

GILLNETTER'S RESPONSE

TO THE EDITOR:

I am writing in opposition to the proposed house bill (HB 2366) which would ban commercial gillnetting on the Columbia River. The information and insights I offer come first-hand as a third generation gillnetter, as a merchant in a coastal resort community, and as the holder of a master's degree in marine resource management from Oregon State University.

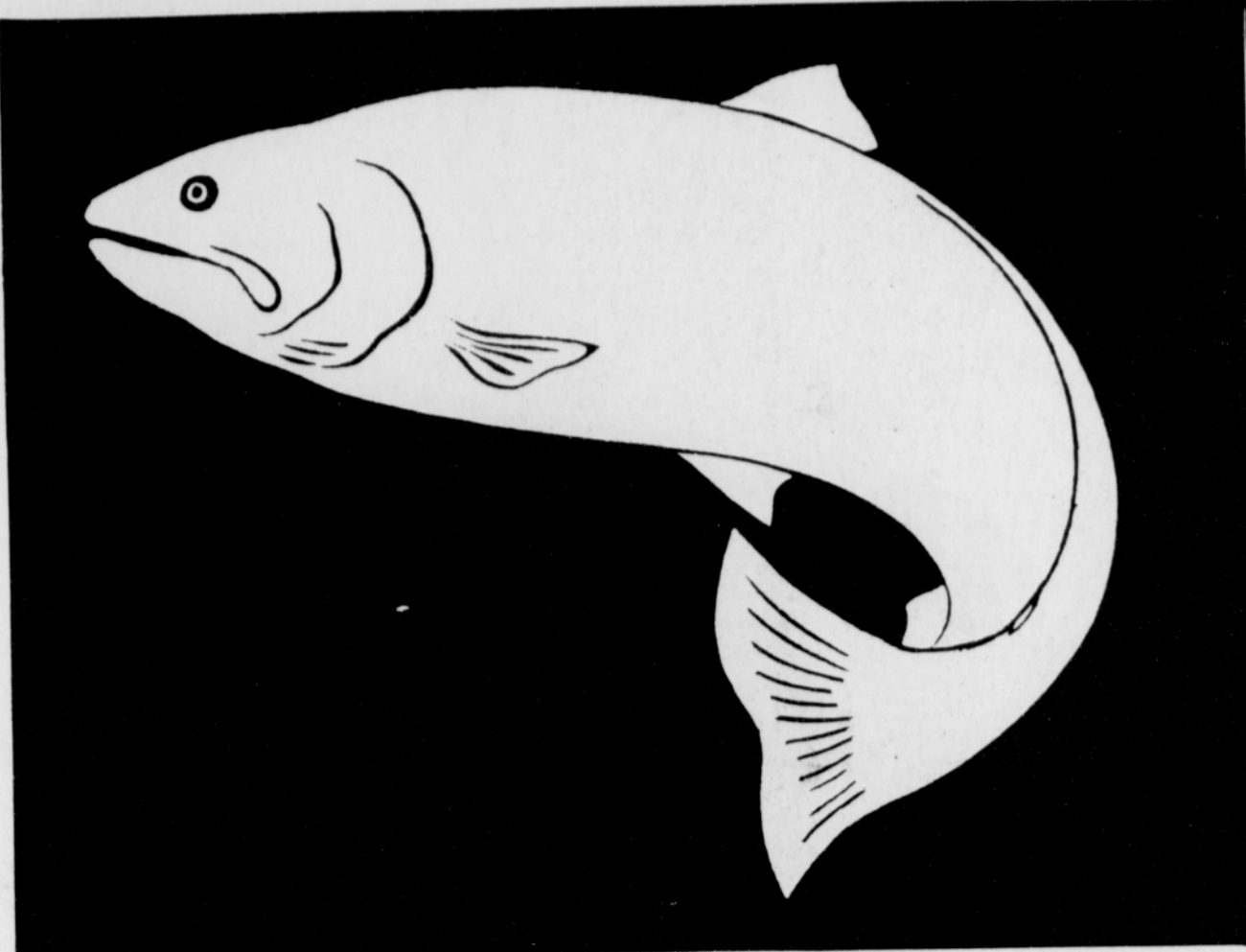
It disturbs me that this proposed bill hinges on pure subjectivity — I want something you've got...give it to me. Management of a salmon (and sturgeon) resource should be manifest in two ideologies: (1) the perpetuation of that resource through proper environmental controls, in tandem with (2) user group harmony. As an example, Fish and Game in the Bristol Bay region of Alaska (where I fish during the summer) control a sockeye run that is solely a commercial catch. This is easy management in terms of user group harmony, there being only one. However, fishermen spend many days on the beach waiting for fishing periods because escapement goals are not met. Conversely, on large return years, fishing is continuous. Too many fish in a spawning environment create oxygen and habitat stress in that environment. In Alaska, fish have actually been dynamited to protect future runs.

On the Columbia River, gillnetting provides this same control function as at Bristol Bay. In a closed environment (hatcheries), too many coho or chinook result in extreme spawning mortality rates and/or loss of excess brood stock. Escapement goals are set by local control agencies (in other words, Fish and Wildlife). In surplus years, gillnetting is a means of harvesting the surplus.

The Fall salmon harvest is a total non-sport entity, once the salmon adjust to fresh water (something that happens in an arbitrary area around Tongue Point). It does not then feed or take a hook. As an anadromous fish, it is living off its body fats, slowly deteriorating as it begins its spawning cycle. During this period, the fish is most commercially suited for harvest. It has reached its full weight and has not begun its tissue decline.

Termination of gillnetting on the Columbia would prevent harvesting of this resource. No user group in the Columbia would have access, as the fish simply does not take a hook.

The economic impact of such a loss would be profound to me personally and, obviously, to the industry. The gross value of my com-



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mercial catch last year on the Columbia was approximately twenty thousand dollars. Half of this money went to boat maintenance, fuel, new nets; all money spent in the lower Columbia area, from a resource that brought in new dollars. My portion, after taxes, gave me enough money to reduce my Veterans Administration home loan to a point where I can finally see a reduction in principal payments. As the father of two small children, gillnetting has been a blessing.

The argument that gillnetters are moonlighters is absurd. Most of us are aggressive, hardworking, family men and women. Yes, typical Oregonians and Washingtonians. When I was a boy, two hundred days of fishing existed on the river. Today, we may gillnet approximately two months out of the year. When we cannot fish, we will work at other occupations to support our families. Most of us would desire a life in which we could solely support ourselves from gillnetting on the river. It was my father's only means of income until 1968, at which time fishing was not providing our family adequate income. But he still lives next to his boat in a traditional setting that is harmonious with the lower river — as most gillnetters.

Presently, I am a merchant in Cannon Beach. I was also, for seven years, a crewman on towboats on the Willamette and Columbia Rivers. I love the river. It means more to me than a "hog-line" at Oregon City.

Every Spring, in Cannon Beach, the local groceries and fish markets fill their display cases with Spring chinook salmon gillnetted on the Columbia. Restaurants in town offer gillnetted salmon and sturgeon as a special. It is difficult for me to envision a tourist coming to my community, eating in a restaurant I have recommended, and not being able to eat locally caught salmon or sturgeon. For what reason? So that one user group might have access to a resource.

If our runs were depleted, then curtail user group access. Commercial fishermen accept these controls. But our fish runs are becoming a success story of which we should all be proud. Barging of smolts is proving successful and coastal and mainstream hatcheries are doing well.

Gillnetters on the Columbia have long had a slogan: SALMON FOR ALL. Let there be sport fishing; I never miss a chance to go myself. Let there be as much as proper management will allow. But let us not eliminate one user group because of another's lack of vision, especially when that resource is improving.

My grandfather came to Astoria from Finland to gillnet. I hope my two year old son will be able to share in this wonderful heritage. The commercial fisherman has been called the last American cowboy. I do not believe he is an anachronism. He or she is a part of what has made and makes the Pacific Northwest a special place. Please preserve this industry.

— JIM OYALA, CANNON BEACH

CONSIDER US

TO THE EDITOR:

I am a thirteen year old girl. I live in Portland. I read your paper, The North Coast Times Eagle.

I like your paper but I wish you could make a special column for the younger ones, something we would be interested in.

— TONI LINTON, PORTLAND

AMNESIA

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been known to forget my mother-in-law's birthday, an occasional dentist appointment, where I put my car keys and how old my dog is.

But if I had given my okay to sell arms to Iran, I know I would remember doing so.

— MARY TANGUAY WEBB, ESTACADA



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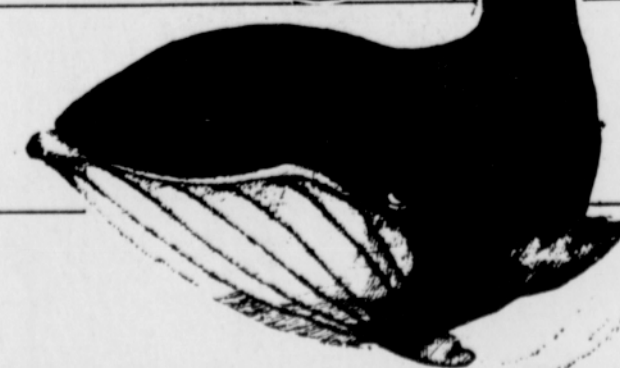
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