



Chinook Salmon in Butte Creek in 2008. Credit: Kurt Rogers / S.F. Chronicle.

The Sacramento Bee [reports this morning](#) that contrary to expectations the Central Valley fall-run chinook salmon had another weak run this year, probably no better than the record-low return a year ago. That's bad news because the hatchery-boasted fall Chinook is the main target of the commercial salmon fishery off the California and Oregon coasts. The low return suggests that we are in for a third consecutive year of little or no commercial fishing and severe restrictions on the recreational catch. The situation may even be worse than that. Preliminary analysis shows that about 90% of the returning fish were hatchery spawned, leading to speculation that the wild fall-run may soon need protection under the Endangered Species Act, which would shut down the fishery and further complicate Delta water management. There is one ray of hope in the numbers — the return of 2-year old "jacks" is better than last year, providing some room for optimism about a stronger run next year.