



For Immediate Release
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Fish, Family and Fun

Fishing for fun and finding facts was the theme of a family event held at Seaman's Lodge on Saturday, May 21. This event focused on increasing public information about mercury in fish two different ways. During the afternoon at Pioneer Park, a family-oriented educational event provided information on which locally caught fish are safe to eat and which are better caught and then released due to high mercury content. Meanwhile, teams of community volunteers traveled to local water bodies to post state-issued fish consumption advisories so anglers would have access to this information during the summer fishing season.

This educational event was a collaborative effort of three local organizations, The Sierra Fund, South Yuba River Citizens League and Wolf Creek Community Alliance. Several other local organizations and agencies participated with information and fun activities for kids; including the US Forest Service, Gold Country Fly Fishers, Trout Unlimited and the Upper American River Foundation.

Fishing for Fun: A Family Affair

More than 50 kids, parents and grandparents participated in the first ever "Fishing for Fun, A Family Affair," a free and educational event that celebrated local watersheds and the fun of fishing with kids of all ages, while raising awareness around eating fish safely.

Kids joined in on age-appropriate activities and games and had a chance to test their new knowledge through trivia questions about which fish are safe to eat, in exchange they received entry to a raffle with prizes donated by local businesses. Meanwhile, teens and parents had an opportunity to talk with experts about fishing locations, the history of mercury in our area, efforts underway to clean it up, and how to protect their family by choosing which fish to eat.

Children squealed with delight when their fishing poles came back with magnetized fish cards using the magnet bait. Other children learned about how mercury attracts (amalgamates) gold by playing with silver and gold colored magnets. Another game used marbles to demonstrate how mercury concentrations increase at higher levels in the food chain. Raffle tickets were awarded to children once they completed each learning game, and a number of prizes donated from local merchants were won by many lucky raffle ticket holders. Gold Country Fly Fishers provided lessons in fly casting as well as opportunities for children to learn how to create and tie a fly. Trout Unlimited offered activities for children to learn about waste in the watershed and provided free tee-shirts. The US Forest Service provided information about fishing location and handed out gear to enthusiastic children.

The ice-cream sundaes were a big hit, as demonstrated by the many smiling faces. "This was such a great way to catch the attention of children, and to inspire an interest of science, nature and local ecology," commented one beaming

grandfather. Ice-cream sundaes, with ingredients donated by local stores, were served up to everyone that participated in the games and postering activities.

Over 30 Fish Consumption Advisory Signs Posted

Thanks to 15 committed community volunteers, signs with state-issued fish consumption advisory information are now present at 10 local public fishing locations. Volunteers traveled to popular fishing locations in the Yuba, Bear, American, Feather and Truckee River watersheds and made sure more than 30 fish consumption advisory signs were posted.

For some locations, such as Donner Lake and Little Grass Valley Reservoir, this was the first time the sites had ever been posted with this important information. Anglers at these locations now have the information they need to make smart decisions on which fish are safe to eat and feed to their families.

The effort to improve public awareness of safe eating guidelines was augmented by the Nevada Irrigation District and the Yuba River Ranger District of the Tahoe National Forest. This year, NID and the Yuba River Ranger District agreed to post the advisories at the lakes and reservoirs they manage which constitute the majority of public fishing locations in the Bear and Yuba watersheds including Combie and Rollins Reservoirs, Scotts Flat Lake, Bowman Lakes, and the Gold Lakes Basin. Other neighboring agencies have followed suit including Placer County Water Agency which has agreed to post fish advisories at Hell Hole and French Meadows Reservoirs, and the South Feather Water and Power Agency who will post Sly Creek Reservoir.

Important Public Health Information

The information contained in the fish consumption advisory, issued by California's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA), is important to anglers in the Sierra Nevada region because of historic mining activity which has led to elevated levels of mercury in local fish. Of the more than 26 million pounds of mercury that was brought to this region for use in processing gold during California's Gold Rush, approximately 10 to 13 million pounds were lost to the environment and remain in our watersheds and ecosystems.

Sport fish consumption is likely the single most significant route by which people are exposed to mercury that remains in the Sierra Nevada foothills from legacy mining activity. Furthermore, some popular sport fish such as bass and brown trout can contain the highest levels of mercury, due to the way mercury enters and accumulates in the longer lived and predatory fish. OEHHA recommends limited or no consumption of these fish for children and women of childbearing age. On the other hand, rainbow trout, another popular sport fish, is generally one of the healthiest options for eating locally caught fish.

The Sierra Fund is surveying anglers now that the advisories are in place to learn about the effectiveness of the new signs. "We were so pleased by the enthusiasm of the volunteers who showed up to help us with this long-neglected public health issue," noted Kelsey Westfall of The Sierra Fund who helped coordinate the event. "And it was so much fun having the families and children join us this year for the first time at the event."

The fish advisory posting effort is made possible by funding from The California Wellness Foundation, the California Department of Water Resources, and the Clarence E. Heller Charitable Foundation, with donations of food and prizes from SPD Markets, Briar Patch Co-Op, Safeway, Grocery Outlet, Caroline's Coffee Roasters, Flour Garden Bakery, Emily's Cakes and Catering, Mountain Recreation, Mountain Pastimes, Reel Anglers Fly Shop, Culture Shock Frozen Yogurt, and the Earth Store, and by the awesome volunteer power provided by our community.