

It's time to act on predation

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Who ever thought that reducing predation by an invasive species in a critically important ecosystem could be controversial? It is not uncommon for conservation efforts to go to great lengths to address impacts by non-native species that have a detrimental effect on native species. When the invasive species is harming an endangered or threatened species in its native habitat, then the need to address the situation is even greater.

So why is the situation any different in the Delta? Apparently, it is because the invasive species in this case is the striped bass, a prized sport fish among recreational fisherman.

The California Fish and Game Commission will soon be facing an important decision to set in motion a straight forward environmental review of a proposal to reduce predation by striped bass on endangered salmon and smelt in the estuary at its next meeting.

The decision to move forward will not be popular among sport fishing interests. Fishermen are expected to turn out in large numbers at the hearings to oppose the proposal. Over 300 anglers turned out for a workshop in Rio Vista when the proposal was first introduced. The decision to move forward couldn't, however, be more important, and it must to be made if we are to have any chance for efforts to restore the health of the Delta to succeed.

Fishery biologists unilaterally agree that predation by striped bass has a detrimental impact on native species, particularly endangered salmon. They may disagree on the extent of predation (impacts on salmon range from 5 to 40 percent or more), but there is no question that it is occurring. Most biologists also agree that striped bass most likely didn't cause the decline in salmon and the Delta smelt, but there is no disputing the fact that stripers are harming, and possibly preventing, recovery of



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Key state and federal regulators agree on the need for the Commission to move forward. In a letter to the Commission in 2010, the National Marine Fisheries Service stated, "In our review of the available literature regarding striped bass predation on native fish, NMFS has concluded that striped bass predation on salmon and steelhead is an important stressor warranting action."

Striped bass are not the only stressor on the estuary, and are likely not the most important. Actions to address other stressors also must be taken as recommended by the Delta Stewardship Council in its Delta Plan.

All the experts should be able to agree on one point though: the full range of stressors must be addressed if we are to recover threatened and endangered species, create a sustainable ecosystem and achieve the co-equal goals envisioned by the 2009 Delta Reform Act. That action needs to include a well-conceived effort by the Fish and Game Commission to reduce predation by striped bass.



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A Project of the Coalition for a Sustainable Delta