

A New Manifest Destiny for Californians - When Salmon Can No Longer Survive on This Planet, Can Humanity Be Far Behind?

by Jack L. Sanchez

The people of California, volunteering together, can save salmon and steelhead. People must ask themselves whether or not salmon and steelhead have any time left on the planet without the help of the people. The Golden Age of Salmon and Steelhead is likely long past, but people working together can ensure at least their continued existence. California salmon were thought to be extinct as early as 1865 as a result of sediment that choked the streams from hydraulic mining and clear-cut logging. The salmon of California are now once again in danger for many reasons: global warming, pollution, poisons, man-made drugs, lack of fish passage and an overall degradation of spawning beds

Part of the solution is not to argue for years but to open up California streams as soon as possible for salmon spawning. The SARSAS Plan (see www.sarsas.org), formulated for the Auburn Ravine, is the simplest way to save salmon and should be implemented on all streams within our state immediately. If every stream were to have a volunteer group working to do what SARSAS is doing with the Auburn Ravine, (that is, to return salmon and steelhead to its entire length and secure fish passage, adequate water and spawning beds) then salmon could once again thrive in significant numbers. The line from the movie *Field of Dreams*, "If you build it, they will come," can be paraphrased and applied to all salmon: "If you clear it, they will come."

SARSAS urges the Governor Brown's staff, both houses of California government and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar as well as his water Czar, David Hayes, to help. Governor Brown and legislators can provide incentives to encourage other organizations to take ownership of particular streams and make them suitable for salmon passage. They could help streamline the 501c3 process and perhaps add small incentives to volunteer groups once they have a strong strategic plan in place. Salmon are at considerable risk, and the governor and legislators have the ability to connect each group to the right agencies in a quick and efficient manner to fast track volunteer groups' efforts toward salmon restoration.

The SARSAS Plan for the Auburn Ravine can serve as a model for other organizations to work on other streams. It is a simple but effective plan easily adaptable by any group. Additionally, SARSAS board members are available to assist other groups in implementing the SARSAS plan.

Imagine the impact of a thousand salmon in the Auburn Ravine and then multiply that by several hundred streams or perhaps all 738 streams that enter the San Joaquin, Sacramento and American River watersheds. Salmon and steelhead numbers certainly can and will thrive in this environment. If only three percent of the smolt return to each of these streams, the result will be tremendous. "Clear it (stream) and they will come." In a short period of time with many individuals and groups on board, SARSAS will reach its goals, missions and ultimately, the restoration of salmon and steelhead at a very low cost. Even if the SARSAS Plan is partially successful, salmon and steelhead will have one more river to spawn within, and new life will abound. An alternate plan of trucking salmon above and around dams is feasible, and SARSAS wholeheartedly supports it, but it is very expensive. Our plan costs thousands of dollars, the alternative, billions of dollars. Both can help the salmon, but at what cost in time and real dollars?

Want to help? Contact the governor, legislators, federal officials and local entities and ask them to grasp and support the SARSAS Plan. Then, contact Interior Secretary Ken Salazar and California Water Czar David Hayes and ask them to work with SARSAS. Let them know that the SARSAS Plan will provide successful outcomes for salmon and steelhead and, if adopted for a significant number of streams in central and northern California, the plan can assist in the restoration of the Pacific commercial fishery. Since many tributaries to the Sacramento/San Joaquin Rivers are blocked by minor diversion dams, salmon cannot currently spawn in numbers large enough to prevent a decrease in their number.

Using the SARSAS Plan as a model for saving salmon in the Auburn Ravine may be enough to begin the restoration of the Pacific Coast Salmon Fishery and put thousands of unemployed fisherman back into their boats, free sport fisherman to follow their passion and help Californians feel good about themselves because they did something to help themselves, their children, and the fishes. Volunteers, concentrating and uniting their efforts, can work quickly enough to revive our salmon population toward health and well-being. SARSAS needs your help, political will and public support to finish its work on the Auburn Ravine and to provide assistance to others who may wish to develop their streams.

In the final analysis, "All things merge into one and a river runs through it. We are all haunted by water" (and the salmon in it). The SARSAS Plan allows people to do something about the destiny of salmon, and thereby do something about their own destinies. Again, when salmon can't make it in our world, neither can people.