

# Cottonwood Lakes and the Golden Trout

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If you live in California, you probably have explored the Sierra Nevada Mountains numerous times. It's a formidable range rising to over 14,000 feet with numerous streams flowing towards the east or the west from the Sierra Crest. An exception to this flow is the Kern River which flows in a southerly direction along a fault line within the midst of these mountains. This exception allowed the possibility of a new species of trout to develop within this mountain range, our California Golden Trout.

There are actually three subspecies of the Golden Trout, all within the Kern River watershed. The trout developed over a 70,000 year period yet were almost decimated by the late 1980's through our fish introduction practices. Cottonwood Lakes played a major role in providing Golden Trout throughout the region and the world. Within this program, we will look at the region from a historical view and discuss how Cottonwood Lakes has impacted our freshwater fisheries. This region was also instrumental in how we perceive our natural resources. This is the region that helped to bring the Wilderness Act into effect and allowed us to re-examine how we approach some of our natural resource areas.



My background is one of a Naturalist. I grew up within the Santa Barbara area during the 1950's and 60's. Our family enjoyed both backpacking and fly fishing, so there were many excursions to the Sierra Nevada. During my High School years, I tended to lean toward the natural sciences with an interest in Marine Biology. We had a major oil spill in 1968 within the Santa Barbara channel and I was selected to attend a National Youth Science Foundation Oceanography program in Maine for the Summer. My project there was to study the effects of oil dispersants on intertidal marine life. I attended UC Santa Barbara where I was a Botany major with a particular interest in California plants. This major brought many more trips to the Sierra where I found appreciation in the diversity of the flora. I transferred to UC Berkeley as a Forestry major. UC Berkeley at the time was ranked as the best Forestry School in the nation. We had some great faculty members that were closely connected to the Timber and Resource activities that took place within the Sierra Nevada during the 1940's, 50's, and 60's. One of those Professors was A. Starker Leopold, the son of Aldo Leopold. Starker taught the Wildlife classes and was a very adept fly fisherman. In addition to taking Forestry courses at Cal, I was a research assistant for Dr. Edward Stone who taught the Ecology classes.

I finally entered the workplace in 1976 starting a reforestation nursery in Carmel Valley. My first contract was 2 million seedlings for the Six Rivers National Forest. Reforestation was a very dynamic field with a high demand for reforestation seedlings from major timber companies and Government agencies. I started two more reforestation nurseries in Oregon and Washington. Overall, I grew about 45 million seedlings that were planted within the Northwest. As quickly as the reforestation grew, it quickly subsided once most of the large growth timber was removed from the Pacific Northwest.

I moved back to the Santa Barbara area, where I have a Reprographics business. It is ironic that once you are physically away from those fishing localities, ie Umpqua and Lewis River that you lived on, you become stimulated to seek fishing opportunities and make sure that you do not miss those opportunities any further. So for the past twenty years, I try to make a trip to the Sierra about every two weeks. My serious interest in fly

fishing started when I returned to Santa Barbara and met Bob Johns and Neal Taylor in the 1990's. There was so much information on fly fishing that I had stacks of magazines, books, and notes filling my home office. There had to be a better way to organize this information so that I could readily access it. So, I decided to start a web site called "Fly Fishing the Sierra" ([www.flyfishingthesierra.com](http://www.flyfishingthesierra.com)) in 2002. Within this site, I could put images and recipes of the fly patterns that I wanted to use. I also wanted to have maps showing how to access certain waters, what flies to use, and what fish inhabited those waters. The web site has worked well for me over time. Currently, I am developing fishing maps of to cover all of the Sierra Nevada.

