

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god — sullen, untamed and intractable,
Patient to some degree, at first recognized as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.
The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten
By the dwellers in cities — ever, however, implacable,
Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder
Of what men choose to forget.

— T. S. Eliot, "The Dry Savages"

five degrees; rearing areas, fifty to sixty degrees. Laboratory experiments have demonstrated that water temperatures at seventy degrees Fahrenheit and above are directly lethal to more than one-half the adult salmon populations.

Temperature studies by fish and game biologists have indicated the reaching of upper limit lethal temperatures in the Columbia River basin during the peak summer irrigation months of the late 1970s. During an extreme drought year, 1977, the individual basins behind the dams were held to near "desireable" levels. However, the downstream significance of a reduced water discharge was great. Biologists recorded water temperatures at Pillar Rock (approximately twenty miles from the mouth of the Columbia) in excess of seventy-six degrees at depths greater than ten feet. Such temperatures had never been recorded that far downstream.

The rationale for the high temperature was the low discharge through the dams because of drought conditions. Heavy fish mortalities and increased lethargy were experienced by the anadromous runs of autumn, 1977.

With a proposed doubling of the outtake of river water in the next fifty years and the approach of the lethal thermal temperatures in the Columbia River today, it is apparent that increased irrigation pressure will be instrumental in pushing the temperatures of the Columbia River beyond lethal limits for life support of salmon species. Although there have been times in the past when the use that could be made of the Columbia River system appeared to be unlimited, it is becoming evident that with the existing level of development of forty-three and one-half million acre-feet of storage, the system will

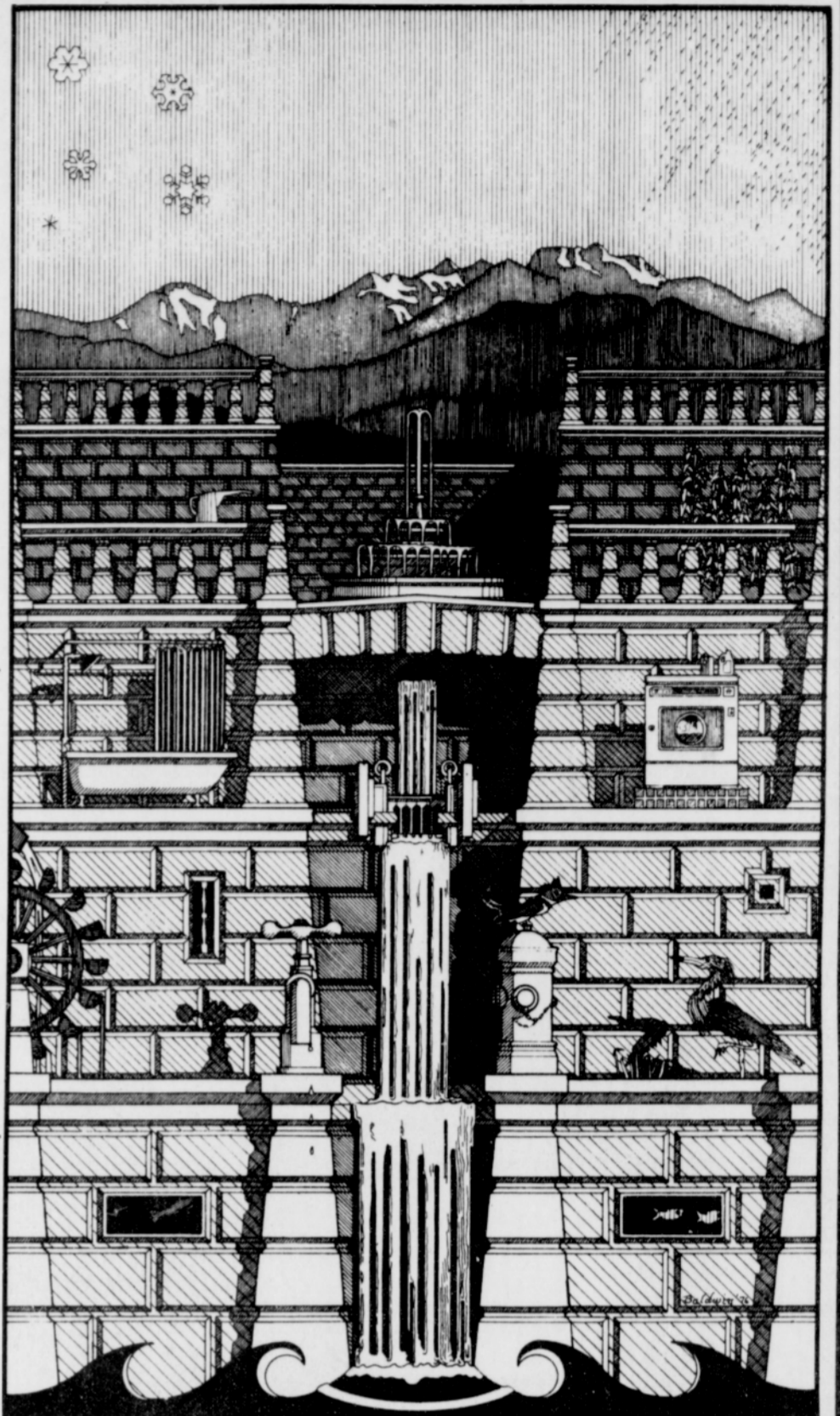
be unable to continue to completely serve its many diverse uses, such as irrigation, navigation, fish migration, hydropower, and flood control.

Regardless of the implications that water quality suffers due to irrigation practices the push for increased irrigation projects prevails. During the extreme drought year of 1977 the following article was a front page item in the Tri-City Herald, a Pasco, Kennewick, and Richland, Washington publication:

"Water to irrigate three hundred and forty thousand acres will be reserved in the Snake and Columbia Rivers between the Tri-Cities and John Day Dam under a proposed Washington State water management policy . . . The proposed program would establish the following order of priority for river-water use (1) Existing water rights; (2) Irrigation, domestic, stock watering and municipal use; (3) Navigation; (4) Industrial and thermal power plant cooling; (5) In-stream flows (fish, recreation); (6) Hydro-electric power.

"Wow!" exclaimed Russ Smith, Pasco president of the state Association of Irrigation Districts. "I'm surprised they've changed horses as far as they have. The last thing I saw, in-stream flows (fish, recreation) were about on top. I'm pleased they've moved it down. . . ."

Jim Oyala has been a part-time commercial gillnetter on the Columbia River for fifteen years. He has a Master's degree in Oceanography from Oregon State University in Marine Resource Management. He presently works for Knappton Towboat Company and fishes commercially for salmon in Alaska.



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