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1999 Fall-Run Chinook Salmon Spawning Escapement in the Yuba River

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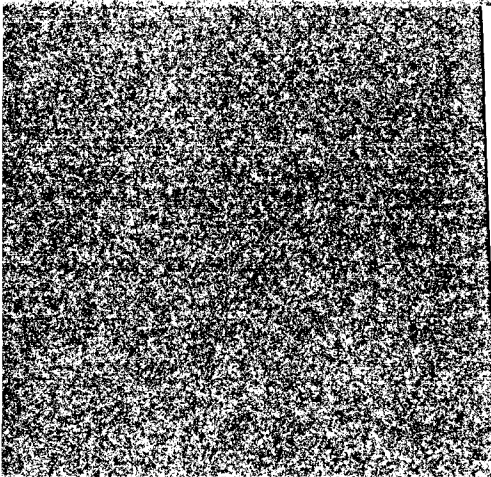
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INTRODUCTION

From 1953 to 1989, the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) conducted annual surveys of chinook salmon carcasses on the lower Yuba River to estimate fall-run chinook salmon (*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*) spawning escapement (i.e., the number of salmon that are not caught and return to spawn each year). DFG suspended its surveys of Yuba River salmon carcasses in 1990 because of budget cuts. In response, the Yuba County Water Agency retained Jones & Stokes in 1991 to conduct the escapement surveys. Jones & Stokes continued these surveys through 1999. DFG participated from 1992 through 1994, but was unable to participate in subsequent years.

This report presents the results of the 1999 spawning escapement surveys. The results of the 1991–1998 surveys were reported in previous documents (Jones & Stokes Associates 1992, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999).

METHODS

Since the 1970s, DFG has used a modified form of the Schaefer mark-recovery method (Schaefer 1951) to estimate the number of chinook salmon that spawn each year in the Yuba River. Weekly carcass surveys were conducted each year during the principal spawning season for fall-run chinook salmon (October through mid-December). Fresh and decomposed carcasses were counted, fresh salmon carcasses were tagged and returned to the river, and carcasses tagged on previous survey dates were recovered and counted. Weekly estimates were computed based on the proportion of tagged carcasses recovered and the total number of tagged and untagged carcasses observed. Weekly estimates were added together to obtain the total spawning escapement estimate. Previous reports describe the sampling methods in more detail (Jones & Stokes Associates 1992, 1994).

Weekly carcass surveys were conducted from October 5, 1999, to December 17, 1999, in the following reaches (Figure 1):

- Rose Bar (Rose Bar at the downstream end of the narrows to Parks Bar at the Highway 20 bridge),
- Parks Bar (Highway 20 Bridge to Daguerre Point Dam), and
- Daguerre (Daguerre Point Dam to the Simpson Lane bridge in Marysville).

These reaches include nearly all of the spawning areas used by chinook salmon in the Yuba River. Spawning may occur in the narrows between Rose Bar and Englebright Dam, but spawning gravels are scarce in this reach. For many years, DFG did not survey the reach above Parks Bar. Instead, DFG assumed that 15.5% of the run spawned above Parks Bar. This figure was based on the average percentage of the total spawning escapement estimated for this reach during the period of 1966–1971

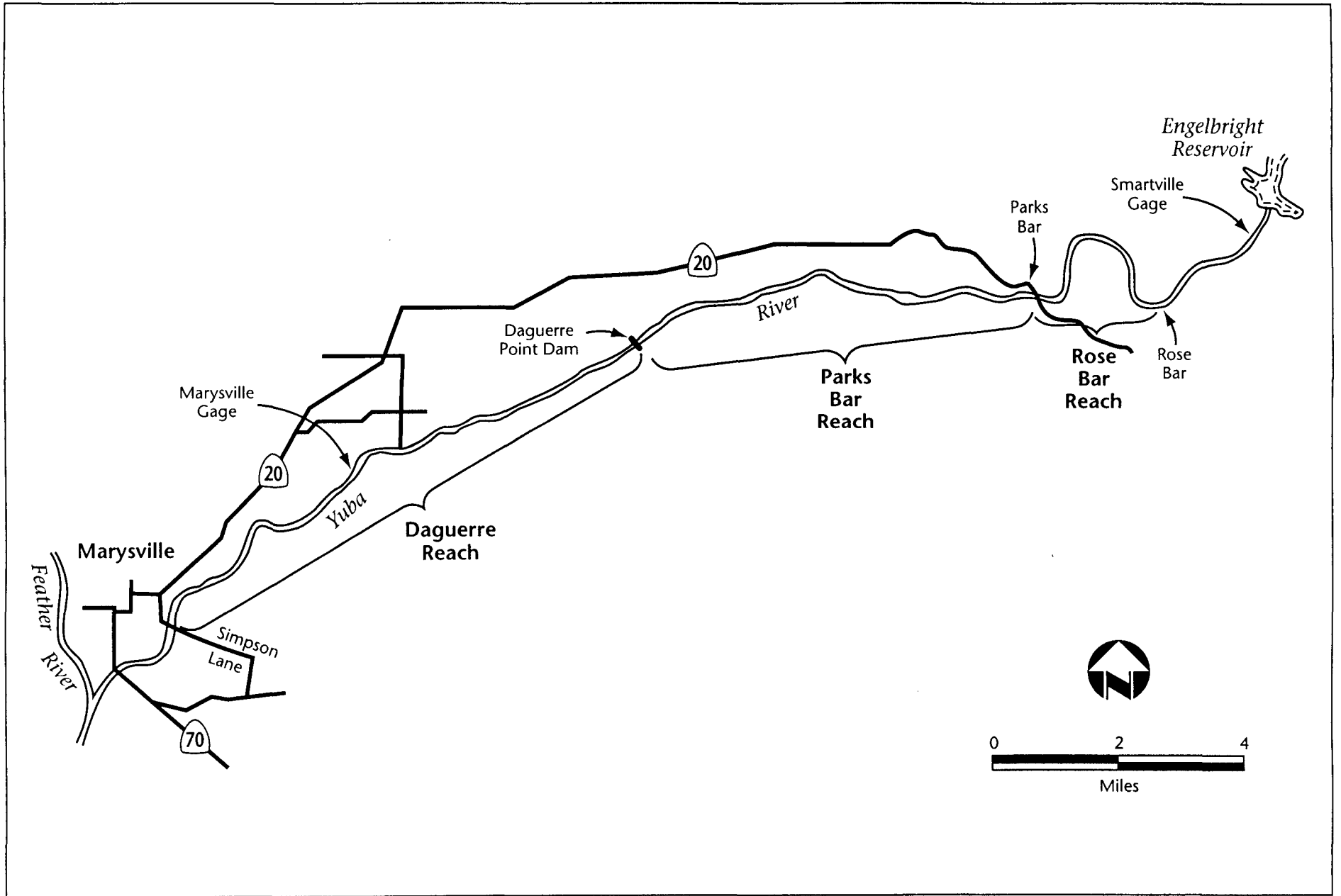


Figure 1
Lower Yuba River Chinook Salmon Spawning
Escapement Survey Reaches

(Konhoff pers. comm.). However, recent surveys (1994, 1996-1998) revealed that 25–37% of the run spawns in the Rose Bar Reach.

The sampling methods used during the 1999 spawning escapement surveys on the Yuba River were generally consistent with those used by DFG during past surveys with a few modifications. DFG's practice has been to tag only adult fish carcasses (age 3 and older) and estimate the number of grilse (age 2) by multiplying the adult estimate by the ratio of fresh grilse carcasses to fresh adult carcasses. This assumes that grilse carcasses are recovered at a rate similar to that of adult carcasses. However, by separating the counts between adults and grilse in recent years, Jones & Stokes found that grilse are often recovered at significantly lower rates than adults. Boydston (1994) also made this observation and suggested that grilse may be more easily overlooked and disappear faster from the stream because of their smaller size. To avoid this potential bias, both adults and grilse were differentiated and tagged in 1999. Because recovery rates may differ between reaches, independent estimates of both adults and grilse were made for each reach. Distinctly colored tags were used to identify carcasses from each reach.

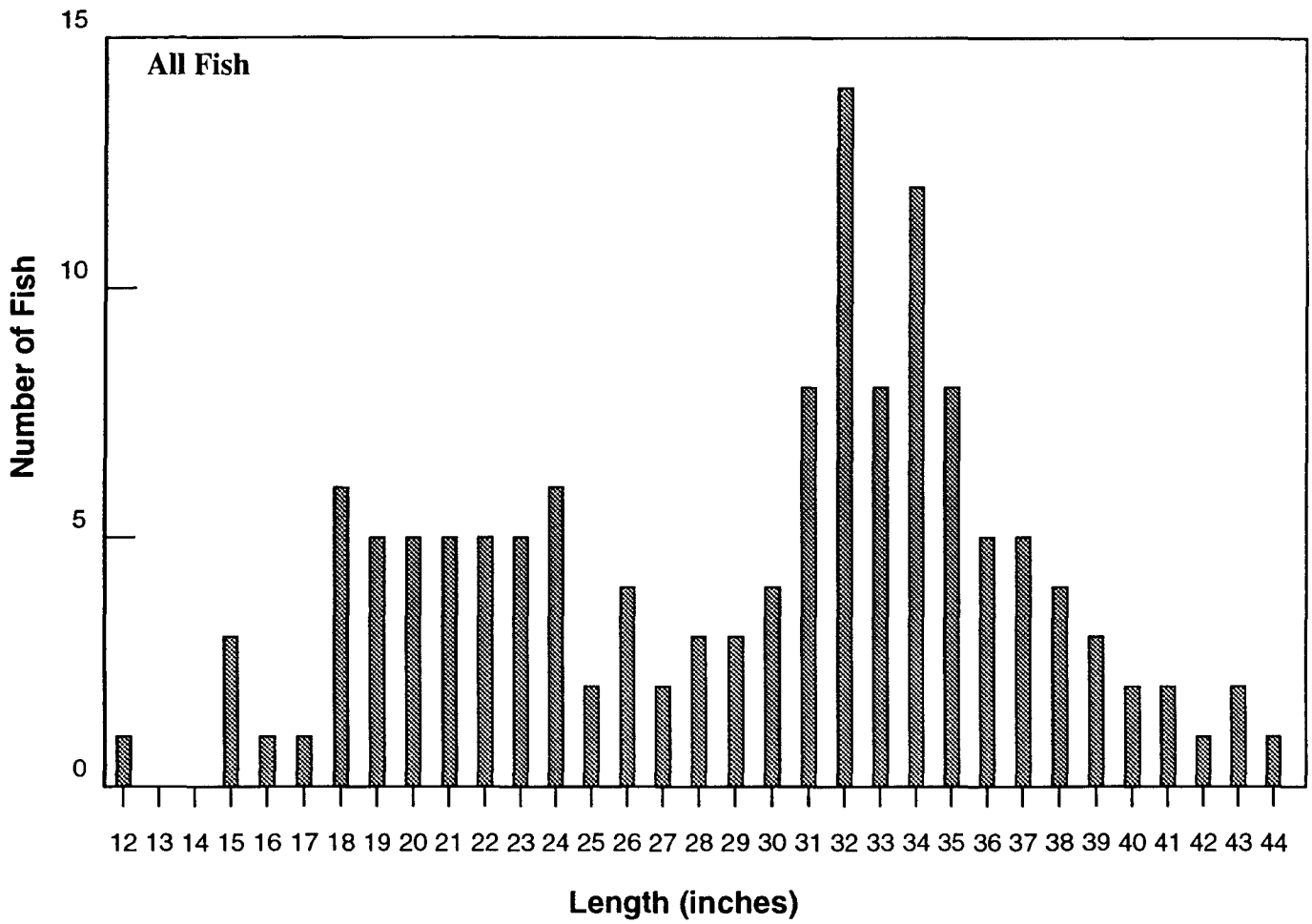
Salmon carcasses were classified as adults if they were greater than 25.5 inches long (fork length), or as grilse if they were less than 25.5 inches long. This cutoff length was determined from length-frequency data acquired from the chinook salmon collected on the Yuba River in the beginning of the 1999 season (Figure 2). The length-frequency distribution indicated that the 25.5-inch cutoff length was a reasonable criterion, although there was apparently some overlap in adult and grilse lengths.

RESULTS

River Conditions

Figure 3 presents the daily average Yuba River flows during the 1999 chinook salmon spawning season. Yuba River flows below Englebright Dam (Smartville gage) averaged close to 1,100 cubic feet per second (cfs) during the survey period, and were relatively stable throughout the spawning season. Yuba River flows near Marysville (Marysville gage) averaged 852 cfs during October, decreased to an average of 725 cfs in November, and then increased to an average of 759 cfs in December.

Mean daily water temperatures at Smartville and at Parks Bar were consistently between 50 and 55°F from September to December (Figure 4). Mean daily water temperatures at the Marysville gage were between 58 and 59°F in early October, decreased to just below 55°F in November, and declined to around 51°F by early December (Figure 4). Water visibility ranged from 3 to 12 feet during the spawning surveys but typically averaged 8 feet, which made it easier to locate fish in the pool habitat.



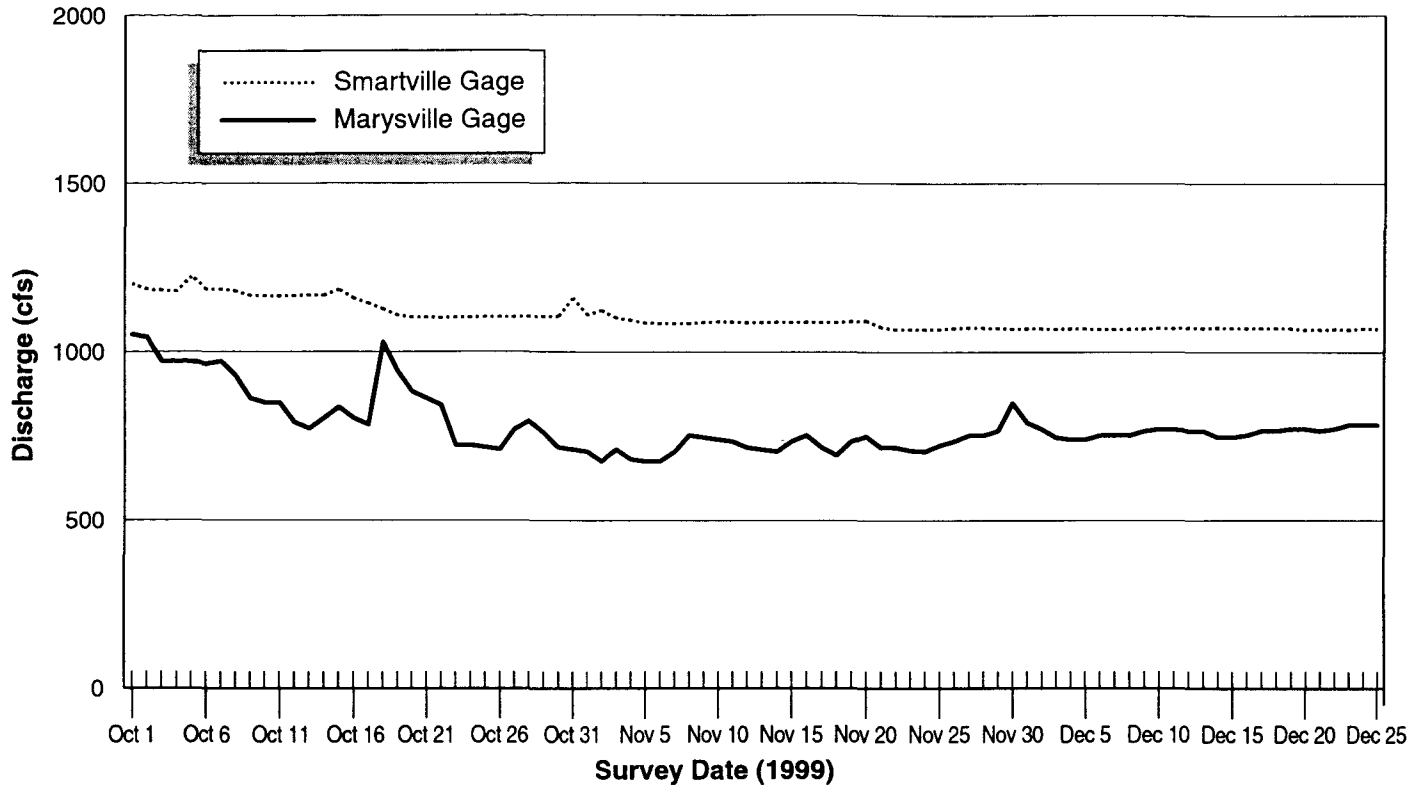


Figure 3
Daily Yuba River Flows Measured at the Smartville and Marysville Gages, October 1 - December 25, 1999

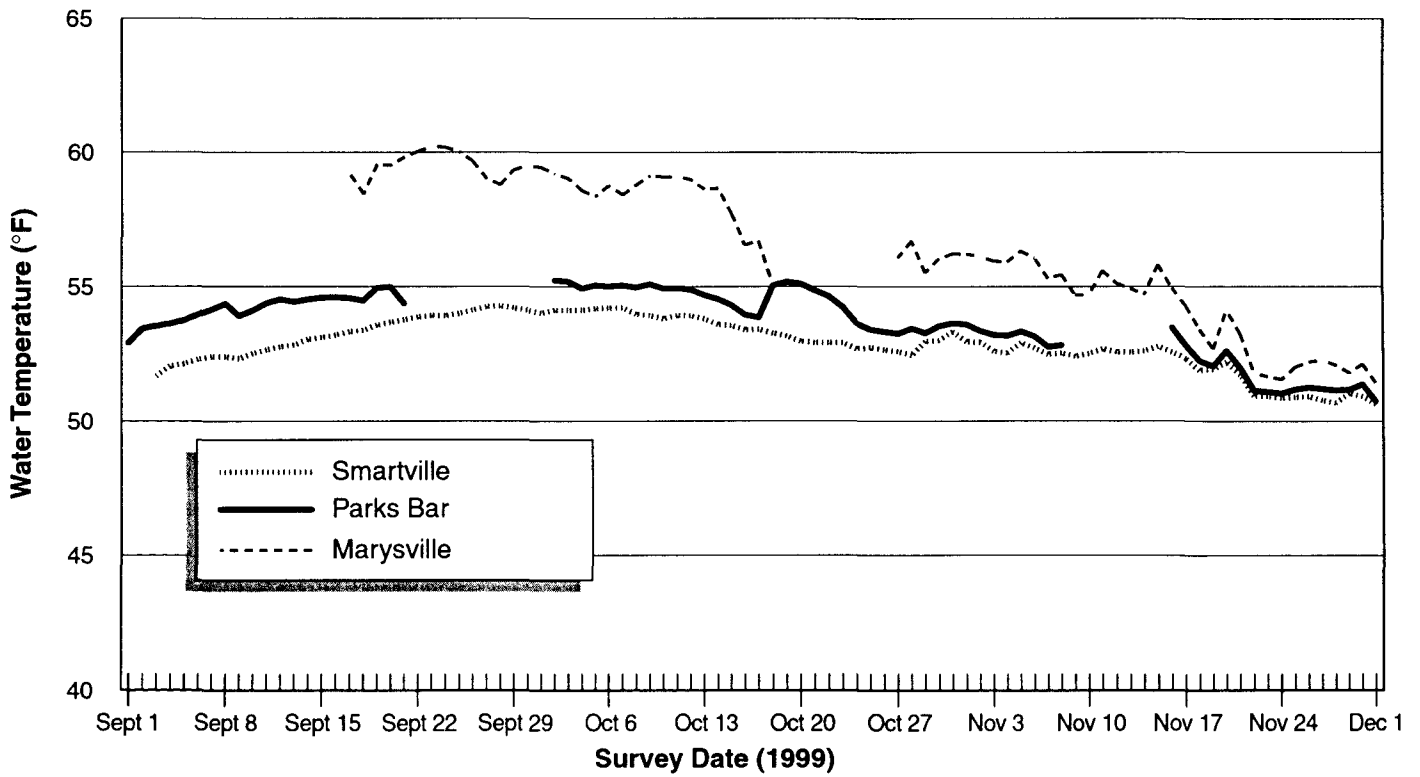


Figure 4
Mean Daily Yuba River Water Temperatures Measured at Parks Bar, Smartville, and Marysville, September 1 - December 1, 1999

Spawning Escapement, Timing, and Distribution

An estimated 23,067 chinook salmon (17,853 adults and 5,214 grilse) spawned in the Yuba River in fall 1999 (Table 1). The spreadsheets used to compute the 1999 spawning escapement estimates are presented in Tables A-1 through A-12 in Appendix A.

Table 1. 1999 Yuba River Chinook Salmon Spawning Escapement Estimates
by Reach and Age Class

Survey Reach	Adults	Grilse	Total	Percentage
Rose Bar	4,256	675	4,931	21.4%
Parks Bar	5,185	2,276	7,461	32.4%
Daguerre	8,412	2,263	10,675	46.2%
Total	17,853	5,214	23,067	100.0%

Results from redd surveys conducted by DFG above Daguerre Point Dam indicated that spawning started in early September. It is assumed that these early spawning fish are spring-run chinook salmon that arrived in the spring and overwintered in the lower Yuba River. However, because of broad spatial and temporal overlap in spring- and fall-run chinook salmon spawning, separate estimates of spawning escapement for these two races cannot be made.

Chinook salmon typically begin spawning as water temperatures approach 56° F. Water temperatures recorded at Smartville and at Parks Bar were within the optimal spawning temperature range in early September. Water temperatures remained fairly constant between September and December, ranging from 56–51° F. Water temperatures at the Marysville gage (approximately 6.8 miles downstream of Daguerre Point Dam) reached 56° F in mid-October. Spawning peaked in the second and third weeks of October in both the Rose Bar and Parks Bar Reaches, and a week later in the Daguerre Reach after temperatures reached 56° F (Figure 5).

The Rose Bar Reach is approximately 3.99 miles in length. An estimated 21.4% of the run (4,931 fish) spawned in the Rose Bar Reach (Table 1); therefore, about 1,236 fish spawned per mile.

The Parks Bar Reach is approximately 6.34 miles in length. An estimated 32.4% of the run (7,461 fish) spawned in the Parks Bar Reach (Table 1), therefore, about 1,177 fish spawned per mile.

The Daguerre Reach is approximately 9.22 miles in length; however, the lower portion of the surveyed reach (approaching Simpson Lane) is relatively deep with fine-grained sediments that are generally unsuitable for spawning. About 6 miles of the surveyed portion of this reach contain spawning habitat. An estimated 46.2% of the run (10,675 fish) spawned in the Daguerre Reach; therefore, about 1,779 fish spawned per river mile.

Run Composition

Adult male and female salmon comprised 41% and 59%, respectively, of the fresh adult carcasses observed during the 1999 surveys (Table 1). Grilse salmon comprised 15% of the total number of fresh carcasses and 22.6% of the total estimated population. The sex of grilse could not be reliably determined in the field, but typically the majority of grilse are male. Spring-run chinook salmon may have been included in the surveys, but there is no way to visually separate the two runs of chinook salmon.

Hatchery Fish

Nine coded-wire-tagged salmon were recovered from the Yuba River during the 1999 surveys and delivered to DFG for decoding. All the hatchery fish were recovered by the end of October.

Recovery Rates

The weekly recovery rates of tagged adult salmon carcasses (i.e., the percentage of tagged carcasses that were recovered) averaged 49% in the Rose Bar Reach, 50% in the Parks Bar Reach, and 32% in the Daguerre Reach with an overall recovery rate of 42.7% for all reaches. The recovery rates of tagged grilse averaged 29% in the Rose Bar Reach, 23% in the Parks Bar Reach, and 17% in the Daguerre Reach with an overall recovery rate of 22.2% for all reaches.

Some salmon die before spawning each year. Over 20% of the female carcasses observed in 1998 were determined to be unspawned. Therefore, counts were made of all unspawned females (including grilse females) throughout the 1999 season. Unspawned salmon are brightly colored, appear to be in good condition, and have no apparent signs of disease, trauma, or physical injury. Approximately 20% of the adult females and 5% of the grilse females appeared to have died before spawning in the 1999 spawning season.

RECENT TRENDS IN ABUNDANCE

Chinook salmon spawning escapement in the lower Yuba River has increased substantially since 1993 and was well above the historical average from 1996 through 1999 (Table 2 and Figure 6). Annual spawning escapement before (1953–1971) and after (1972–Present) construction of the New Bullards Bar reservoir has ranged from 1,000 fish in 1957 to more than 39,000 fish in 1982, with an average of approximately 13,000 fish. The large spawning escapements in recent years raised the average to 15,119 fish for the period after construction of New Bullards Bar reservoir (Table 2 and Figure 6).

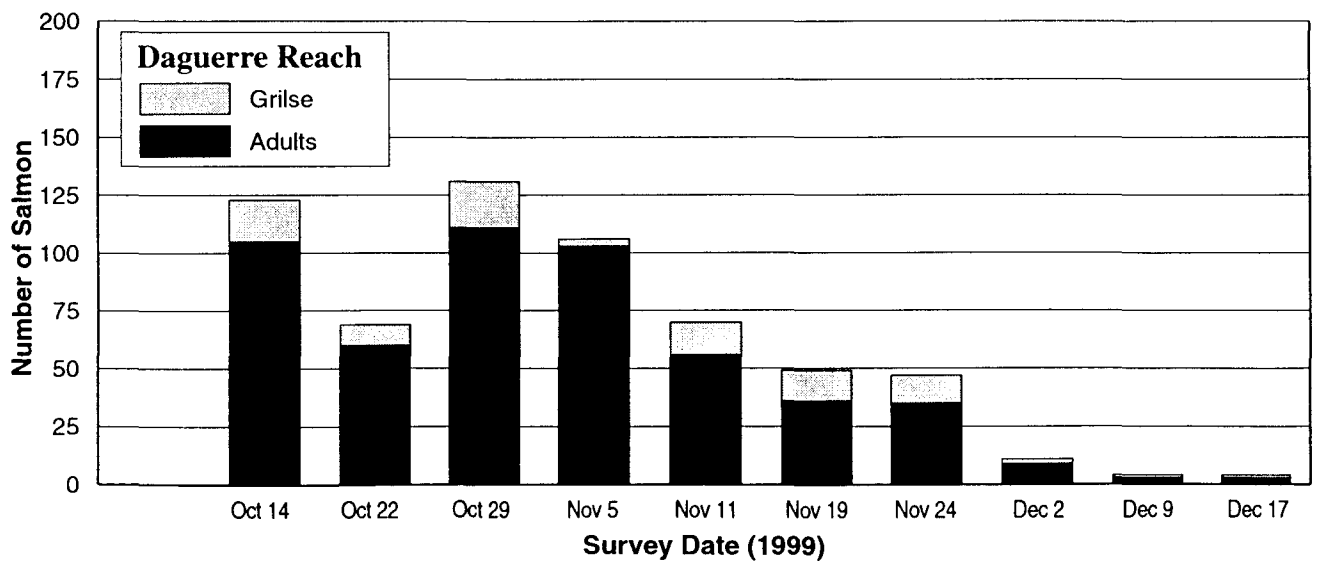
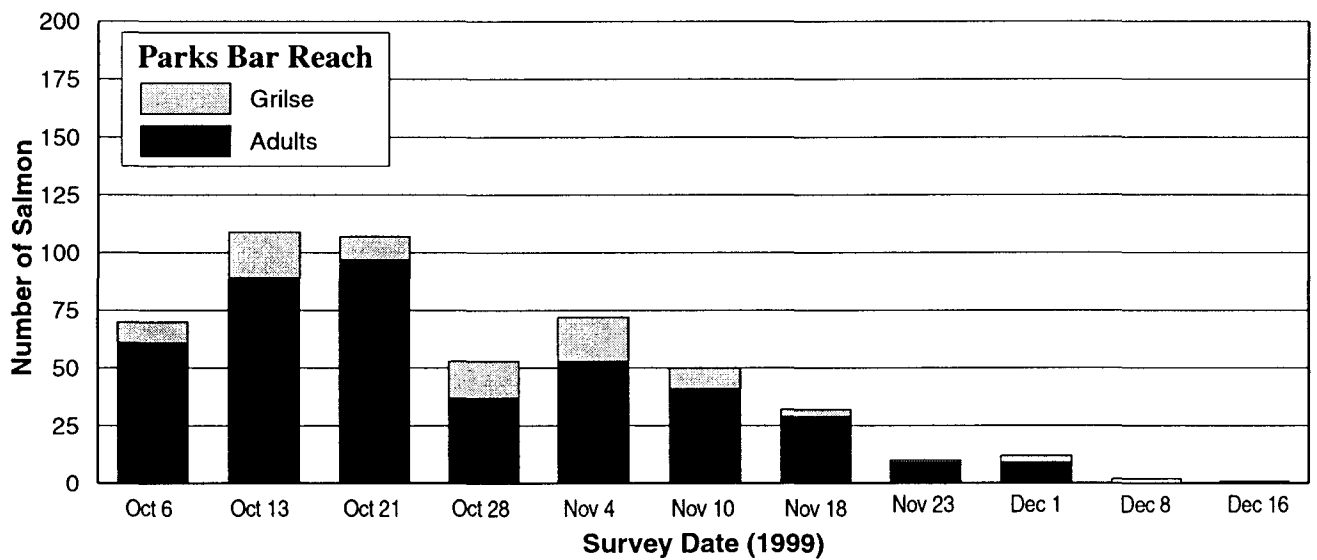
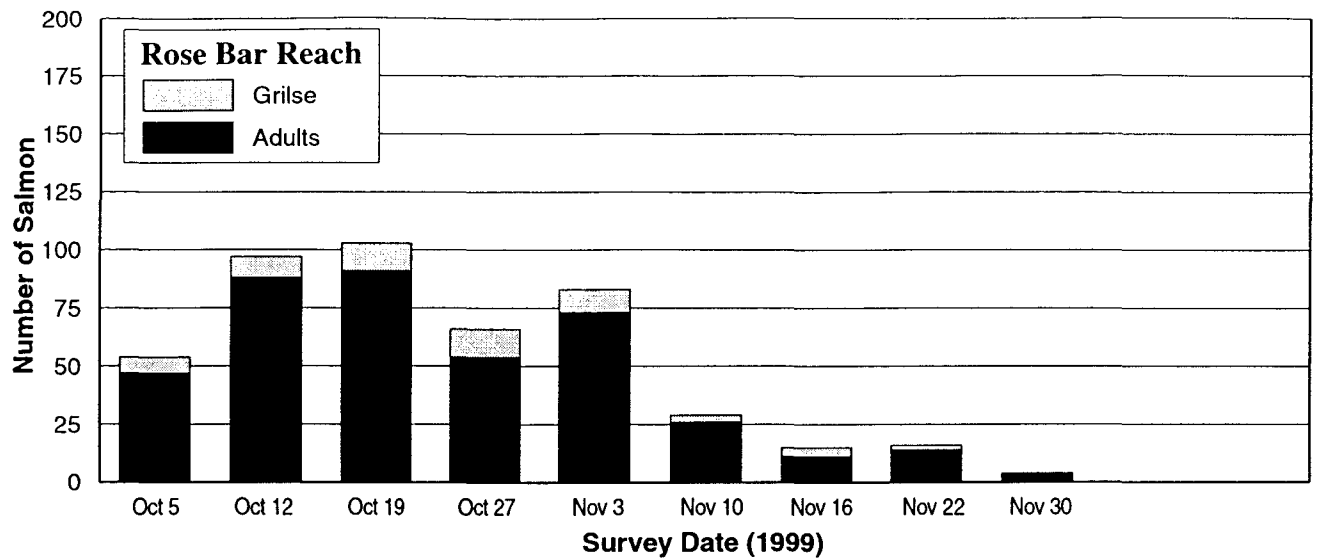
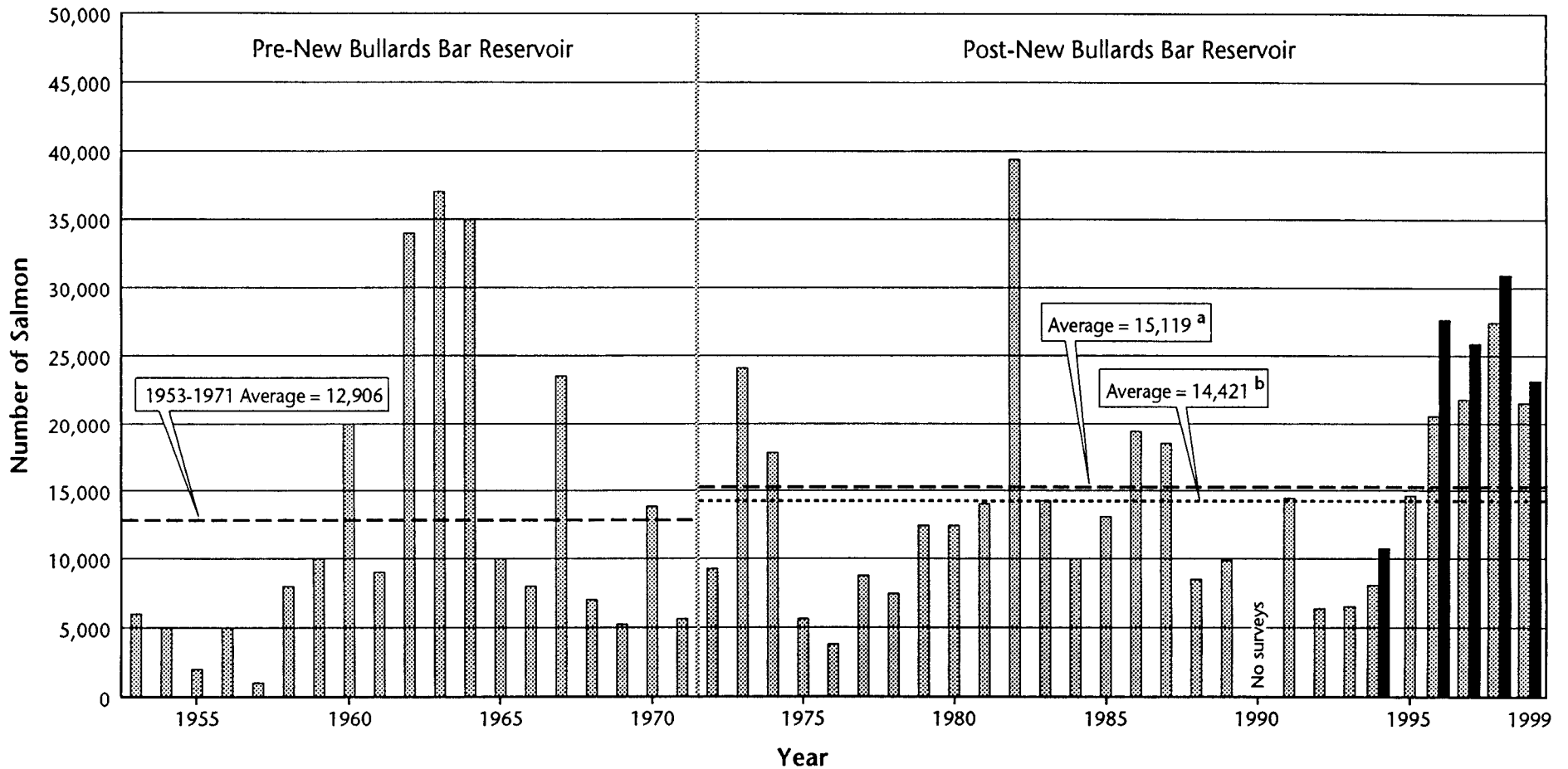


Table 2. Annual Fall-Run Chinook Salmon Spawning Escapement in the Yuba River during Pre- (1953-1971) and Post- (1972-Present) New Bullards Bar Reservoir Periods

Year	Pre-Reservoir Escapement	Year	Post-Reservoir Escapement
53	6,000	72	9,258
54	5,000	73	24,119
55	2,000	74	17,809
56	5,000	75	5,641
57	1,000	76	3,779
58	8,000	77	8,722
59	10,000	78	7,416
60	20,000	79	12,430
61	9,000	80	12,406
62	34,000	81	14,025
63	37,000	82	39,367
64	35,000	83	14,256
65	10,000	84	9,965
66	8,000	85	13,066
67	23,500	86	19,406
68	7,000	87	18,510
69	5,230	88	8,501
70	13,830	89	9,837
71	5,650	90	--
		91	14,413
		92	6,361
		93	6,516
		94	10,691
		95	14,561
		96	27,520
		97	25,778
		98	30,802
		99	23,067
Average	12,906	Average	15,119

-- No carcass surveys conducted

Sources: 1953-1966 Hallock (n.d.)
 1967-1989 Mills and Fisher (1994)
 1991-1998 Jones & Stokes Associates (1992, 1995, 1996,
 1997, 1998, 1999)



^a Average post-NBB spawning escapement based on actual estimates of spawning escapement in Rose Bar reach in 1994 and 1995-1999 (dark bars).

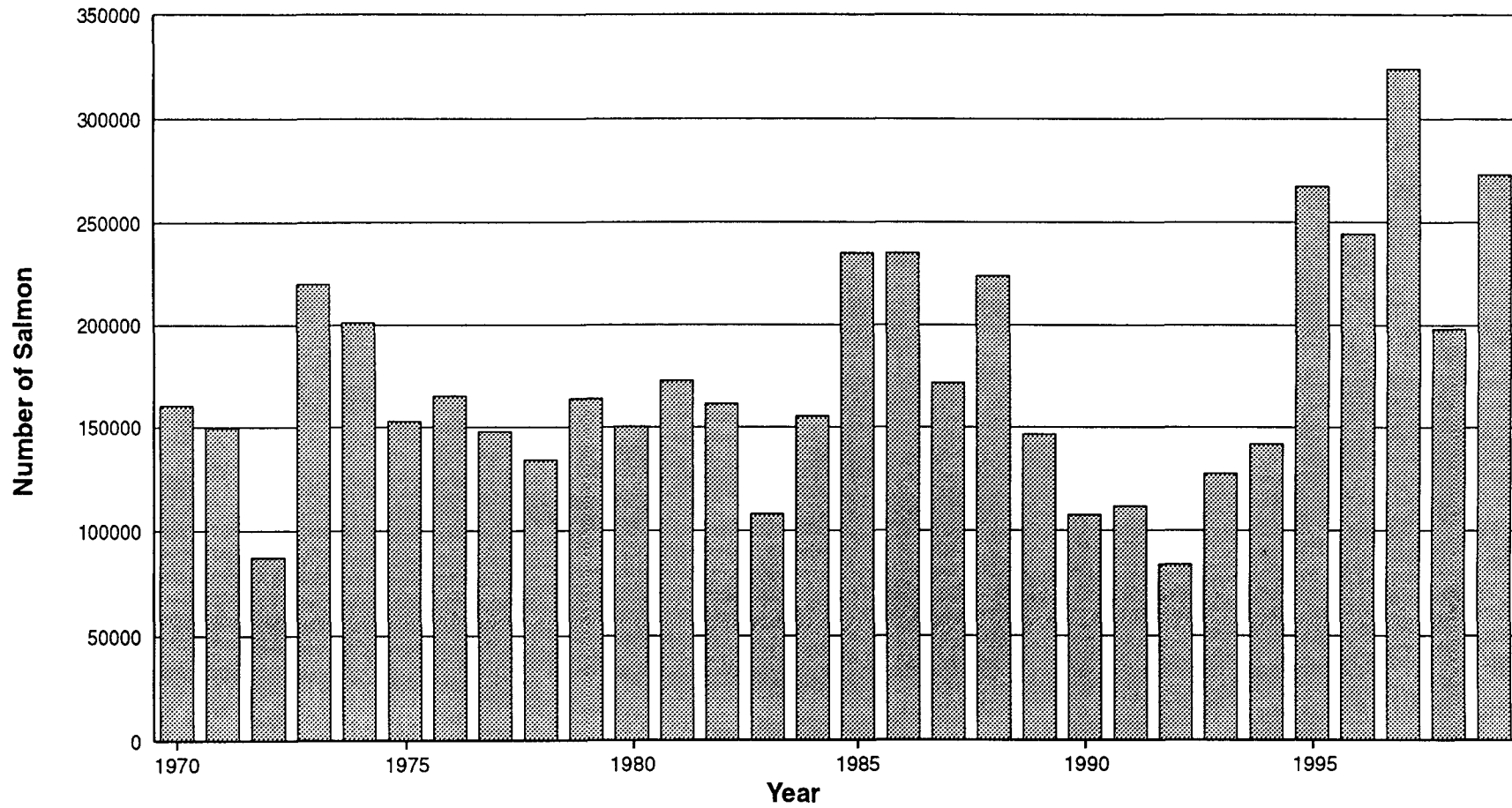
^b Average post-NBB spawning escapement based on assumptions that 15.5% of spawning escapement spawned in Rose Bar reach in 1994 and 1995-1999.

SOURCES:
 1953-1966: Hallock (n.d.)
 1967-1989: Mills and Fisher (1994)
 1991-1999: Jones & Stokes Associates (1992-2000).

Figure 6
 Annual Fall-Run Chinook Salmon Spawning Escapement
 in the Lower Yuba River during Pre- (1953-1971) and
 Post- (1972-1999) New Bullards Bar (NBB) Reservoir Periods

Preliminary estimates of annual fall-run chinook salmon spawning escapement in the mainstem Sacramento River and its major tributaries (including the Yuba River) in recent years indicate a less-marked, but similar, trend since the early 1990s (Figure 7). The number of commercial and sport landings of Central Valley chinook salmon in the ocean has increased since 1990 (Pacific Fisheries Management Council 2000). The increase in the number of ocean landings and the concurrent increase in spawning escapements in recent years indicate that overall salmon abundance in the Central Valley has increased since the early 1990s. Ocean harvest rates (i.e., the proportion of salmon caught in the ocean) have not changed substantially since the early 1990s and have decreased somewhat since 1996. Restrictions in ocean harvest rate have likely contributed to higher escapement in recent years.

The lower Yuba River continues to exhibit exceptionally high rates of natural salmon production, particularly in view of the absence of a hatchery, which contributes substantially to salmon populations in other major Central Valley tributaries (e.g., the Feather and American Rivers).



SOURCE:
Pacific Fishery Management Council (2000)

Figure 7
Annual Hatchery and Natural Spawning Escapement
of Sacramento River Chinook Salmon

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Personal Communication

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January 27, 1988 - memorandum to DFG files regarding 1987 Yuba River chinook salmon spawning stock estimate.

Appendix A. Spawning Escapement Estimate Tables

