

Newsom signs bill creating 365-day fishing license

October 17, 2021



Last week, Governor Gavin Newsom signed AB 817, authored by Assemblymember Jim Wood (D-Santa Rosa), a bill that will authorize the director of California’s Department of Fish and Wildlife to transition the calendar-based fishing license to one that is valid a full 365 days from the date of purchase. The law also authorizes DFW the option to display a sport fishing license electronically on a mobile device.

“Tourism is one of the largest parts of the North Coast’s economy, and anglers come from all over to enjoy fishing in our ocean and many lakes, rivers and streams,” said Wood. “And it’s only common sense to move past the calendar-based license to a model that is used for so many things in your everyday life, like your Costco membership card.”

Since 1980, annual resident sport fishing license sales have declined 55 percent while the state’s population has increased over 60 percent. While California has a population of more than 39.8 million people, one of the country’s longest coastlines, more than 3,000 lakes and thousands of rivers and streams, it has the lowest fishing participation rate per capita in the country.

California’s current calendar-based fishing licenses expire on December 31 of each year regardless of when purchased. Some anglers are not willing to pay full price for a license that may only be valid for a few

months. Recognizing this, 14 states have transitioned to a 365-day license. According to Rob Southwick, a national marketing and economics expert who has studied fishing license sales, states that offer a 365-day license are outperforming revenue of states that only offer a calendar-based license.

“Prior legislative attempts to create a 365-day license have enjoyed bipartisan support, underscoring that California’s current, outdated sport fishing license system does not properly serve anglers in the Golden State,” said Wayne Kotow, executive director of the Coastal Conservation Association of California, sponsor of AB 817. “Providing anglers access to a fishing license that provides greater value and technology that makes fishing more accessible is long overdue, and what better way to achieve these goals than to boost the value of a license purchased by an angler? It’s kind of a no-brainer.”

“It’s time for California to abandon an antiquated fishing license that’s harming our participation rate,” said Wood. “Modernizing our sport fishing license to one that is valid a full 365 days from the date of purchase will encourage more Californians to fish and increase fishing license revenue that fund critical state fishing and conservation programs. Making fishing more accessible really supports communities that rely on outdoor recreation and tourism, like my Northern California district.”