

FISHERMEN'S NEWS

The Advocate for the Commercial Fisherman



Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations

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A Tribute to Zeke Grader BY TIM SLOANE

I WRITE THIS AS MY MENTOR and predecessor, and one of our most uncompromising champions of the fisheries, Zeke Grader, is making his last stand.

Zeke's whole life has been about fighting, and his favorite fight is in defense of the fishing communities he holds dear. But this time, the fight has taken him to a different arena, against a different foe.

Most frustrating to him, I think, is that his fight against pancreatic cancer takes him away from fighting for fish.

Despite his illness, he asked me recently whether he should attend a legislative hearing so he could play the really bad cop to protect California Chinook salmon. It seems to me that if Zeke could spend his last day doing one thing, it'd be telling off the government for its negligent stewardship of fish and water.

When we learned that Zeke had entered hospice care, I contacted some of Zeke's longest fighting companions at PCFFA, all current or retired commercial fishermen, to share their thoughts about Zeke's impact on their careers and their lives.

What follows is discussion of who Zeke is, and what he's done to steward the fisheries. One common thread throughout these accounts: Were it not for Zeke Grader, there would be no West

Coast salmon fishery in California and much of Oregon today.

Pietro Paravanno

Pietro Paravanno served on the PCFFA Board of Directors, and is President of PCFFA's sister organization, the Institute for Fisheries Resources.

"I met Zeke when I was President of my local marketing association, which earned me a seat on the PCFFA Board. We quickly built a relationship because of our willingness to engage with adversaries of the small boat fleet.

"Around that time, the legendary Nat Bingham was still a very big part of PCFFA. Nat, Zeke and I formed a friendship based around making PCFFA a force in advocating for the fishing community.

"Zeke brought to the friendship a vision that enabled me to understand the policies that affect fisheries. And that vision has sustained my own and many others' commitments to finding solutions to the challenges facing fishermen.

"Zeke is the gold standard for advocating for fishermen and their communities, and getting legislation that protects them. He is the strongest voice for commercial fishermen and the fishing community that I know of.

"One thing I'd like to point out: I've been thinking more and more about Zeke's resilience in his battle for his life.

He exemplifies salmon's stubborn fight to make it back up the river.

"We just need to give the fish water, just a little chance of an opportunity to survive. They'll have to fight, but ultimately they'll be OK."

Dave Bitts

Dave Bitts is President of the PCFFA Board of Directors.

"I heard about PCFFA from an older guy in my marketing association. I'd been speaking up at Pacific Fishery Management Council hearings, but I wanted to get more active. I met Zeke at my first PCFFA meeting in '82 or '83.

"You have to love the guy and be in awe of all the stuff he does, but every now and then he drives you absolutely crazy. He wants to do things his way. He never followed PCFFA Board direction unless it suited him.

"I've known some fishing organization Directors to blindly do the bidding of their greediest members, usually to the long-term detriment of the fishery. If our Board suggested comparable stunts to Zeke, he'd say 'There's no way in hell we're doing that and here's why.'

"At some point, the National Marine Fisheries Service intended to have salmon trollers off the water by 1984. When we got wind of this plan, we thought, 'What are these guys thinking?' We knew that if fishermen disappeared,



the fish wouldn't be around much longer.

"It's 2015 and we, and the fish, are still here. Zeke and Nat are probably equally responsible for that fact.

"Nat was active at the PFMC and exploited a lot of the public participation features that allow fishermen to participate in decisions.

"At the same time, Zeke dealt with inland habitat issues that PFMC couldn't touch, like freshwater quality, stream flow and dams. Zeke could and did kick agency ass and file lawsuits against suction dredge miners, farmers, and timber harvesters that were killing salmon.

"I've been privileged to know some truly great people in this business. Nat, Zeke and others had huge vision, always looking out for the future of the fleet and the resource, and then effectively implementing their vision.

"Zeke's impact on fishing policy is huge. He taught bureaucrats and managers, and me, that 'sustainability' is basically that we'll never sell the future for this year. That concept made its way into the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

"I hope he'd agree that I'm getting the pillars of sustainability right: (1) catch a little slower than fish can replace themselves; (2) don't screw up the habitat; (3) minimize effects on non-target critters, and; (4) ensure the fishery is financially viable and robust enough that it's worth participating in.

"If fishing isn't worth it, we have a serious problem. But you don't solve that problem by compromising the first three legs.

"My job now is to transition to the next generation. We need to find young blood in the fleet to get involved in policy. Some of these young guys could have the vision and the effectiveness. Before I retire I hope I've set the hook on some of these new fishermen.

"Someone once said PCFFA is spelled 'S-A-L-M-O-N.' The organization has huge credibility and respect that is way out of proportion to the size of our membership. All that's because of Zeke."

Larry Collins

Larry Collins is Vice President of the PCFFA Board of Directors.

"When my wife (Barbara Emley, aka "Bunkie") and I started fishing around '84, we didn't know anything about this policy stuff. When salmon seasons started getting cut, I talked to the old dinosaurs around the dock. They said to call Zeke.

"Zeke told me to come to a PCFFA meeting. We went and Zeke and Nat tag-teamed me and Bunkie. They told us that San Francisco needed representation.

"Protecting fishing doesn't just happen by itself. Fishermen hate going to meetings. But if you don't have someone watching your back door, making sure they don't take it all away from you, they'll take it. Its pretty scary, but they'll still take it anyway.

"Zeke mentored us – we didn't know anything! He taught us to organize, get the SF association going. I can't tell you how much I learned from him over the years. It's eye opening how much he knows. He's a mind-boggling genius about the game.

"He always said to 'speak truth to power,' but he might take a year to do it. I'll never be a politician because I just blurt out the first thing on my mind. He'd be thinking about checkmate fourteen moves down the road, whereas I'd just want to scream at them. He was like a governor on my mouth.

"But when he needed someone to shoot their mouth off, he'd bring me and let me go to it. He loved taking me to Westlands Water District, one of the main industrial irrigators that we fight over water for salmon.

"Zeke would pull me out and I'd scream about Congress and the agencies violating the Central Valley Project Improvement Act by reneging on the promise of 800,000 acre-feet of water for fish, or how they never doubled salmon.

"He has a built-in detector in his brain for BS. He could right off the bat tell you when the alarm was going off. And he had fire. He'd get fired up when something was wrong.

"There would not be a small boat commercial fleet in California but for Zeke. We'd have been gone for twenty years now if not for him. All the families that my organizations represent – there are forty boats that fish out of San Francisco. Without Zeke it'd have been all over, twenty years ago.

"This fleet's not going to work near as well without him. It'll be hard not to have him to call up when somebody calls me and asks for my support on some policy. A lot of it I can figure out but a lot is deeper than I ever shoveled.

"Not very many people are as altruistic as Zeke. Especially today. That man gave more of himself than anyone I know. And fishermen aren't the most thankful people or the most generous with their resources. For very little thanks, he has given us 200 percent."

Barbara Emley

Barbara Emley is a PCFFA Board member and Secretary of IFR.

"Larry's crazy, we met Zeke in '89. Larry used to call Zeke all the time. Zeke got weary of Larry hollering at him, so he referred Larry to Nat. From there we got thoroughly busy doing fish politics.

"I couldn't believe how hard Zeke worked. We used to try to get ahold of him and he'd not answer and wouldn't return our calls. Then we figured that if you call the office at 6:30 in the morning we'd get him! He worked all the time.

"He ignored the Board's direction a great deal, but we got used to it. I'll tell you this, the first PCFFA meeting I went to I expected it to be like marketing association meetings, which are a whole different crowd: selfish, ridiculous ways of problem solving, yelling. I was dumbfounded at how intelligent PCFFA meetings were.

"I'm not sure whether he loved salmon or fishermen more. Fishermen are sometimes hard to love. But, he fought for the fisheries all the time. He did everything to keep us going.

"We used to say that salmon is the kind of fish that thinks he's bigger than he really is. Zeke did the same thing for PCFFA – he made us seem a lot more important and bigger than we were."



Mike McCorkle

Mike McCorkle is a long-serving PCFFA Board member.

"Eureka had the idea to start PCFFA, and they put it out to the other ports. They knew Zeke from working for his dad. They hired Zeke when PCFFA started. I joined right after that.

"When I first met Zeke, I liked him. "Every time I call him, I say 'Zeke, we got big problems over here.' And he says, 'Well Mike, tell me about it.' And I tell him, and he says, 'We're gonna get to work on it, we're gonna get it going.' Always a positive attitude. He never turned us away. It made me feel like we always had a chance.

"If Zeke hadn't been around, we wouldn't have any fisheries. Especially salmon, and herring. If he hadn't been there at least fifteen years back, we wouldn't have a salmon fishery.

"Zeke stands for always telling the truth when you talk. No mistruths, don't twist the truth. Pretty soon agencies and legislators listen. If you're always honest, and you get where they like you, they'll bend over backwards for you. No one ever caught Zeke lying about anything.

"He has a great BS detector. He knows when people are

lying. If something was coming down, and he didn't like it, he'd call it BS. People respected him.

"Once, a halibut bill came up and Zeke and I went to testify to the California Legislature on it. When we got there, some enviros came up to Zeke and asked whether it was a good bill. Zeke told them that we supported it. When the halibut bill came up, the enviros sat back and held their tongues. When bills we didn't support came up, the enviros gave the Legislature a bunch of grief.

"He's a champion for commercial fisheries. When Zeke talked, people listened. When he's gone, fishermen are gonna realize that they have to be more involved and they're not gonna be able to say 'its all right, Zeke will take care of it.'" **EN**

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