



September 9, 2015

For Immediate Release

Zeke Grader, Champion of West Coast Fisheries and Fishermen, Dies

William F. “Zeke” Grader, Jr., the former executive director of the Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations and the Institute for Fisheries Resources, and a fierce advocate for wild fish and the men and women who harvest them, died on September 7 after a long illness. He was 68.

Grader was a pivotal figure in the fight to preserve the West Coast’s rivers, estuaries and fisheries, uniting the environmental and commercial fishing communities in common cause. He was a familiar figure in both Sacramento and Washington, and could be confrontational or charming, depending on the situation and audience. Regardless of approach, his support for sufficient and clean water, abundant fish, and a solvent commercial fishing sector was unwavering.

“Zeke was a prime example of complete dedication to a cause,” said Tim Sloane, the PCFFA’s and IFR’s executive director. “Fisheries protection consumed him. Just a few days before he died, he was working on the preface to a book he was co-writing on the history of fishing on the West Coast. His efforts to protect fish and habitat were always guided by his belief that the culture of the fishing community was worth protecting, and he wasn’t afraid of anyone who threatened that culture’s right to exist and thrive.”

Patricia Schifferle, the principal and director of the environmental consulting firm Pacific Advocates, an advisor to PCFFA, and one of Grader’s long-time friends, described Grader as “...a great warrior for fishing men and women, salmon, and the ecology of San Francisco Bay and the Sacramento/San Joaquin Delta. What I recall most about Zeke was his ability to cut to the chase and fight against all odds, demanding the water flows essential for the health of our salmon and other species essential to our fishing heritage.”

David Bitts, a commercial salmon fisherman based in Eureka and the president of PCFFA, said the relatively good condition of West Coast fisheries is a direct result of Grader's work.

"We have fairly robust fisheries on the West Coast, with mostly owner-operated, family-owned boats," said Bitts. "This is Zeke's legacy. That's how it's supposed to work, and it's up to the rest of us to keep it that way."

Pietro Parravano, the president of the Institute for Fisheries Resources, said Grader was able to explain the connections among the natural world, fishing communities, and society at large in terms that were both eloquent and understandable.

"Zeke gave human values to fish, fishery habitat, to ecosystems, to oceans," said Parravano. "His vision was embedded in his life-long quest for teaching others the ecological, social, and economic importance of sustaining domestic fisheries. He was a true educator and legend."

Grader's roots in the West Coast fishing community were multi-generational. Born in Bellingham, Washington, he moved with his family to the Mendocino County fishing and timber community of Ft. Bragg in 1950. There, family members helped Grader's uncle manufacture fertilizer from fish scraps. Grader's father, Bill Grader, ultimately founded Grader Fish Company, a seafood broker and processor that specialized in local, high-quality salmon and crab. Zeke Grader worked for the family business through high school, unloading the daily catch on the company's dock.

After graduating from high school, Grader took his undergraduate degree at Sonoma State University, served in the U.S. Marine Corps, and graduated from the University of San Francisco's School of Law. He passed the California State Bar in 1975. During his studies, Grader also managed Ocean Traders Co. in Sausalito, a fish receiving station for his family's seafood processing business.

At the same time, massive changes were underway in maritime law and fisheries policy. Congress was deliberating on the details of a 200 nautical mile-wide "economic zone" to preclude overfishing by foreign fleets. This ultimately resulted in the Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976, also known as the Magnuson-Stevens Act for its authors, Senator Warren Magnuson of Washington, a long-time friend of Bill Grader, and Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska. In response to concerns about the implications of the Magnuson Act, a group of West Coast fishermen formed the PCFFA and drafted Zeke Grader as executive director. He served in that position until June, 2015.

From the beginning, Grader demonstrated an almost preternatural aptitude for the persuasion, debate, declaiming, arm-twisting, and cajoling necessary for dealing with policy makers at both the state and federal levels, says Bill Kier, a Marin-based fisheries consultant and one of Grader's best friends.

"One of Zeke's great talents was his ability to size up each day's fish habitat and fishing regulation skirmish and figure out how to pluck out a gain for his fishermen - gains the fishermen *never* could have afforded through normal pay-to-play lobbying," says Kier. "There's been a lot said over the years about how Zeke's boyhood fish dock / Marine Corps-bred fighting skills served the fisheries, but this other side of him, the *t'ai chi ch'uan* fisheries warrior, intrigued me the most."

Over the years, Kier continued, Grader helped fishermen define and articulate their positions on a wide range of issues that affect fisheries and fish habitat, including offshore oil and gas development, timber harvesting and water allocation.

“His lobbying was largely responsible for the passage of the 1988 Salmon, Steelhead Trout and Anadromous Fisheries Program Act, which called for a conservation plan to double wild salmon numbers,” said Kier. “He then used that legislation as a mandate for reforming the federal Central Valley Project. Due to the work of Zeke and his allies, the Central Valley Improvement Act passed in 1992.”

Along with these two “monument” legislative coups, Grader also helped modernize the federal Fishery Conservation and Management Act, successfully litigated to accelerate water quality restoration under the Clean Water Act, and helped protect fishing grounds by advocating for effective oil spill prevention and response policies.

He received widespread recognition for his work, including the Environmental Hero Award from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

But Grader also realized that fishermen could not achieve their goals on their own. He was a masterful collaborator, forging alliances with environmental groups, land trusts, conservancies – any organization with agendas that dovetailed with the preservation of fish and fishery habitat.

“There really was no one else like Zeke,” said Carolee Krieger, the executive director of the California Water Impact Network. “He fought for fishermen and fish, and in doing so, he also fought for the protection of our wetlands, estuaries and rivers, and for the equitable distribution of our water. He was a man for all seasons, a man who was always ready with support or advice. He brought us all together, and made all of us stronger.”

Grader is survived by his wife, Sausalito attorney Lois A. Prentice; his mother, Geraldine Grader; two sisters, Lindsay Grader and Allison Grader; and a brother, Samuel Grader, also an attorney. A memorial service is pending.

Contact:

Tim Sloane, executive director
Pacific Coast Federation of Fishermen’s Associations & Institute for Fisheries Resources
415-561-5080
tsloane@ifrfish.org