

**Things I Would Like to Have Said on Being Named
the Salmonid Restoration Federation's
"Restorationist of the Year"**

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[Note: Since my friends and colleagues are very good at keeping secrets, I had no idea I was to receive an award at the concluding banquet of this year's Salmonid Restoration Federation conference in Davis, CA. I left the conference late in the day to attend a family gathering. I was thus very regrettably not present in person to accept the Salmonid Restoration Federation's award as "Restorationist of the Year."

Almost all of my work involves making something good from a less-than-ideal situation. In that spirit, I composed these words, an after-the-fact speech that I never gave. This has two advantages: first, no one had to suffer while I once again talked too much. And second, I am able to say things in a more organized way than I would have spoken on the fly.]

Thank you, members of the Salmonid Restoration Federation for making me Restorationist of the Year for 2017. It is an award I value and appreciate enormously. And thanks to all of the ringleaders who pushed my nomination forward. Their support means as much to me as the award itself.

In giving a talk, the rule of thumb is to keep it to three points. So here's my three. First, regulatory proceedings are essential to restoration. Second, coalitions improve regulatory success. And third, advocates in the regulatory arena often don't get to finish what they start.

Good regulatory work is essential.

The overwhelming problem fish face in California's Central Valley and Sierra watersheds is that fish don't have enough water. The magnitude, timing and duration of flow hamstring other efforts to make conditions better for fish. Regulatory processes give us the chance to get water back. This is the primary focus of the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, known as CSPA and pronounced "see-spa."

The venues in which I work most frequently are hydropower relicensing proceedings before the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission and water rights proceedings before the State Water Resources Control Board. I deal with legal, procedural, hydrological, biological, and economic issues. I try to cross-walk among all these disciplines and to help my colleagues improve both written and spoken communication. This means taking each of these subjects and others seriously, and doing a lot of figurative and literal homework. As some of the younger people in the conservation business consider their careers or their avocations, I hope they will also become subject-area translators and interpreters. The goal is two-fold: helping others to see the big picture, and improving technical and verbal competence.

Regulatory work is also eminently social. Last year, I spent about 80 days in meetings. Some meetings are formal, like days at the State Water Board arguing against attorneys who make more money in an hour than fish advocates make in a day. Stakeholder meetings for hydropower relicensings are less formal and more frequent. In both cases, an advocate who hasn't broken up the room in laughter at least once has missed an opportunity. Someone who walks out of the room without people knowing his or her name has not succeeded. Someone who has talked only to announce his or her authority and general importance to the rest of the room (usually, it's his: we call it "man-splainin'") has lost ground.

Practice good situational awareness and improve meeting dynamics: it's fun. While you're at it, make written work the best it can be, back it up with citations, and insist on technical integrity and honesty.

Coalitions improve success.

One of my favorite book titles is from Walter Mosely: *Always Outnumbered, Always Outgunned*. Fish advocates will never have the resources of water agencies and water users. We need to be smarter and more efficient and do more with less, the very things we would like water users to do with water.

Since 2006, it has been my privilege to be on the steering committee of the California Hydropower Reform Coalition; I have been vice-chair for many years. Since 2009, I have been on the steering committee of the national Hydropower Reform Coalition. Through these entities, I coordinate relicensing activities, engage in state and national energy policy actions, and receive much of the funding that makes my work possible. I am also part of the Foothills Water Network, centered in the Yuba, Bear and American river watersheds, and am often part of more ad hoc coalitions on specific problems or issues.

In each of these coalitions, we share the same values. We don't always agree. Resolving coalition conflicts, both tactical and substantive, is excellent practice in negotiating with people whose values are different. If it is not humbling, then you are not paying attention. Some people write better than others: go with the better expression and leave your ego behind. Some people can captivate a room: let them direct the action. Some people know the law: listen.

When you get in the broader room, argue against the statement or the policy, but never do anything that could even be interpreted as demeaning the person. Try to draw out the values you share. If inter-personal chemistry is toxic, get other people talking. Deflect dead ends towards productive outcomes. Work overtime to achieve resolution. Walk away if you have to.

In society as well as biology, there is great value in diversity. It is important for utility operators and other water users to know that there are people who will work tirelessly to find good outcomes, and also people who mean business if there are no other options. While CSPA allows me to credibly play both roles, it is also important for there to be organized checks and balances within the broader restoration community.

Someone needs to finish.

In 2008, I was fortunate to be involved in the Auburn Dam hearing before the State Water Board, after which the Board revoked the water rights for Auburn Dam. That hearing was started back in 1998, when my predecessor at CSPA filed a water rights protest. With Ron Stork at Friends of the River and others, I got to help finish what others had started (although Auburn Dam, like Dracula, may rise again).

In 2006, CSPA hired me to work on the relicensing of the DeSabra – Centerville Hydroelectric Project on Butte Creek. By August, 2016, I thought it was finally just about in the “done” column. On February 2, 2017, PG&E withdrew its application to relicense the project, and I am now potentially back to square one. This project is one of the few hydro projects that provides a substantial benefit to fisheries, in this case to spring-run salmon. We need to find an outcome that protects the Butte Creek fish. A number of us are working to develop a stakeholder process and find a potential new operator. Several people approached me during the conference wanting to help. We will contact them and others as options develop.

It was satisfying to be in a crowd at the conference week where about half the people were about half my age. We need some of the best and the brightest to move into the regulatory side of restoration, to take up the baton while the veterans are still moving and hopefully show the gray hairs how to do a better job. We need to finish more of the processes we start.

Some final thoughts

In closing, it is customary to acknowledge some of the people with whom you work when you get an award. It is never possible to acknowledge all who deserve acknowledgement, and it feels weird to exclude by including. Nonetheless, I want to call out several.

Bill Jennings, Executive Director at the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, has given me a platform for my work for eleven years. Bill has pointed me at what I needed to learn but has let me set my own course 95% of the time. He’s let me do things my way when at times he would have done them differently. He works too hard and too long, and I tend to follow his example, though I must admit that I didn’t need a lot of pushing in the work-ethic department.

Dave Steindorf of American Whitewater is a master of framing issues and an expert in situational awareness. He’s taught me that your most effective allies sometimes come from unexpected places. Working with Dave in 2007-2009 to eliminate the circular firing squad of conflict between anglers and boaters was one of the smartest and most satisfying things I ever did.

Beth Lawson of the California Department of Fish and Wildlife has showed me how to handle and use hydrological models. She showed me their importance by example and has walked me through the steps of reviewing outputs and even changing inputs, despite my skip-ahead approach and lack of formal training. She is focused and solution-oriented, a stickler for technical integrity, and a quiet leader within her agency.

All three are fun and funny, and working with them has enriched my life over the past ten years more than I can say.

I also want to call out Gary Reedy. I understand Gary went to quite a bit of trouble organizing this award and its presentation to he-who-did-not-show-up. I am touched and very grateful.

Thank you again to everyone who has helped me to get here today. It is a great honor to be Restorationist of the Year. I very greatly and deeply appreciate the recognition. I absolutely promise that I will be there next year to pass the award along.