

OUTDOORS

The waters are teaming with fish at Salton Sea

It was the kind of sight avid ocean anglers dream about. The sea was calm, and for as far as you could see in both directions, the water was alive, quivering. Every couple of hundreds yards there were baitfish skittering across the surface as foamy boils opened up and gamefish slashed into the schools of bait. In the distance, desert mountains shimmered.



**JIM MATTHEWS**

Mazatlan? The Yucatan? The Sea of Cortez? How about the Salton Sea? A three-hour drive or less from just about anywhere in Southern California, the Salton Sea fishery is back. "The fishing is as good now as it's ever been," said Leah Head, the manager of the Bombay Beach

Marina, who proudly showed off photos of a 20-pound corvina caught last week. A half-dozen anglers on the jetty there were catching two- to four-pound corvina, filling limits in a hour or two. Boat anglers were getting five-fish limits in a few minutes. But she said very few anglers had heard the news because the crowds were still light. "I've seen the time when you couldn't put a

car, a tent peg, a toothpick up out there (Bombay Beach), there were so many people."

Steve Horvitz, head ranger at the Salton Sea State Recreation Area said that catch rates "would either equal or surpass (the peak years), especially with all the tilapia being caught now."

Horvitz said that news about the tremendous fishing is slowly leaking out, mostly by word-of-mouth. Use at the park went from a high of over 500,000 annual visitors in the 1960s, when the fishery was considered the most productive inland water in California, to a low of 87,000 in the fiscal year 1993-94. Last year there were 126,000 visitors, and this year, Horvitz is predicting close to 200,000 when the

fiscal year ends next month.

Last Friday, Horvitz and I stood watching schools of corvina slash through schools of tilapia at Corvina Beach, just south of the state recreation area headquarters. It was mid-day and over 100 degrees. The surface was smooth, except for the fish slashing across the surface, for a mile or more in both directions along the beach. There was not a fishing boat in sight.

Horvitz blamed this on bad press.

Negative publicity for the past several years about bird dieoffs, poor water quality, and potential health problems with the fish has kept most anglers away. Horvitz said surveys show that over 50

percent of the people who once came to the sea, but stopped, said they did so because they had health fears.

Horvitz bristles at that news. He says the Salton Sea is cleaner than the Pacific Ocean, it's fish are healthier than those in the Colorado River or most urban lakes and reservoirs, and that reports to the otherwise are half truths — at best.

Most recently, last week there was a major dieoff of nesting birds at Mullet Island on the south end of the sea. A television reporter called Horvitz and asked if there were lots of dead birds there the photographer could come and photograph.

"I said, 'What dead birds. I can take you out to shoot pictures of

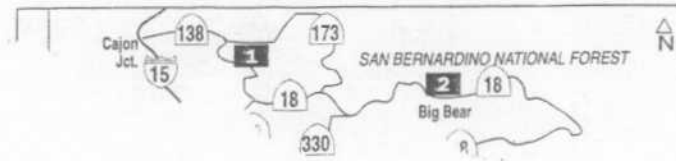
live birds. We don't have any dead birds here.' But he wanted pictures of dead birds. People just don't realize the size of the sea or understand that the dieoff is very localized — and that there are really no threats to eating fish caught here," said Horvitz.

The advisories for Salton Sea fish are common-sense advisories. Don't any dead or dying fish found floating or washed up on the shore. Don't eat any fish that are spoiled. And don't eat the guts raw, if you eat fish guts.

Jim Matthews is head of the Outdoor News Service. He can be contacted by mail at P.O. Box 9007, San Bernardino, CA 92427, by telephone at (909) 887-3444 and by e-mail at [jmatthews@pe.net](mailto:jmatthews@pe.net).

FISHING REPORT

Water report



with some surface fish early and late. Fish fair to good throughout this region. Lake Havasu: The fish are showing early good topwater bite. A total captured the weekend. The

Landing. The fish was caught only 40 mile from San Diego and it was one of just eight fish boated aboard the Producer that day topped by an 18-pounder. That same day the Pacific Queen skippered by Sam Patelli put out on the same area of fish late in the and boated 10 more albacore to 21 and three bluefin tuna to 52 pounds. Angler, with sip

*Back to the Salton Sea from Mike Morris - Don't miss the photos please*