

STEWARDS OF THE SEA IN BODEGA BAY

Honoring The Fishermen of Bodega Bay (Part 2)

by Andrea Granahan - 2022

In our last issue, our story of Bodega Bay's fisherman highlighted the forming of our Grange, Chapter #777, one of few, if not the only one remaining in the United States, that focuses on fishing as agriculture. Our "farmers of the sea", their families and friends of the Grange are remembered as the group that saved Bodega Harbor from becoming too shallow for boats. They planted and grew grasses that hold the sand in place on the peninsula know as Bodega Head. The Grange supports the community and it's people. The Carpenters', the Ames', the Wedel's and many others created a strong foundation for our community by building a place to gather, a safe haven. The Grange members, mothers, fathers, husbands, wives, children, and their friends, grew into a force that influenced Federal and State politics with Crab Feeds and Social gatherings for all. For years teens got their first cars loans from the Grange Credit Union, and Grange Chapter #777 handed out (and still does) generous scholarships at graduation.

In the 1970s trouble for the fishing fleet was brewing again. Foreign fishing fleets invaded local waters. Overfishing was becoming an issue. Local fishermen fought for the 200 mile limit as a Fisheries Conservation Zone. They also faced a disappearing crab fishery. Not only were foreign countries invading the catch, California state planned to build the Peripheral Canal that would devastate salmon runs. The salmon runs were also being killed by uncontrolled logging, road building and other inland activities that destroyed their breeding grounds. Logging companies were proposing "ocean ranching" of salmon. Unfortunately, the first time it was tried the immature fish swam upstream, not to the ocean, and ate the naturally hatched fish and then died. The US Navy proposed dumping defunct nuclear submarines in the fishing grounds off the north coast. Fishermen were very angry about a lot.

They found their voice. Bill Grader, who ran a fish receiving dock in Fort Bragg, realized just trying to appeal to his local representative wasn't enough. In the late 70s he approached then State Senator Barry Keene

about holding a *Fisheries Forum*, bringing together a number of coastal legislators to meet directly with fishermen. The first few forums were almost fist fights. But the fishermen had real stories to tell and enough legislators were impressed they formed the Salmon and Steelhead Citizens Advisory Committee.

"The Forum came out of frustration," said the late Zeke Grader, Bill's son who became a potent industry spokesman, and helped form the *Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen's Associations*. The PCFFA eventually became a real force in Sacramento. Its weekly newsletter Friday became a must read for fishermen, environmentalists, fish buyers, lawmakers



and seafood lovers.

The Fisheries Forum: A key turning point, in the transition from being Farmers to Stewards of the Sea came in 1978, when the *Fisheries' Forum* captured the attention of stunned legislators when the salmon fishermen demanded to tax themselves. No one had ever asked to be taxed before! Barry Keene took up the cause of the Salmon Stamp and passed the bill. It required salmon fishermen pay up to \$30 for a salmon stamp each season. The money was to be used for fish

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restoration, fixing the habitat. It would be controlled by a Salmon Stamp Committee headed by a fisherman and made up of fishermen advised by Fish and Game and by scientists of the fishermen's choosing. It was eventually increased to \$55 and extended to include commercial party boats that fished for salmon.

In 1981 the women of the fishing communities moved in on the action at the urging of Bill Grader. The late Donna Freeman of Bodega Bay and Dodie Scott of Fort Bragg were very active in creating the first seafood receptions for legislators and their staff at the Forum.

"When the women's organizations began to hold the seafood receptions in 1981, the Forum began to reach a whole second tier of legislators – those that simply like seafood. We've been able to use those contacts when the industry was in trouble. The reception has created a great fund of good will," recalled Keene on the fifteenth anniversary of the Forum back in 1987. Legislators began attending the Forum by the dozen.

Preparing the seafood (often for as many as 400 people) was not easy when the only space available to the women was often just the motel rooms.

"We had ice chests everywhere and a plastic tablecloth spread over a bed so we could use it for a table. One person worked in the shower cutting up smoked cod. Fuses kept blowing because too many electric cookers were being used," recalled the late Marcet Makela of Fort Bragg. Sometimes a restaurant would give up its kitchen to them making life easier.

One thing the women did was to send invitations to the staff people of the legislators. That was unusual and the staff were impressed by the thoughtfulness. It was also very diplomatic since much of the legislative grunt work that got bills through was done by key staff members who became industry champions.

California began passing legislation protecting the inland habitat of the salmon. The state Fish and Game Department had finally learned just cutting fishing seasons was not the way to protect a resource, but it was a way to get fishermen killed by forcing them to fish during a short period despite dangerous weather

or ocean conditions. California's actions caught the attention of the federal government and Congress passed the Magnuson Act in 1976 which created the 200 mile limit the fishermen had been fighting for. It was a major milestone.

The Forums also led to the creation of the State Senate Select Committee on Fisheries and Aquaculture, headed by Barry Keene and led by eight legislators. The committee could take on a lot of the work that the Forum demanded. For example, it directed research on the dumping of nuclear waste, blowing the whistle on the Navy and scuttling their plans for scuttling waste that would have poisoned the fish.

All this did not go unnoticed by the environmental community. They began attending the Forum and wanting to be on the agenda. Joining the fishermen, the united groups successfully fought offshore oil drilling in northern waters. That unique alliance also defeated government plans to strip mine the ocean floor for minerals. It was and is a sometimes an uneasy alliance since fishermen had often felt under attack by such groups as Green Peace, the Sierra Club, etc. But the fishermen had accomplished so much they had established themselves as effective stewards of the sea and the critters that inhabit it. And they welcomed the help from environmental groups in keeping the oceans and rivers that supported their industry clean and productive.

In our next issue, we will speak to the heroic efforts of today's fishermen and women on Bodega Bay.

