

Purple Fish in Flow

Presented by Levi Lewis at the 2026 IEP Annual Workshop Poetry Slam

Verse 1:

San Francisco Bay, rivers and tides swell,
Little fish, strong currents, big story to tell.
Longfin smelt, small body but major,
forage base, against which, few would have wagered.
Iridescent purple when sun touches skin,
Flash! here then gone, bring your vi-o-lin.
Spawning migrations to and from the bay,
Surf the tides, to and fro, the osmerid way.

Chorus:

Purple in the tide, little fish in flow,
Trying to survive while the rivers slow.
Marsh to the lab - learning what they tell.
Saving our distinct pop of longfin smelt.

Verse 2:

Scientists in the lab; stories in the bone,
Otolith rings show how each fish has grown.
Concentric rings, a black box of time,
Chemistry in the bands, migrations we find.
Measure maturation, ovaries swell.
Count fecundity, population growth fortell.
Males fan the floor, anal fin real wide,
Females ride the tide, to spawn in stride.

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Verse 3:

It used to swarm the delta like an endless school, now scientists counting fewer than a few.
Hydrology altered, climate heating up,
Pollution in the water, exotics fill the cup.
Managers question where to take a stance,
Raising little smelt to improve their chance.
At UCD hope grows in a tank, Culture program provides a reserve bank,
CDFW, DWR,

The LFS Tech Team are super stars.

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AI image created by Copilot of a “purple-toned” Longfin Smelt from the San Francisco Estuary.