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SACRAMENTO NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE: Refuge Staff, Others, Rescue Stranded Salmon

By Michael Woodbridge, USFWS

They were big, approximately 15 pounds on average, and there were hundreds of them. While Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge [TITLE] [NAME] was out patrolling the refuge, he noticed movement in the water next to an impoundment called Dam One. Located next to the public wildlife drive, Dam One serves as one of the water delivery locations used by the refuge to manage water levels for the wetlands that provide vital habitat for hundreds of thousands of migratory waterfowl during the winter months.

[NAME] knew something wasn't right, so he contacted fish biologists from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) for assistance. Working together, refuge and CDFW staff caught some of the fish. They turned out to be Chinook salmon coming up to spawn. Some were missing their adipose fin—hatchery raised salmon. A few of those fish were sent to the local hatchery to have their tags read. The salmon turned out to be winter-run Chinook, an endangered species.

Since the fish were an endangered species, a permit was required before refuge and CDFW staff could handle the fish. Working closely with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) National Marine Fisheries Service, a permit was quickly acquired and the agencies cooperated in the effort to rescue the wayward salmon. Time was of the essence, the summer heat in the Central Valley was increasing and soon the water would be too hot for the salmon to survive.

Over the course of a few days of collecting the fish, approximately 250 salmon were rescued. During that time, a few more of the salmon were spotted just outside of the Delevan National Wildlife Refuge, a few miles away. Crews went to that site as well and, using the same techniques of seine nets and dip nets, caught a number of those fish.

While no one knows exactly how the salmon reached the Sacramento National Wildlife Refuge, the quick action by refuge staff and cooperative efforts with NOAA and CDFW means these Chinook salmon will have a second chance to reach their spawning grounds further up the Sacramento River.