

Following the salmon to central California

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Fishermen along the California coast boasted boatloads of prized salmon during this year's season, which reportedly has been one of the better salmon fishing seasons in years.

"It was a good one," acknowledged fisherman Richard Hagel of Crescent City, "(although) I don't know if I'd term it one of the best. We've had some big years in the past, you know.

"But I would say that in recent history, it was the best season."

That depends on where you fish, of course. Not every California fisherman got that lucky. Some reported that very few salmon made it to the state's northern coast. "Nobody seems to understand why, but the fish stayed south," said Rick Shepherd of Crescent City, president of the Crescent City Commercial Fishermen's Association.

While salmon generally migrate north, this year they swarmed the areas of Bodega Bay, Monterey Bay and even as south as Morro Bay, just north of San Luis Obispo.

Yet that didn't stop fishermen to the north from pursuing their catch. Many from Crescent City took boats and crews down south, as if chasing gold. And many of those fared well, catching upwards of 1,500 salmon.

In fact, for the season to really pay off, many fishermen needed to commit to an extended time on the central coastline. Some found it more difficult to stay south, away from their families for longer periods of time. Some struggled to turn much of a profit when fishing the Bay Area, given the high cost of staying there.

"It's so expensive down there," said fisherman Karl Evanow of Crescent City, who boated to the Bay Area mid-salmon season. "I mean, you're almost taking the money from the fish and putting it right back out."

Still, nearly all agreed that the California coast housed the salmon treasury.

As to why, among the numerous possibilities for the influx of salmon to the south could be heavy rainfall, particularly in 2017, which ended California's several-year drought. The rain caused rivers to fill and made the salmons migration to the Pacific Ocean easier.

Some credit this season's success to hatcheries.