

History

Viewing The Kings' Fishery Habitat Progress

Hank Urbach, who is now chairing the Kings River fisheries Management Program's Public Advisory Group, looks back at more than two decades and is generally pleased with what he sees in terms of the river's fishery enhancement progress.

"Some of us are reasonably happy with the way things have developed", says Urbach, a Centerville area resident who is retired as a computer expert.

"We think there is an opportunity to turn things around in the river fishery."

Urbach wasn't always so optimistic. "I was on the original Lower Kings River Committee in the 1980's that filed a public trust complaint (viewable in the Maps and documents section of this site) on the Kings River," he says. "We were pretty upset with what had happened to the fishery."

It was a tremendously contentious time, he recalls. There was little or no trust between the anglers and the river's primary oversight agencies--the Kings River Water Association, Kings River Conservation District and California Department of Fish and Game.

The Public trust complaint, filed in 1991 with the State Water Resources Control Board was the anglers' choice of strategies (rather than a lawsuit, such as the environmental litigation that has dominated San Joaquin River interests since 1988).

"Out of that came the Framework Agreement," (viewable in the Maps and Documents Section of this site) he says. "We could have been like the guys on the San Joaquin and we would have taken 25 years to get one boulder in the river."

That agreement established the Kings River Fisheries Management Program in 1999 in a partnership between the KRWA, KRCD and California Department of Fish and Game, with cooperation from Pacific Gas and Electric Company and, ultimately the anglers themselves.

Cooperation, consensus and program implementation are at the heart of the Fisheries Management Program. The 28 KRWA member agencies voluntarily provided 12 percent of their storage rights to establish the program's 100,000 acre-

foot temperature control pool along with providing increased minimum releases. In the program's first 10 years, the partnership will have contributed \$2 million for habitat work.

"We recognized the reality that we were not going to get an imposed agreement," Urbach said. "It would have to be voluntary. That was a new concept at the time."

Although some anglers wanted a Public Advisory Group to have a major and direct role in managing fisheries program, Urbach said he was among those who "took the approach, 'let's see what happens.' We've been in it ever since."

Urbach, a Minnesota native who has lived in Fresno County since 1979, has been a regular at Public Advisory Committee meetings, first under the chairmanship of Mickey Powell of Visalia and more recently under the leadership of Kevin Wren of Fresno.

He sees the Kings River Fisheries Management Program as "an example of how cooperation can work." He also appreciates the amount of studies, data collection, program design and habitat improvement construction that the Fisheries Management Program has been able to achieve on a modest spending plan.

"I think if we did it in the typical way, we'd be looking at millions and millions of dollars," Urbach said.

Instead, he said, the three partnering agencies have been generous with their personnel resources and the environmental and engineering staffs at KRCD have been particularly well positioned to lend credible professional expertise to the Fisheries Management Program.