adjourned at 5:15PM.