



Media Release

State Water Board adopts regulations to help address sharp decline in Clear Lake hitch population

Emergency action authorizes collection of water use data

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SACRAMENTO – To support ongoing efforts to improve conditions for the imperiled Clear Lake hitch, a native fish found only in Clear Lake watershed and its tributaries, the State Water Resources Control Board yesterday adopted emergency regulations that allow staff to collect information from water users to evaluate how pumping affects creek flows that are critical for the species' habitat.

Millions of hitch, also known as "chi" to local tribes, once thrived in the watershed, but poor water quality, invasive species, passage barriers and inadequate flows have contributed to long-term declines of the population, with the numbers plummeting over the last decade. Insufficient creek flows from February through June can prevent access to spawning habitat or strand and kill the fish before they migrate back to Clear Lake or before eggs can hatch, creating a primary threat to the species' survival.

The board's regulations allow staff to collect a variety of water use data, including well locations and depths, the amount of groundwater pumped, and when and how water is used. Additionally, the data will help staff evaluate how pumping and other water uses may be impacting creek flows. Climate conditions such as multi-year droughts, surface water use and groundwater pumping can all directly affect streamflow.

"Drought, climate extremes, and related environmental challenges are threatening the existence of the hitch, or chi, which has been a food and cultural mainstay of the original Pomo inhabitants of the region since time immemorial," said State Water Board Chair E. Joaquin Esquivel. "The information we collect will help us protect the hitch in future droughts and lead to collaborative and innovative management solutions that support local leadership. Tribal and community monitoring and data collection, in particular, have been critical to the board's efforts."

Spurred by the sharp decline in the hitch population during the most recent drought, Gov. Gavin Newsom issued an [executive order](#) in March 2023 directing the board to evaluate minimum instream flows, work with water users and tribes on voluntary actions, and consider emergency regulations.



Since the beginning of the year, board staff have moved quickly to address the challenges confronting the hitch, collaborating with the Big Valley Band of Pomo Indians, Robinson Rancheria of Pomo Indians, Habematolel Pomo of Upper Lake and Scotts Valley Band of Pomo Indians, along with representatives from the California Departments of Fish and Wildlife and Water Resources, Lake County, Lake County Farm Bureau, individual farmers and community groups.

Workshops, government-to-government meetings and repeated visits to the watershed by staff and board members led to a number of insights, including the recognition that better information about wells is urgently needed.

Once the Office of Administrative Law approves the regulations, which can take up to two weeks, staff will send out information orders and begin engaging with water users in January 2023. Engagement will include ongoing meetings, workshops, compliance assistance, fact sheets and more.

More information on the Clear Lake hitch (chi) is available on the board [website](#).

The State Water Board's mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation for present and future generations.