

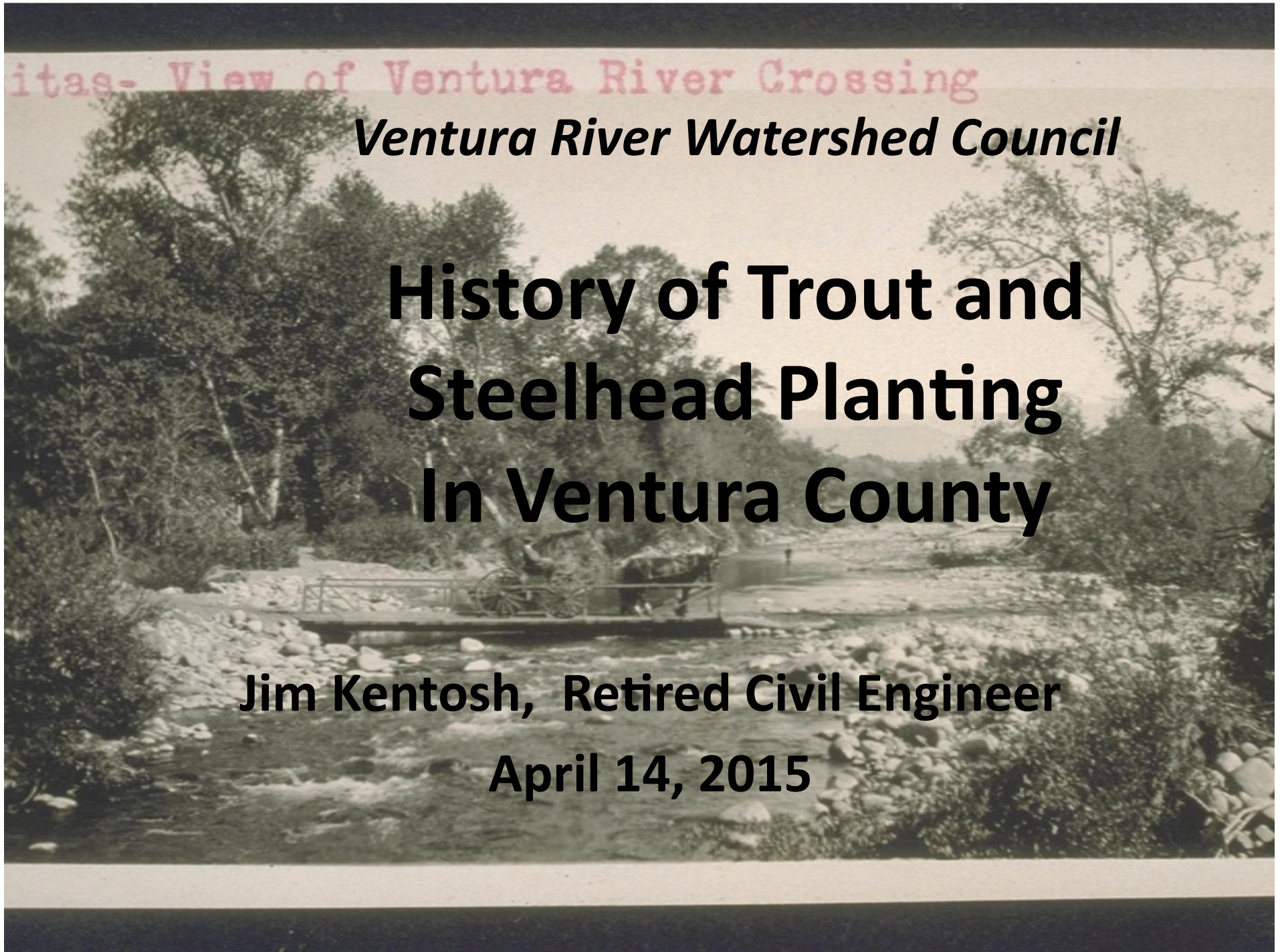
itas- View of Ventura River Crossing

Ventura River Watershed Council

History of Trout and Steelhead Planting In Ventura County

Jim Kentosh, Retired Civil Engineer

April 14, 2015



In case you're wondering...

Rainbow trout and steelhead
inhabited Ventura County prior
to settlement in the 1800s.

Sources of Historical Information

- Newspapers
- Hatchery records
- Ventura County Board minutes
- Early scientific publications
- Henry Sparks' fishing log

Much information has not been found

History Posted Online

- *“History of Steelhead and Rainbow Trout in Ventura County: Newsprint Accounts from 1870 to 1955”*

Completed in 2008

by Kimberly Bowers, Historian

United Water Conservation District

www.unitedwater.org

700 pages

Partial List of Newspapers

Fillmore Herald

Oxnard Courier

Santa Barbara Daily Independent

Santa Barbara Daily News

The Republican

Ventura Weekly Democrat

Los Angeles Times

The Ojai

Ventura Signal

Santa Paula Chronicle

Ventura Free Press

Ventura Vidette

About newspaper accounts

- Boosterism/poetical phrases
- Tongue-in-cheek
- People enjoyed the outdoors & fishing
- Different terminology for steelhead
 - “Mountain trout” = resident rainbow trout
 - “Salmon trout” = steelhead
 - *Salmo gairdneri* = steelhead

Example of Boosterism

“No section in this sun-kissed land is in advance of Ventura county in natural resources, in beauty and grandeur of scenery, in the products of the soil, in salubrity of climate, in the abundance and quality of water, or in healthfulness.”

The Ojai 1892

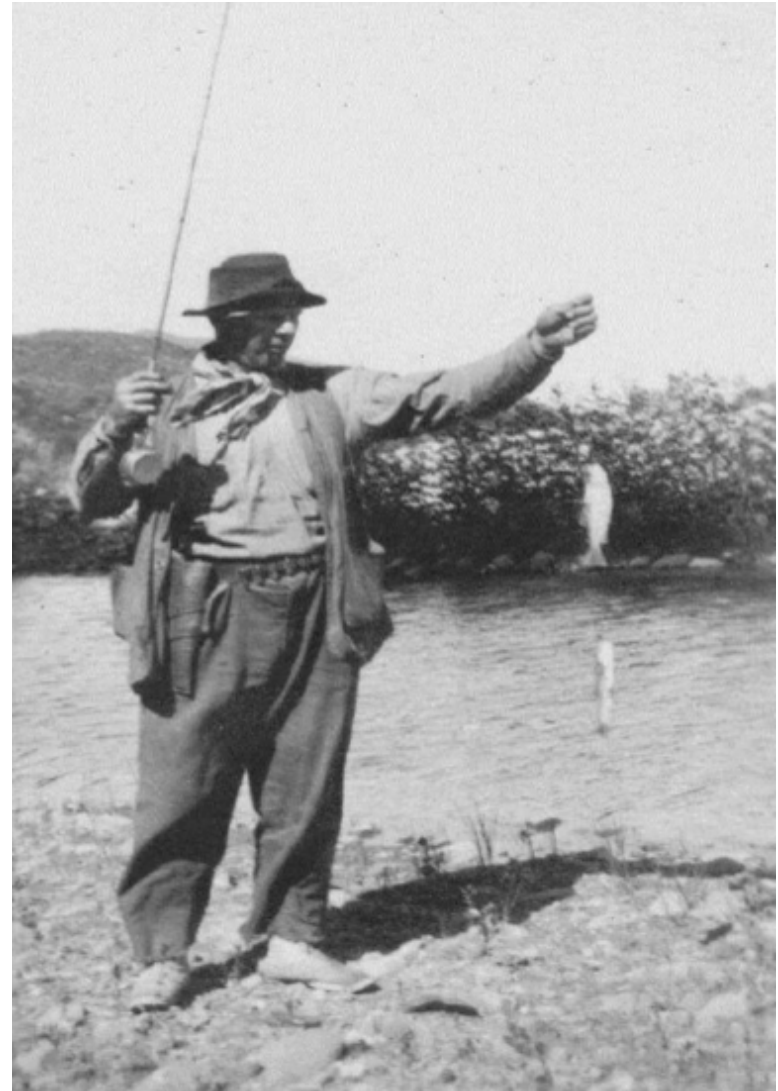
Tongue in Cheek

1885 Ventura Signal

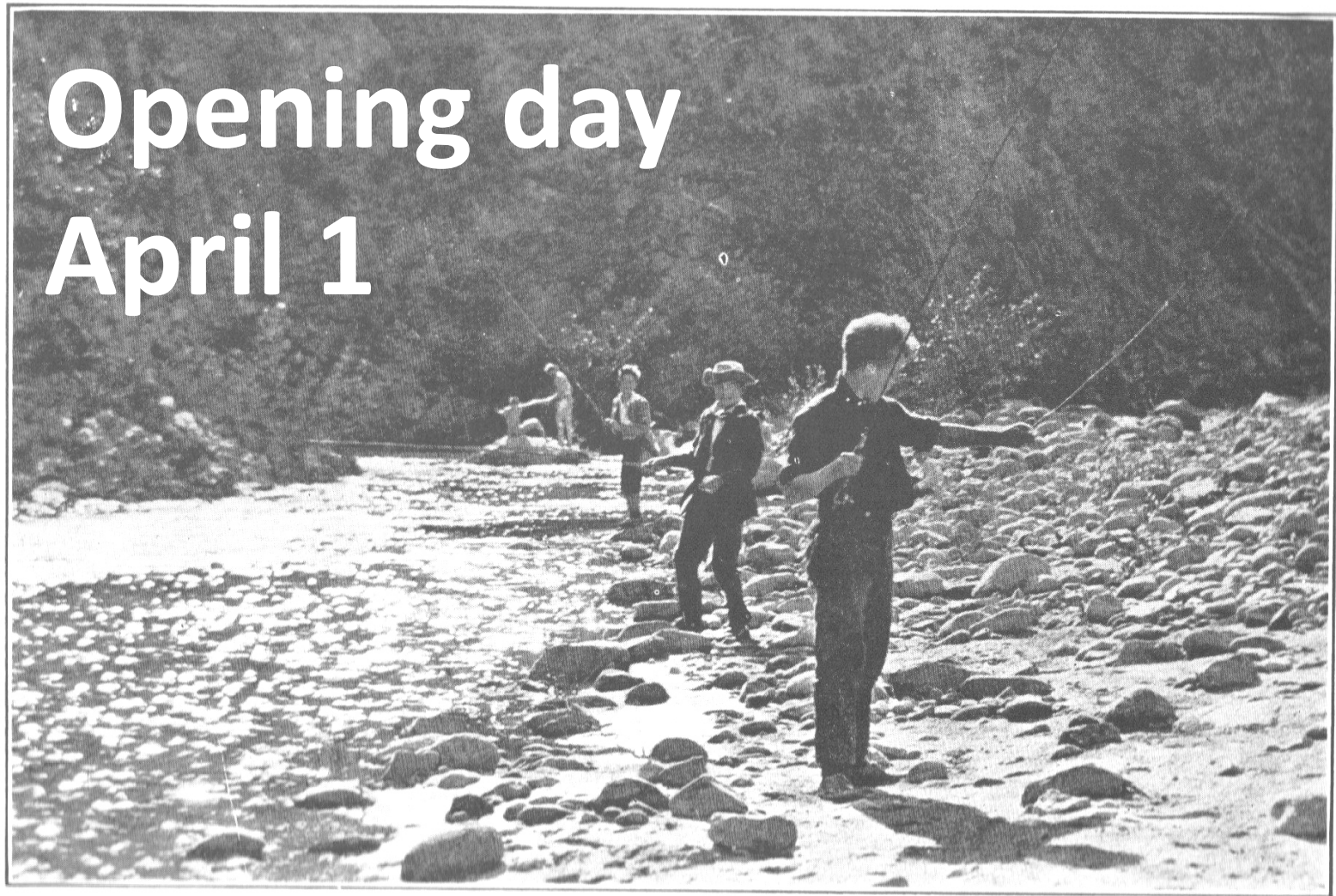
“The liars are anxiously awaiting the opening of the trout season, April first.”

1891 Ventura Free Press (April 10)

“Trout fishing services along the river were very numerous attended.”

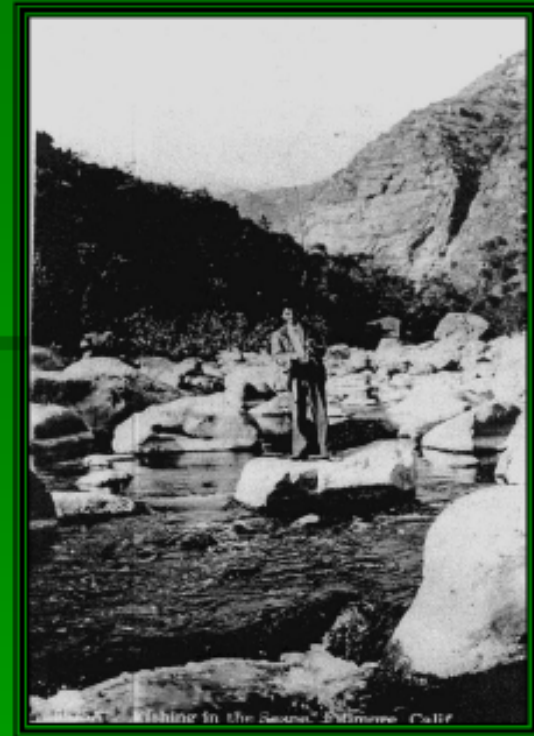


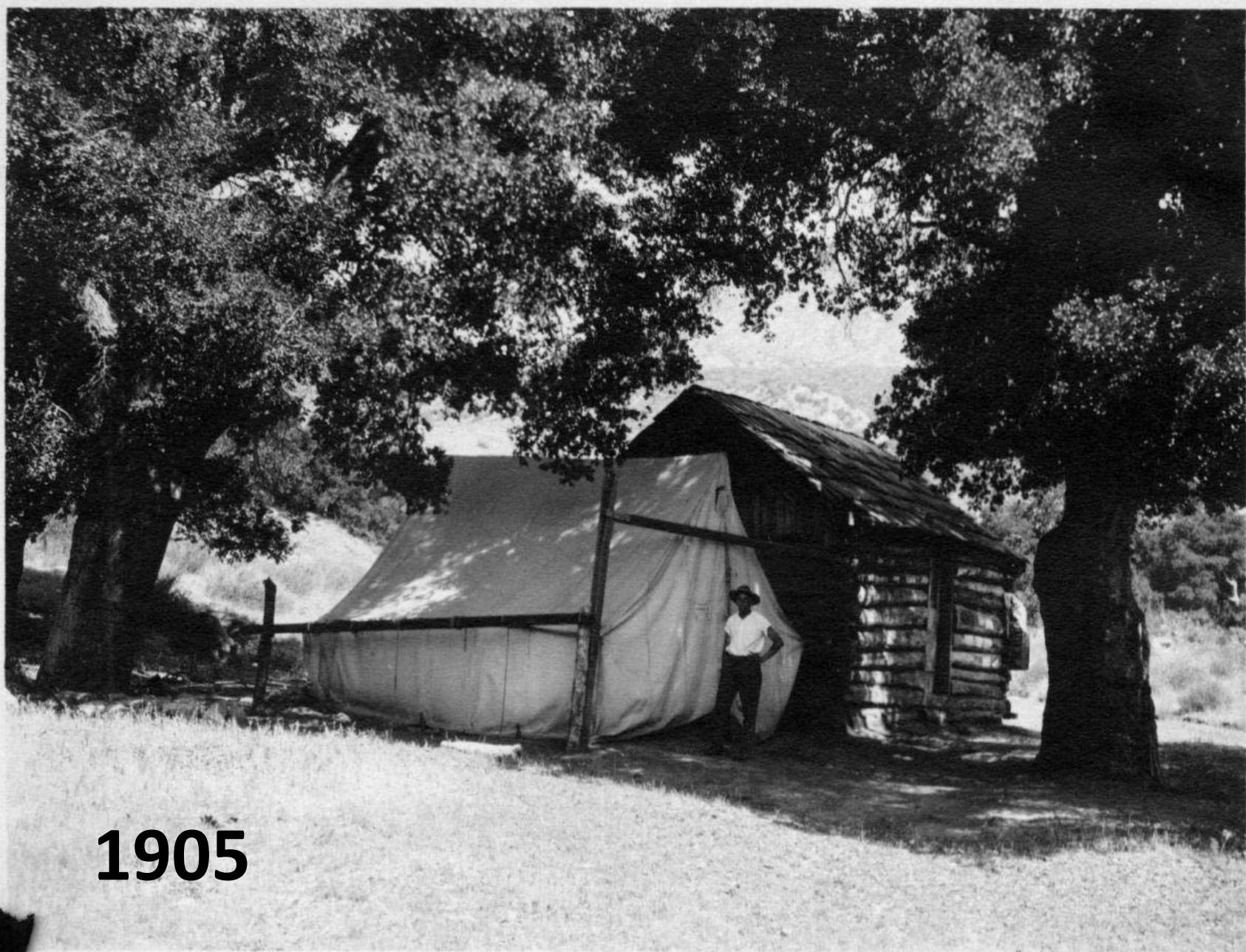
THE SESPE AND THEREABOUTS



THE SESPE RIVER, 1908-9

POSTCARDS





1905

ATTON'S CABIN OR PIEDRA BLANCA LODGE

Trout were abundant

- Mission era
 - The Mission of San Buena Ventura was famous for its trout (before 1835)
- Trout sold in markets and at hotels
 - 1876 – “Mountain trout were in the market the first of the week.”

Trout fishing successful

- 1877 – Two anglers caught 183 trout in Santa Paula Creek in a few hours.
- 1878 – Good trout fishing is reported on the Sespe, some parties catching as many as one hundred in a few hours.
- 1884 – Newby and Shelby brought home 312 trout from the Matilija on Thursday last.

Streams were usually “fished out”

More on abundant trout

1887 Ventura Free Press

...trout so abundant that anyone can catch two or three hundred in a couple hours.

1891 in Matilija:

2 men caught 753 trout in one day

Reports of 8" gravid females

Mountain trout



April 11, 1913 – Ventura Free Press

Numbers of fishermen:

1,000 on Ventura River

500 on Sespe

500 on Santa Paula Creek

300 on Piru Creek

“100,000 trout estimated taken on Tuesday”

Fish and Game Laws

- 1861 – Closed season for trout in CA
- 1878 – Trout season April 1 to Nov. 1
- Later changed to May 1
- Limit of 50 fish
- Five inch size limit
- 10 pounds plus one fish

NORTH BRITISH AND
MERCANTILE INSURANCE CO.
Of London and Edinburgh.

1892		1893	
April 1	125	April 1	50
= 3	165	= 8	9
= 10	70	= 20	14
= 21	85	May 4	30
May 4	75	= 11	7
= 16	46	June 3	29
June 7	28	Sept 9	33
= 20	39	= 20	7
July 25	9		179
Sept 11	100		
	677		

These figures are copied from
old books.

Net Fire Assets over \$19,000,000

1894		1896	
April 1	42	April 1	105
= 8	22	= 13	54
= 19	19	= 20	54
May 1	5	= 28	49
	88	May 2	52
1895		= 19	26
April 1	182	= 26	26
= 10	29	June 4	25
= 25	40	= 18	25
May 3	117	Sept 7	24
= 17	8	= 17	10
June 6	3	Oct 2	12
	379		462

Henry Sparks' Fishing Log 1892-1914

Courtesy of
Mark Capelli

Occasional steelhead

Ventura Signal Oct. 23, 1875

- [surveyors] “reported the capture of a trout measuring 25 inches in length, in the Arroyo los Coyotes. They corralled the monster in a pool, and dispatched him with rocks. This is the largest trout ever captured in this part of the country.”

1884 Ventura Signal

“FROM SANTA PAULA – Enormous trout have come up from the ocean into the Santa Paula creek, this spring. Fish twelve to sixteen inches long are being lifted out of the stream every day, and the boys report plenty more of the same kind in sight. By George, what monsters there must be in the Sespe.”

Early steelhead

- 1883 – An angler took a fish 36-inches long from the Ventura River. “Fish this size are rare, but are becoming more common every year.”

Fillmore Herald May 4, 1917

Who	How Many	Size
Hayward	50	One 23" steelhead
Armour Garrison	At least one	One 21 ¾" steelhead
Dr. Henry Watt	50	About 6" average
His wife	25	
His daughter	29	
Seth ("Doc") Maxwell	13	4 ½ pounds total, one 17"
C. H. Sundquist	50	
Miss Mae Morrow	14	
Lisle Ingalls	31	
J. A. Kreiter	13	Averaging 10"
L. F. Robinson	14	
C. N. Bozarth	15	
A. Garrison	50	One 21 ½" steelhead
Al Burrows	20	Four were 10"

375

Key dates for early stocking

1870 First CA state hatchery established

1885 First U.S. fish hatchery built in CA

1887 Railroad built into Santa Clara valley

1890 Ventura County appoints a fish commissioner

Planting efforts started early

Early movement of trout in California

- 1873 – California Acclimatizing Society
 - Imported trout from the east coast
 - Expected to grow larger than local trout
- Also in 1873 – California fish association transported fish in railroad cars in CA

First trout raised in Ventura County

- F. A. Sprague of the Sespe
- Built a small dam
- Raised local trout in 1873
- Continued into 1876
 - The dam broke in January 1876

First record of importing trout to Ventura County

1887 Ventura Free Press

The Hueneme Sportsman's Club planted
14,000 Tahoe trout in Matilija Creek

1893 Ventura Free Press

Man shot a trout of the Tahoe variety
29 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches and 6 $\frac{1}{4}$ pounds

Early planting in Ventura County

- 1893 – 10,000 rainbow trout from No. Cal. Planted in Santa Paula Creek by the CA Fish Commission.
- 1894 – 20,000 hatchery trout planted in the Ventura River
- 1894 – 30,000 Tahoe and rainbow trout planted in local streams
- 1894 – another 25,000 Tahoe and rainbow trout planted in Piru, Santa Paula and Ventura.

Regular stocking begins

- By 1895, a regular trout stocking program had begun.
- Between 1899 and 1909, output of California hatcheries increased by 10 times.

Hatchery in Piru Creek

- 1895 – A small hatchery was built near Agua Blanca Creek (N of Piru) and stocked with eastern brook trout.

Early U.S. government involvement

U.S. Fish Commission

- Established in 1872
- First railway “fish car” in 1881
- Nationwide movement of fish
 - Shad to California in 1874
 - Steelhead to the Great Lakes in late 1800s
 - 1875 rainbow trout introduced to New York
 - 1882 rainbow trout introduced to Missouri



FIGURE 24. Mount Shasta Hatchery, 1895.

Mt. Shasta and Mt. Whitney Hatcheries



Fish Car



FIGURE 29. Interior of railroad fish distribution car. Hoses supplied air to the cans containing fish. Bunk beds provided sleeping accommodations for crew members.

“...a little help from a few of the local fishermen, would be welcomed by them. If you can help a few hours in the work, see Rasmussen and do what you can do.”

Ventura Free Press 9/27/1912.

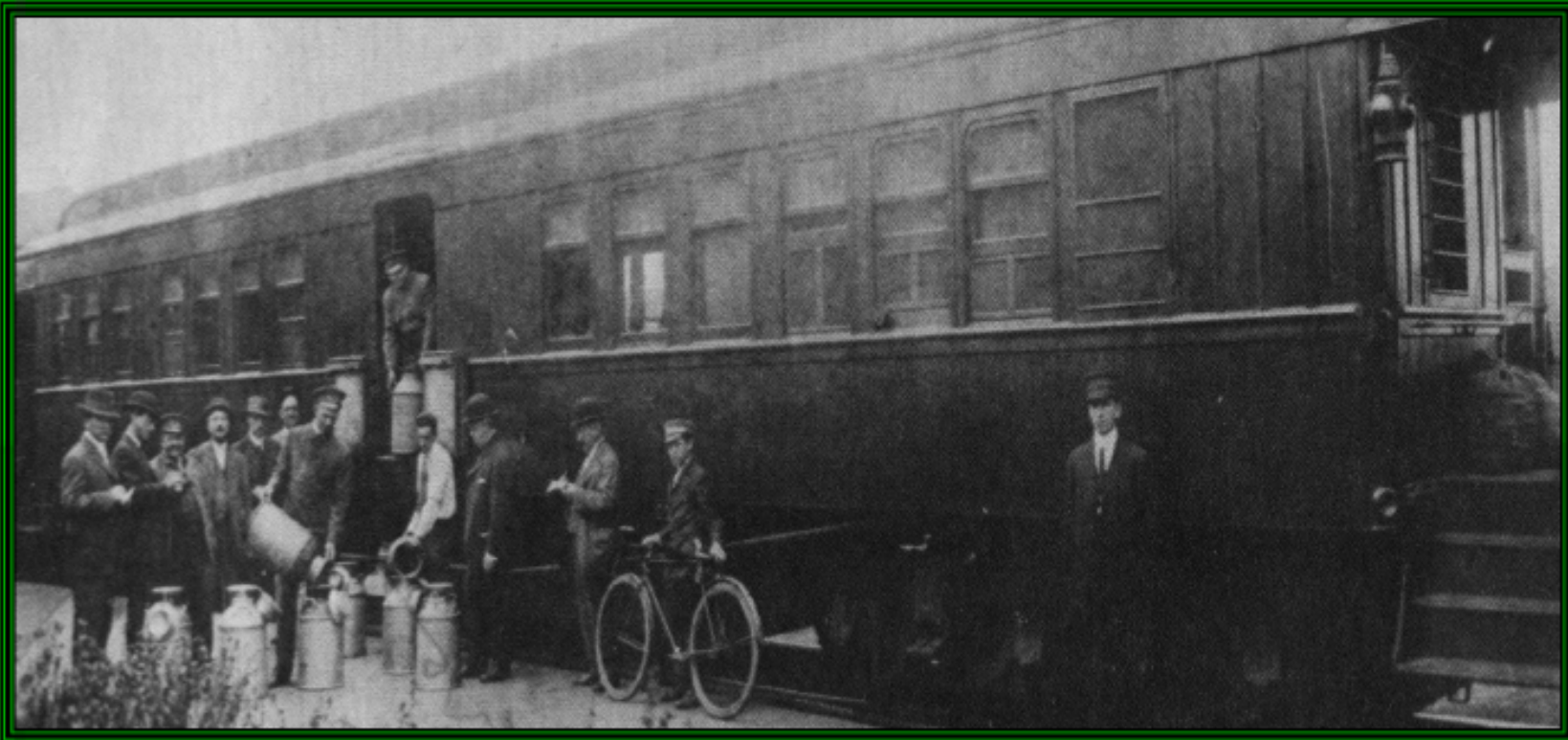




Fig. 24. Truck No. 1, one of the automobiles used in fish planting operations at Lake Tahoe

Packing in the Fingerlings by Horse



Display from Mt. Whitney Hatchery



TRAIL OVER SLIDE ON GRIDLEY

By the early 1900s...

“Wednesday morning a stocked car of the Fish and Game Commission was attached to the Espee arriving from Los Angeles and at Brownstone **100,000 steelhead trout** in 25 great cans were unloaded for the Sespe river...”

Fillmore Herald

October 19, 1917



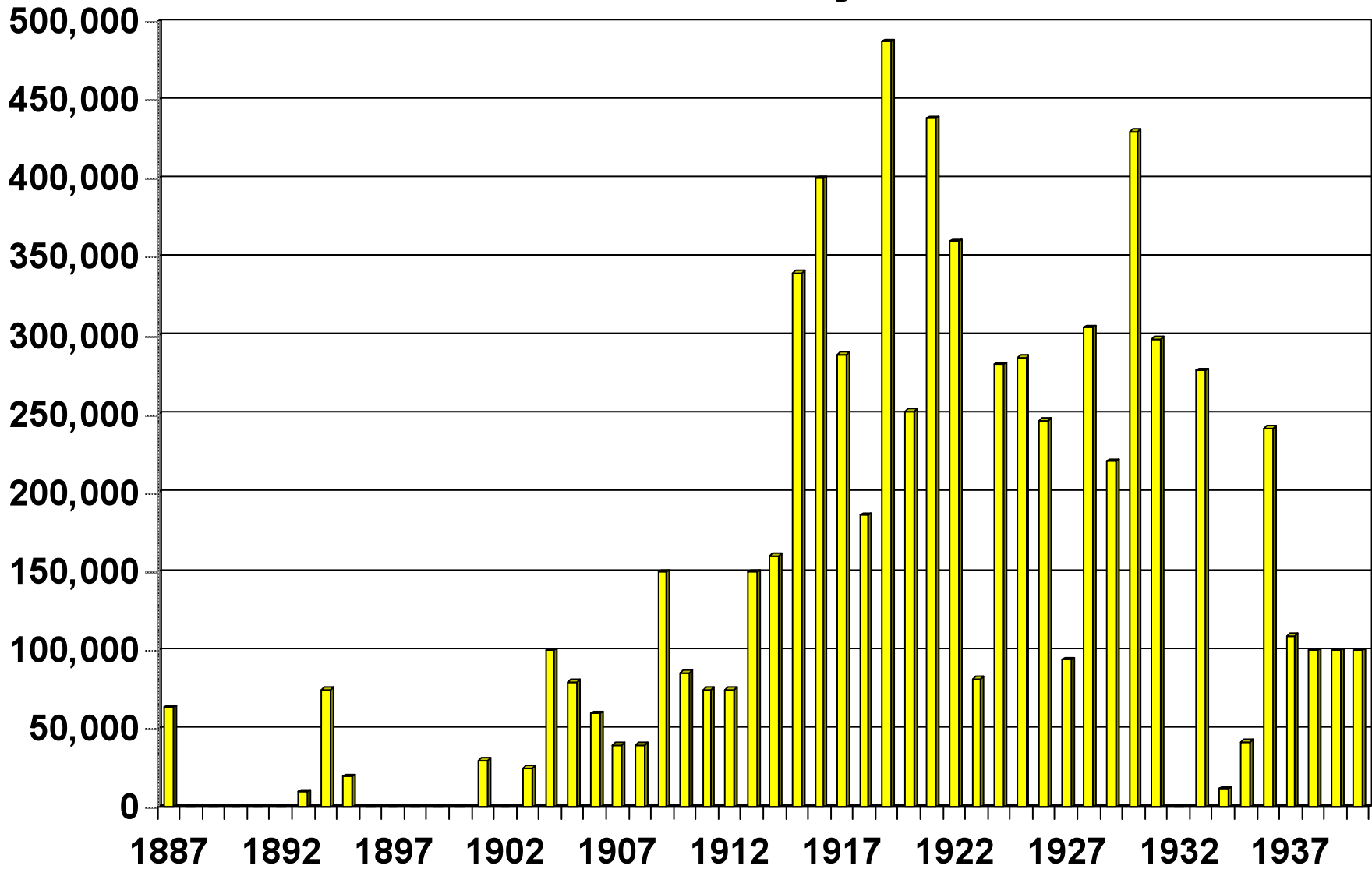


Hatchery and Planting Records

Trip No 5 Mt Whitney Sept. 9th 1918
7 1/2
To Lone Pine Feb 5th

	W.A. Phillips Polysdale	4 RB			
	XV-21-386-231-351-				
15	S.H. Douglass Sycamore	5 RB			
	XV-207-205-21-100 XI-24				
4	Game & Fish Prot. Assn. Pine	10 RB			
	XII-07-3-118-7-42-119-185-81-121				
	Game & Fish Prot. Assn. Brownstone	15 RB	30	30	
	XI-348-306-98-199-276-43-202-344-10-				
	273-362-365-277-XI-18-104				
22	XV-127-249-385-105-33-384-307-390				
	242-65-166-230-135-74-18-256-384				
	98-293-XII-98-50-100-0-15-83-168-43-				
	68-28-62				

Trout and Steelhead Stocking Graph Ventura County

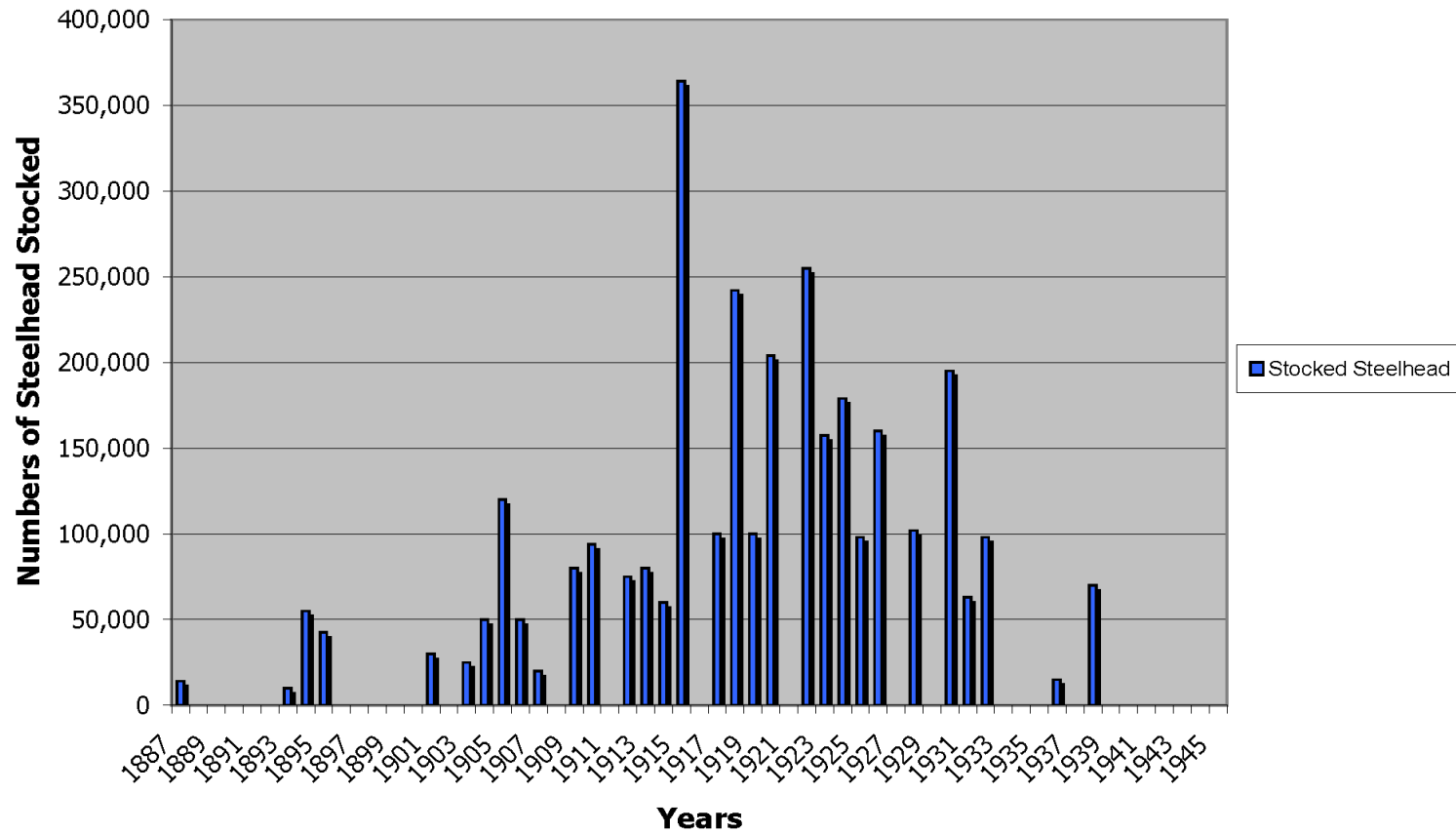


Steelhead from the north

- Trap adult steelhead on the Eel River and other rivers
- Squeeze the eggs and hatch them
- Raise them to $\frac{3}{4}$ " and transport south

Ventura County Steelhead Stocking Numbers

Stocked Steelhead in Santa Clara and Ventura Rivers





Steelhead plantings 1932

SPLENDID SPORT IN STORE FOR STATE ANGLERS
Hatcheries Liberate Millions of Young Trout in Many Streams

**SEspe CREEK 12 MILES
FROM MOUTH 50,000 STEEL-
HEAD 15,000 RAINBOW
UPPER SESPE 25,000 STEEL-
HEAD 10,000 RAINBOW TROUT**

**AGUA BLANCA CREEK
20,000 STEELHEAD
TROUT PLANTED**

**SANTA PAULA CANYON
10,000 STEELHEAD 10,000
RAINBOW TROUT**

**VENTURA RIVER
AND TRIBUTARIES
25,000 RAINBOW SALMA
TROUT PLANTED**

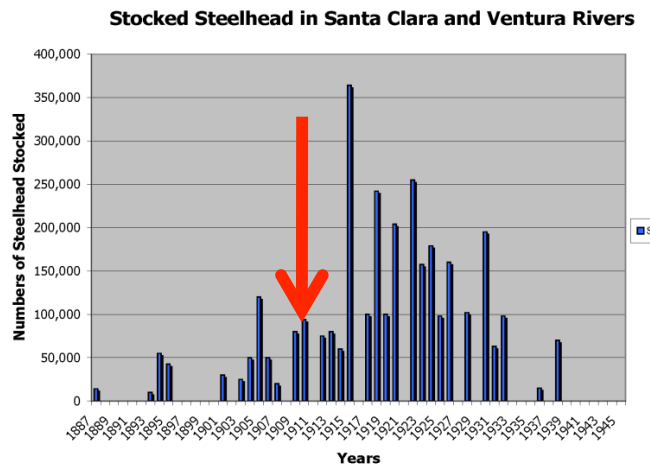
LOS ANGELES COUNTY RECEIVES 194,000 FINGERLINGS
Here is seen Pete Peterson, well-known Los Angeles sportman, using a fly preparatory to making a cast in boulder-bordered Sespe River, Ventura county. Below—Map shows where young trout have been planted in Ventura county.

By 1910s large steelhead were more common

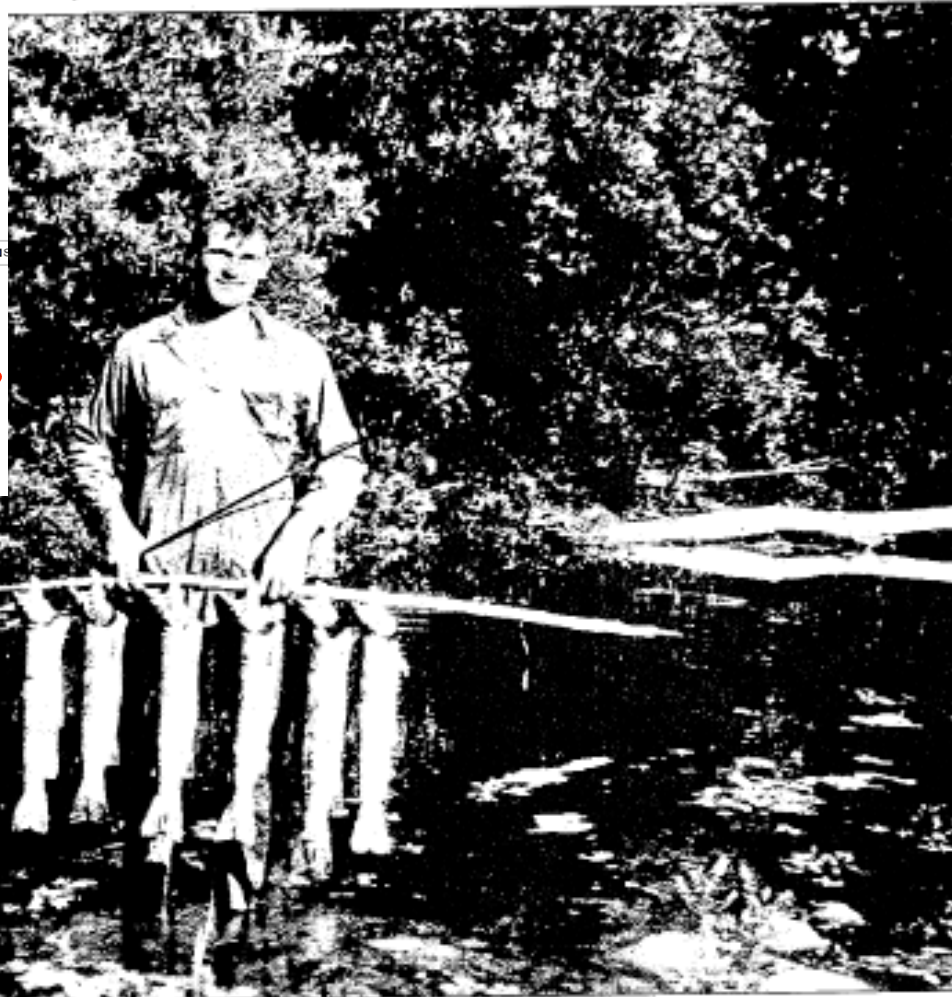
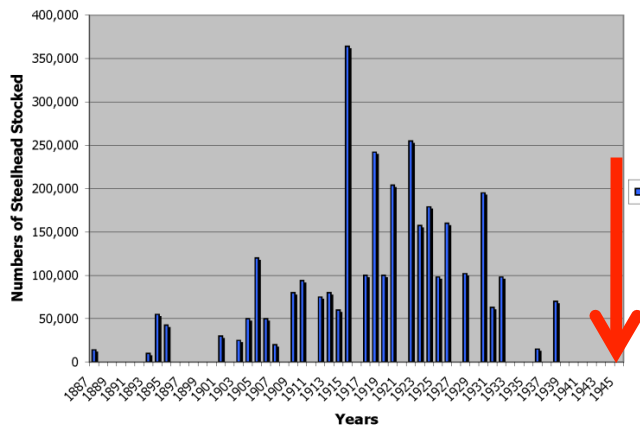


Steelhead caught in Lower Sespe in 1911

by William Brown



Stocked Steelhead in Santa Clara and Ventura Rivers



Ed Henke
1946

Photo courtesy of Ed Henke

Ed Henke holding six steelhead kelts (spawned out), caught with Jack Gruell in the Ventura River just above the Foster Park Bridge, in July 1946.

Upstream battle to recover steelhead

Ed Henke puts his research up against special interests' fish stories

Fillmore Fish Hatchery

- Opened in 1942 (plaque says 1932)
- Warm water hatchery
 - Fish grow faster
 - Eggs from the north
- Started growing catchable sized trout
 - Major change in hatchery practices in CA



FIGURE 40. Ponds at Fillmore Hatchery, 1956.

Steelhead mostly gone by 1950s

- 1952 Santa Paula Chronicle
 - “Steelhead fishing season ended this year without a single catch being made.”
- Bureau of Fish Conservation, 1953:
 - “... the steelhead runs appear to be a thing of the past...”
- The steelhead have disappeared and it is unrealistic to expect them to return. (+/-)
 - {Fish and Game} around 1955

What happened in the 1940s?

- Local hatchery producing “catchable” trout
- No more steelhead fry from the north
- Six-year drought started in 1947
 - Account by Willis Evans, 3-25-47
 - Steelhead dying in the Ventura River
 - Killed off any non-native steelhead run
- Dam construction
 - Matilija Dam in 1948
 - Casitas Dam in 1959

What else does historical info tell us?

- Information on range of steelhead
 - No primary account of any adult steelhead caught on Piru Creek
- Widespread human impacts on trout
- Introduction of other species

More on Human Intervention:
North fork Matilija Creek opened

- 1892 – Boulders were blasted in the creek near the hot springs so that trout could ascend and gain access another 6 miles of the north fork of Matilija Creek.

Introduction of Disease?

1915: 25,000 steelhead fry planted in upper Sespe via pack horses

- First planting of steelhead in upper Sespe
- Private planting?

1916: Santa Paula Chronicle (+7 months)

“Fully 90 percent of the trout in the Sespe have died from unknown cause.”

Introduction of Carp

- 1883 – German carp imported for stocking carp ponds
- By 1892...
 - “The importation of carp has almost driven out trout in some localities and it was a great mistake in bringing them out.”

Today carp outnumber steelhead

Any effects on trout genetics?

- Girman and Garza 2006
 - “These results together suggest that the Santa Clara River trout populations are the most distinct of the 5 basins studied here. **This may be a consequence of greater influence of hatchery introgression on these populations**, as they consistently cluster with Fillmore Hatchery strains on the trees and the hatchery is located in the Santa Clara River.”

Summary and Conclusions

- Resident trout were once far more abundant
 - Often fished out
- Trout & steelhead planting started over 120 years ago.
- Planting affected historical trout and steelhead abundance (room for debate)
- By the mid 1950s, the steelhead runs had diminished.

One option for rapid recovery



**Comments
or
Questions?**