

**Brian LeNeve**

**From:** Harrison HILBERT [harrisonhilbert49@hotmail.com]  
**Sent:** Tuesday, June 07, 2011 10:45 AM  
**To:** Brian LeNeve  
**Subject:** Big Sur Steelhead

Brian,

During the autumn of our junior year @ Carmel High School, R. Reed & I went to the mouth of the Big Sur to fish from the high bluff/rocks where the River's water enters the sea. I believe it was during Thanksgiving break? I'm not exactly sure of the date, but I do know steelhead season had not opened yet. Hence, we were going to concentrate our efforts casting into the surf w/spoons. As the tide turned toward high, we observed several steelhead mingling in the transition waters of fresh meeting salt. The higher the tide rose, the closer the fish moved towards the freshwater out-flow of the Big Sur Lagoon. We didn't hook any that day, but seeing the fish certainly perked our interest. The following day we returned. We climbed to the top of the bluff that overlooks the Lagoon while on our way to the headland rocks on the extreme west end. (This rock buttress forms a boundary forcing the Big Sur waters to the south as they enter the sea.) From the top of the bluff we looked in the Lagoon & saw several ( at least 6) steelhead in the Lagoon. Regardless of the fact steelhead season was not open, we descended to an area near the Lagoon's exit to the sea & fished. I managed to hook & land a male steelhead that morning in the fresh water of the Big Sur Lagoon.

A couple of days later Jack Belangee & I walked into the area we called Dana's Run to see if any fish were that far upstream. There was at least one fish in that run. I managed to hook & land that fish too (another male fish of about 6#). The interesting aspect of that fish was that it was already olive & rose colored, indicating in retrospect, that it was sexually mature & apparently ready to spawn? Both these fish were harvested in the late 1950's.

After I returned from the army in 1963, Dave Hildebrand told me that he & John Hollo had stopped upstream from Dana's early that November, & looked off a large rock that forms a pool near the highway. Dave said there were approximately half dozen fish holding in that pool. Neither Dave nor John had fishing gear w/them that day, but they returned the following day to fish for them, only to observe that the pod of fish had moved.

Jim Cunningham told me of finding a pod of steelhead in the willows upstream from the Big Sur Lagoon around Thanksgiving one year in the mid-50's. I wasn't there, but if you were able to locate Jim, he may recall the event? Another resource might be Ray Wermuth? He might have some experience seeing pre-fishing season steelhead in the Big Sur? In those days the wide use of face masks by most of us to search likely hiding places left few fish undiscovered, as you know.

Rumors of early returning steelhead and/or coho salmon trickled by me during those years, both the late 50's & early 60's, but those are the only fish I'm aware of or personally observed prior to the opening of steelhead season. ( I believe the season opened 1-Dec. in those years?).

An additional observation: During the 50's a freshwater slough ran into the Big Sur Lagoon from the north, just past the east side of the bluff overlooking the Lagoon. It contained enough fresh water to allow fish to travel into & out of it. The slough was formed by a watercourse flowing out of Mr. Hill's large hayfield located above & north of the River's mouth. Water flowing into the slough kept it viable as fish habitat & obviously contributed to the River's freshwater flow. In 2003, David Hansen & I were on the Peninsula for an All CHS Classes Reunion. We drove the Old Coast Road the day prior to the event. From the high point near the south end of the road, we observed a large lake in Mr.Hill's hayfield. The lake was there when you & I made the same drive this past Nov. David & I drove to the old Dana Ranch (now part of Big Sur Park), & walked to the Big Sur Lagoon. One major observation we made was that the north slough was filled in & no longer contributed water to the Lagoon. Additionally, the old slough channel was

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filled in w/soil & brush. No water now flows off of Mr.Hill's hayfield, into the slough, & contributes fresh water to the Big Sur River. I believe Mr. Hill is already getting water from the Big Sur aquifer by impounding water in the large lake on his large hayfield. Perhaps the lake water should be considered when total water volume extracted is considered?

This is a rather lengthy response to your inquiry, & I apologize for being so wordy. I do hope some of what my response contains might be of some help in your efforts. You are welcome to contact me by phone to further discuss my observation, if it might help your efforts in this issue.

Sincerely,

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