

Salmon season scaled back on Sacramento

By Howard Yune/Appeal-Democrat
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Mid-Valley anglers will have less time than ever this fall to hook salmon in the Sacramento River — and the Feather and Yuba rivers will be off-limits completely.

The state Fish and Game Commission on Tuesday voted to shorten the Sacramento River system's angling season to just six weeks, the shortest ever for what once was the West Coast's second-largest fall salmon run.

Only the Sacramento's main course will be open; no fishing will be allowed on the Feather and Yuba rivers or other tributaries.

Anglers will be allowed to take salmon only between Nov. 16 and Dec. 31, and will be limited to one fish per day.

A chronic decline of the fish population in the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta led to the commission's move to reduce the season from last year's two-month period.

The vote, taken at the agency's meeting in Sacramento, followed federal regulators' decision April 8 to ban commercial ocean fishing for salmon in California and most of Oregon for the second consecutive year.

State and federal officials estimate that more than 122,000 salmon will make the migration from the Pacific Ocean up to their spawning grounds in the Sacramento delta, up from last year's record-low count of 66,000 but far below the 2002 level of nearly 804,000.

Federal scientists have blamed the collapse on factors including climate conditions that slashed ocean food supplies, as well as an over-reliance on hatchery-bred salmon that may lack the genetic diversity to cope with environmental changes. Anglers also have pointed a finger at heavy pumping of water from the delta into Southern California during a statewide drought now in its third year.

Cutting the salmon season to the last month and a half of the year risks poor weather keeping anglers away and scrubbing what little remains of a

traditionally busy tourism period, said Bob Boucke, owner of Johnson's Bait & Tackle in Yuba City.

"Shortening it two weeks and getting into the rainy period where we might not be able to fish at all, it's hard to say how much benefit it'll be," he said Wednesday. "That late fall weather is unpredictable — but it's better than nothing."

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