

# THE STATE OF THE SALMON

The number of chinook salmon in the Stanislaus, Tuolumne and Merced rivers has varied widely over the past four decades. Drought contributed to declines in the mid-1970s, the early 1990s and this decade. High numbers came during or soon after wet years, such as in the early 1980s and late 1990s. Salmon also could be suffering from water diversions on the rivers and downstream in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. Other possible causes include predation by other fish, poor river water quality, loss of streambed gravel for egg-laying and poor conditions during their time in the Pacific Ocean.

The numbers are estimates for the fall-run salmon, which return in autumn to the rivers of their birth to reproduce after two to five years at sea. They are counted in the foothill river stretches downstream from New Melones, Don Pedro and McClure reservoirs.

## A TALE OF TWO FISH

### CHINOOK SALMON

*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*

■ **RANGE:** California is at the southern end of the chinook's natural range along the West Coast of North America. Before dams and other human impacts, the fish swam far up the foothill portions of the Tuolumne and other rivers that drain the Central Valley.

■ **SIZE:** Chinook typically grow to as long as 36 inches, though sometimes more, during their two to five years in the Pacific Ocean.

■ **DIET:** They eat insects and crustaceans while young, primarily smaller fish when older.



#### ■ NUMBERS:

The valley's chinook population, estimated at more than 750,000 in 2002, plummeted to about 68,000 last year. The vast majority both years were in the Sacramento Valley. The crash prompted the closure of commercial chinook fishing off California the past two years.

### STRIPED BASS

*Morone saxatilis*

■ **RANGE:** This fish, native to the East Coast, was introduced near Martinez in 1879 and quickly spread to other parts of California. It has become one of the state's top sport fish, swimming in the lower stretches of Central Valley rivers, the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta, San Francisco Bay and the Pacific Ocean.

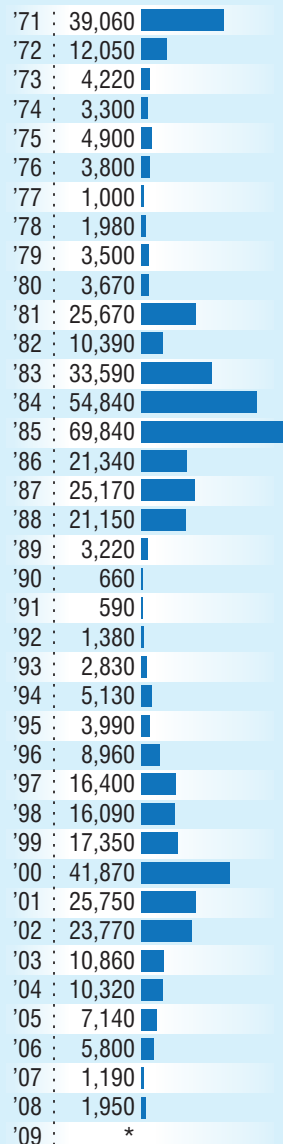
■ **SIZE:** Striped bass typically are 18 inches at three years and 48 inches at 20 years.



■ **DIET:** Young bass eat mostly crustaceans. Adults feed mainly on smaller fish, including juvenile salmon.

■ **NUMBERS:** The delta population has varied from about 600,000 to 1.6 million in the past decade.

Sources: California Department of Fish and Game; Pacific Fishery Management Council



\* Count in process