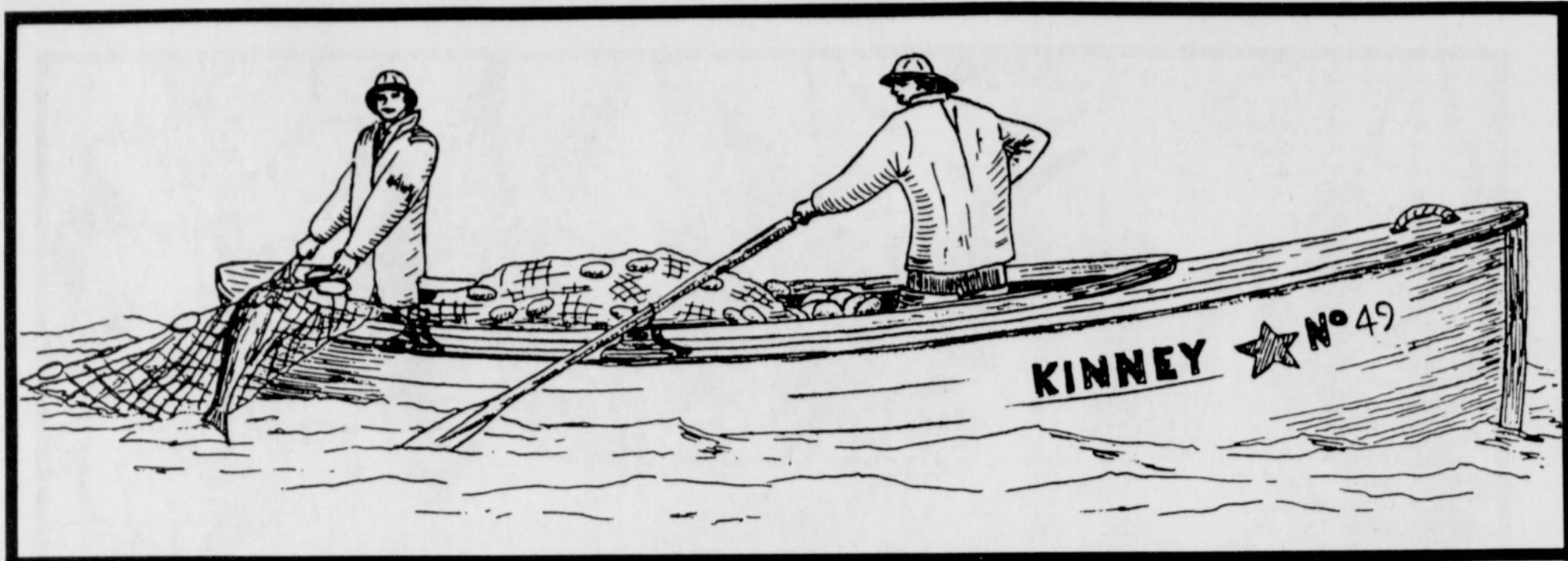




LYLE MORRIS

FROM PAGE 5

Job loss is an obvious threat. Loss of trust in assured wood supplies is the death knell for many communities that were originally formed because of the promise of sustained wood production by the government and large timber corporations. The emerging class conflict takes place between rural loggers and those who see their decline as a positive good, a "sign that the world is evolving toward a higher level of environmental sensitivity" and that they are an anachronism. Further dehumanization occurs when negative stereotypes turn up in the public press, in cartoons, in environmental organization literature. Lee points out that these stereotypes are classic cases of "blaming the victim" — "attributing to individuals pathological character traits that explain why they are suffering and justify negative consequences. (They are bad people and deserve to suffer.)" As Lee points out, the political function of negative stereotyping is the dehumanizing of individuals "so that they can be exploited or treated badly."

The situation regarding loggers could just as easily apply to Columbia River gillnetters. Job loss is an obvious threat, since without fish or the consent of society to catch them, fishermen do not exist. Loss of trust in the agencies designated to manage and protect the salmon runs is at a crisis point, due to the agencies' evident failure to do either. Reduction of harvest was the management agencies' strategy to compensate for inter-dam and other salmon mortalities. The very real issue of

overfishing that was so evident in the 19th and early 20th centuries has now been transformed into a term used to mask the results of environmental degradation and hydroelectric development. In fairness to the agencies, it must be said that, for the most part, they do not have the authority to address these most critical issues. Now that the crisis is apparent to anyone who reads a newspaper, negative stereotyping of fishermen is a shield to deflect criticism from those who share the responsibility for habitat loss and damage to salmon runs.

Negative stereotyping has existed on the Columbia almost as long as the fishery. Witness this 1874 comment: "Were it not for the whiskey bottle and card table, the fishermen on the Lower Columbia might be a comfortable and prosperous class of men." However, within the past decade, extremes in language go far beyond anything dreamed of in the 19th century. A drastic example appeared in a sportsfishing newsletter that characterized gillnetters as "lower than child molesters." What is the result for the fishing community? To quote Lee again, "(Negative stereotyping) has predictable consequences for the victims. Self-blame, loss of self-esteem, and personal disempowerment undermine the ability of people to take pride in themselves and their capabilities, to fight back and to demand respect and equal treatment."

The gradual erosion of the fishing community's psychological ability to defend itself, in conjunction with its previously successful tactic of silence and secrecy in order to preserve its lifestyle, have materially weakened its position vis a vis compet-

ing uses. One of the alternatives to natural resource-based adaptations is the development of tourism in areas of natural beauty. Washington State in particular has made an effort to promote the development of tourism in the latter 1980s and early 1990s. However, the notion that tourism, recreation, and retirement are preservation uses that are morally correct and superior to "extractive" uses needs closer examination.

The moral issue of using wilderness is subject to extreme views. One side may say that no use should be permitted, while the other side may push for the development of all-terrain vehicle trails. Overcrowding of state and national parks is accelerating environmental degradation, but denial of access to such places is almost unthinkable. In addition, private lands once available to recreational pursuits are being closed. Oregon Wildlife put it well:

"People who already own larger acreages (of land potentially useful for recreation) are also becoming less willing to share these lands with the public because of recurring problems with vandalism, littering and other illegal and irresponsible behavior. Access to many prime hunting areas may now carry a hefty price tag."

This is the flip side of the success stories of the Texas and Montana cattle ranchers who lease access to their land to hunters. Public policy in the past has tried to avoid access to recreational opportunities based on wealth, due to a strong American egalitarian ethic. As facilities become increasingly overtaxed, various forms of limited access are being proposed, with resulting ethical questions. More poignant was the comment from a resident of a small fishing community that has attracted increasing numbers of tourists due to its scenic beauty and historic charm: "Sometimes I feel as if we're living in a petting zoo."

Retirement communities are also not without their problems. Housing developments on rural lands, especially in waterfront areas, both restrict access to such areas and contribute to environmental damage in the form of storm water runoff, septic tank effluent, and loss of habitat. In addition, competition for such desirable property forces public agencies trying to purchase land for wildlife or recreational purposes to pay higher prices or forgo acquisition altogether.

The consequence of making the ethical choice to create a "kinder and gentler frontier," a New Frontier, without the rural adaptations upon which such areas have traditionally depended, brings its own ethical dilemmas. There is no guarantee that the land or resources preserved will be made accessible to all. In addition, rural communities looking for retirees to help retain their population base should note that many states give property tax breaks to seniors, based on age and income. In some states they are exempt from paying school and other special levies.

Diminished resources for education in rural areas result in another export, this time of children. Children have been exported for some time, generally at college age. Some then return to rural areas to inherit family farms, or fishing boats, or to manage small family logging firms. A more recent export is children of grade and high school age. Rural schools face declining enrollments due to outmigration of families in search of jobs and declining funds due to waning tax dollars. These circumstances force schools to close down programs, driving brighter students to urban high schools, and compelling the less mobile to settle for a substandard education. The latter are then cycled into that other rural phenomenon, poverty, characterized by substandard medical care, lawlessness, hostility towards outsiders, and unstable family structures. The mixed fishing, farming and logging communities of the lower Columbia are already seeing the changes associated with diminished incomes. It is increasingly difficult to attract doctors to the area, so that some communities are now classed as medically underserved. Increases in the use of food stamps and medical coupons, not just among the unemployed but also the working poor, set new records during the early 1990s.

Aside from the cultural and social implications of radically changing rural America, based on moral precepts, there is also a global effect. The relationship between "extraction" and preservation needs closer examination. Will the demand for food, fish or wood products cease? If not, where will they come from? They will come from 3rd World countries, already the source of much of the nation's clothing. Logging is already occurring in tropical rain forests and has moved to Russia. Beef

THE MIGHTY COLUMBIA

BY RAY FADICH

The great river of the west was known as the Mighty Columbia; it got its nickname by the tremendous volume of water rushing down its length, creating booming waterfalls, crashing cascades and turbulent whitewater rapids. Draining thousands of square miles between the two prominent mountain ranges of the west — Cascades and Rockies — the river ran wild and untamed. From its headwaters in Canada, the mighty flow serpentine through eastern Washington, turned sharply cutting through the Cascades, then made a final dash to the Pacific — a 1200 mile journey.

That was in the past, before the 1930s. Today the Columbia slowly makes its way to the Pacific through a series of dams where the water flow is controlled. Instead of the rapids and cascades, there are now a chain of placid lakes.

Before the dams the Columbia River contained the most prolific runs of Chinook salmon in the world. In just over a hundred years it has been vastly depleted of this natural resource. The Chinook is the largest of the Pacific salmon, some obtain a weight of eighty pounds or more. It was once so abundant in the river, it was thought to be inexhaustible. Some fifty salmon canneries were built on the lower Columbia to handle the enormous pack.

Through the years, dams, overfishing and pollution collaborated to reduce the size of the runs. Slowly, one by one, the canneries shut down; the last one closed its doors in 1979 at Astoria.

Many fishermen could no longer make a living at fishing, so they moved to other areas where fishing could still provide them with a livelihood, such as Alaska. Others changed their occupations.

Although the bonanza years were well past and gone forever, there were still fishermen and ex-cannery workers residing in the communities scattered along the Columbia at mid-century. These old veterans of the glory years could still recall stories of the past: the great salmon runs, the busy stern-wheeler traffic up and down the river, the river's bustling activity. Today the river is relatively quiet; only a handful of die-hard fishermen still work the river.

During the salmon decline, many of the towns along the lower river lost most of their population. One in particular, Brookfield, vanished altogether; it had been a ghost town for ten years then was leveled by bulldozers and burned to the ground. Brookfield had once supported a large cannery and had a population of 500. Nearly as fast as towns had sprung up and prospered along the lower river, they began to wane and die.

To understand the rise and fall of commercial on the Columbia we must look back at the history of the salmon industry. It is an interesting account of man's greed and mismanagement of a natural resource, which at one time was perceived as "abundant, limitless and undiminishing."

It all started in 1866 when Hapgood, Hume & Co. built the first cannery on the lower Columbia River at Eagle Cliff, Washington. This was the ignition that later fueled a mass attack on the Chinook salmon. The mass hysteria that followed can be compared to the gold rush on the Yukon; they came from far and wide to reap the massive harvest. From a humble beginning, when Hapgood & Hume employed two gillnet fishermen to produce their first pack of 4,000 cases, it mushroomed rapidly into an epidemic that ran rapt-shot and uncontrolled. When finally a cure was diagnosed it was nearly too late.

In just twenty years, after the simple beginning, there were forty canneries on the lower Columbia, and 2,000 gillnet fishermen. There were few laws or regulations to control this mad exploitation. Waste was unbelievable. Only Chinook were taken. Other species — Silvers, Bluebacks, etc. — were discarded. The canneries, with their pre-efficient machinery, could not handle the large amounts of fish landed. When over supplied they merely threw the excess overboard.

By 1895 the river contained: 2,200 gillnets, 378 traps, 84 seines, 57 fishwheels, ? Indian dipnets. All these nets, if tied end to end, would stretch over 700 miles in length. That made a formidable obstacle for the salmon.

All commercial fishing is done between Bonneville Dam, near Portland, and the mouth of the river. Near the mouth, the river is four to five miles wide, then narrows to a mile or two as it passes Cathlamet and makes its way to Portland. Its broadest place, 11 miles, is near Altona, about 17 miles from the river's mouth.

During two peak years, 1883 and 1884, some 85 million pounds of salmon were canned. This produced 1.2 million cases, or 58 million individual one pound cans. That represents a lot of salmon — one can for every man, woman and child in the USA at that time.

Although some laws were enacted in 1877, enforcement was not strict. About 1900, when decline of the runs caused concern, stricter laws were enforced.

To cite examples of how the runs have decreased, in 1911 — a peak year — 50 million pounds of salmon were landed. In contrast only 5 million pounds were caught in 1960. In a ten year period, 1910-1920, the average was 42 million pounds per year. In the ten year period 1960-1970, the average was only 6 million.

As if the salmon didn't have enough fishing gear to evade, in 1933 the first dam was built on the Columbia — another obstacle to their spawning grounds. This was followed by fifty major dams, plus over 300 irrigation dams on the Columbia and its tributaries. The odds against the magnificent Chinook were overwhelming. Before the dams, some Chinook climbed the 2400 feet of vertical rise from the Pacific to the headwaters in Canada — 1200 miles upstream.

The river also contained great runs of Silvers (Coho) and Bluebacks (Sockeye), along with an abundance of Steelhead, Sturgeon, Smelt, Shad and Carp.

When salmon entered the Columbia from the Pacific, their greatest challenge was ahead of their instinctive snouts. In the river were thousands of barriers in the form of gillnets, traps, seines, wheels and scoops. By the 1930s all gear, other than gillnets, was outlawed from the river, leaving only the gillnet fishermen to harvest the runs.

Today, the river is tightly regulated to only a few days of fishing per year. Hopefully, with proper management, efficient fish ladders and clean streams we can keep the wild Chinook part of the great Northwest.

Ray Fadich is author of *Last of the Rivermen*, from which this is reprinted. He worked through high school on Columbia River gillnet boats and spent 12 years fishing on various purse-seine boats. He has spent the past 20 years in home construction in Washington State and Hawaii.



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