

THE TRUTH ABOUT SALMON

By Carl D. Shoemaker, Master Fish Warden

The only trouble with the Columbia river salmon industry is leaguettis. The formation of leagues by certain groups for selfish purposes threatens the future of Oregon's third greatest source of wealth. Citizens of this commonwealth now are witnessing the formation of several leagues with diametrically opposed ends. One of these leagues proposes to abolish all commercial fishing above the point where the Sandy river enters the Columbia, do away with the use of seines, wheels and traps, fix the price to be paid for fish by creating a monopoly for the gill net fisherman and prohibiting fishing in the daytime.

A second league proposes to fix a deadline across the Columbia near Sand Island at the mouth of river below which no fishing by any means will be permitted, to regulate the size of the mesh of the nets used in the taking of salmon, to prohibit night fishing on the same theory that what is good for sport or hook and line fishing for game fish ought to be good for salmon, to abolish the use of diver, trammel and other similar nets and to strengthen the alien law so that no one but American citizens can occupy a boat used in fishing.

Still a third league composed of all classes of fishermen are not so much concerned with the purposes of the leagues already mentioned but do want to put all up-river fishermen out of business by drawing a deadline across the river somewhere in the vicinity of Vancouver.

And there is still another league composed of up-river fishermen whose sole purpose in forming is to see that they are not put out of business by the lower river fishermen.

None of these leagues seem to grasp the fundamental idea that it is the salmon and not the fishermen or any particular gear that needs protection. It is the salmon that we want to conserve for the future and not the gill net, the trap, the seine or the fish wheel.

These leagues already formed and those in process of formation are each and all actuated by some selfish motive to give greater gains to themselves or to see that no advantage is taken from them. It is here that the fish commission steps in and plays its hard part. The commission must stand between the future of the industry and the selfish greed of fishermen and packers. It has no particular group, no favorite gear to protect. Its sole excuse for being is to conserve the salmon supply so that it shall always remain one of Oregon's greatest industries. The commercial fisheries of Oregon bring into the state annually many millions of dollars. This is new wealth coming here from other states and a portion of it becomes taxable property. The fisherman receives for his raw fish about sixty per cent of the total value of the product.

These leagues have sent much propaganda over the state and to gain the support of the farmer, the sportsman and other groups have made a special appeal to these classes of our citizenship. To the farmer these propagandists say if you will but support our program you will have so many fish in the streams that you will be able again to utilize salmon as fertilizer, as in the good old days of old. To the sportsman they say that just as soon as the league's program is put into action the streams of the state will again be restocked with salmon and all the commercial hatcheries will be turned over to the propagation of game fish so that the sportsman will always be able to get a bag full of trout when he goes to his favorite hole.

To the laborer they promise that just as soon as the wheels,

seines and traps are eliminated there will be more fishermen earning a living by the use of gill nets. And so it goes. There is no end to the specious argument which has been used to obtain support for the selfish ends of the different leagues.

The salmon subserves but two purposes. One is reproduction and the other is food. When a sufficient number of salmon have escaped to the spawning grounds or the racks in front of the hatcheries so that both natural and artificial propagation are taken care of all other salmon that enter the river might just as well be taken by man for food. With this basic fact in mind let us analyze the situation and ascertain without resort to prejudice or promise what is really best for the salmon. What might be best for the gill netter, or the packer or the wheel trap operators probably is no good for the salmon because the personal element enters into man's consideration of his own desires.

Salmon fishing for food purposes has been conducted on the Columbia since 1866. Wheels, traps and seines as well as other classes of gear have been operated since the beginning. In the early days there were very few laws for the protection of the salmon but later it became apparent that if Oregon were to continue as a salmon producing state protective measures must be enacted to safeguard the future. Open and closed seasons were provided, hatcheries were started and operated, limitations on the operation of gear were made and in other ways a serious effort was made to save the salmon industry to the future. But with the development of the state civilization made such inroads into the natural propagation of salmon that even the artificial methods then employed could not restore the runs of the fish.

The pack kept going down and down and the fishermen and packers became frightened. They saw the end of the industry and many made preparations to get out of the business entirely. About 1905 the fish commission began a series of experiments in artificial propagation. These experiments consisted in holding the artificially hatched salmon in feeding or rearing ponds for six or eight months before liberation into the parent stream. No great numbers were thus held in the early years of the experiment but in 1910 when the outlook was extremely dark the commission held a large number of spring chinook in these feeding ponds and then waited results which might be expected in the year 1914. Many of those engaged in the industry were skeptical but the commission and several packers and a few fishermen had faith that the experiment would be productive of good. 1911, '12 and '13 came with decreasing packs and when the spring of 1914 came hundreds of fishermen refused to go out because they thought that it was no use. But when those who did go out returned on May first with boats loaded with salmon, skepticism changed to joy and there was a mad rush for gear for the following day. The pack rose from 266,479 cases in 1913 to 454,621 cases in 1914. This might have been an unusual year had it not been predicted by the commission and had not the following years given added proof of the value of this method of feeding and holding salmon. The figures for the succeeding years are 1915, 558,534 cases; 1916, 547,805 cases; 1917, 555,218 cases; 1918, 591,381 cases; 1919, 580,028 cases; 1920, 481,545 cases; 1921, 323,241 cases, and in 1922 the pack is estimated to be around 320,000 cases.

It will be noticed that in 1920 the pack took a drop and that 1921 and 1922 show still a greater drop. This was also predicted

by the commission and was due to the extensive fishing by means of purse seines and trolls in the ocean. A fleet of Puget Sound purse seiners and a larger fleet of Oregon and Washington trollers began extensive operations in the year 1918. These operators took the fish on the feeding and maturing grounds in the ocean. Immature, young fish were taken along with the older and matured fish. The supply of young fish which would not mature for a year or two was thus cut off and the catch in the succeeding years must of necessity be less. The salmon is a fish which is hatched in fresh water, makes its way to the ocean in its first year, feeds in the salt water for from three to four years and then seeks its parent stream for the purpose of spawning or reproducing itself and then dies. The supply of young fish then was threatened by the inroads of the outside or ocean fishing. At the legislature in 1919 the fish commission sounded the warning but it was not till 1921 that a law prohibiting this outside fishing was enacted and then only in a compromise form. The law which was passed gave the purse seiners the right to fish during the season of 1921 and the trollers were permitted to operate in 1921 and 1922. The fish commission makes another prediction that it will not be before 1925 and probably not before 1926 that the salmon pack will again pass the 500,000 case mark even with the successful operation of the hatcheries and the output of from fifteen to twenty-five million salmon fry annually. In passing from this topic it might be added that there is another league which has for its purpose the repeal of the antitrolling bill and the enactment of another bill which will give them the right to continue their invasion of the feeding and maturing grounds of the salmon in the ocean. The greed group is again at work. Urged on by the swivel chair fish culturist and league officials the troller looks forward with hungry eyes to the next session of the legislature when he can have enacted this law for his special benefit to the detriment of the industry.

The fish commission has confined its hatchery operations for the most part to the spring chinook salmon. The closed season from March first to May first each year permits a large enough escapement of this splendid fish to take care of the needs of propagation, both natural and artificial. The state maintains a hatchery far up on the Salmon river in Idaho where it takes the early spring eggs and hatches them. The fish which go to spawn in the Snake and its tributaries and the upper reaches of the Columbia have passed all the gear including the wheels in the river below The Dalles long before the season opens. A wise and provident legislature in years gone by passed this closed season law and with good results. Many millions of eggs have been taken in the Idaho country in the past few years. But the main source of supply for spring eggs is now and always will be the Willamette river and its tributaries, known as the Santiam, McKenzie and Middle Fork. The reason for this is basic in the fish itself. At the time the early spring run of salmon is on the Willamette is high and the Columbia is relatively low. The waters of the Willamette rush out in the Columbia and the spring salmon headed up the Columbia comes in contact with this current of snow water and heads into it. Its only obstruction in its migration up the Willamette is the falls at Oregon City. This has been overcome by the construction of a fish ladder which permits an easy migration to the upper waters.

The fish commission has hatched other varieties of salmon, including the blueback, the sockeye, the silverside and a few fall salmon. But the total of these varieties is small compared with the millions of spring eggs which have annually been taken, hatched and liberated into the Columbia and its tributaries.

The blueback has lost its identity in the Columbia, not because of the inability to pass the fish wheels, traps and other devices in the river, but because its native spawning waters, Wallowa Lake, have been taken away by the advance of civilization. The irrigationists in Wallowa county rightly needed all of the waters of that wonderfully scenic lake and they built an impounding dam seventy feet high with which to back up the water and thus save it for their crops. As there is a fluctuating height to the water behind this dam no fishladder could be built and gradually the blueback lost out. To overcome this condition the commission has constructed an artificial lake near the city of Enterprise in Wallowa county. This was completed late in 1921 and at the present time there are more than five million Alaska sockeyes being hatched and fed in this lake. The Alaska sockeye more nearly resembles the old Columbia river blueback than any other of the salmon family and for that reason the eggs are brought from far-away Alaska to restock the Columbia with this excellent fish. Had it not been for the pack of the blueback and sockeye this past season the pack would have been about 60,000 cases short of what it was. This

run was likewise anticipated and predicted for this season by the commission.

It is contended by one league that just as soon as the Columbia is restocked with salmon by means of the legislation it proposes, the salmon hatcheries will be turned over to the sportsmen for the purpose of raising trout. What a preposterous proposition, how childish in reasoning. The trout spawns naturally the same as salmon except that the trout is a perennial spawner while the salmon is only a one time spawner. If it takes artificial hatchery methods to keep the trout in the streams why will it not also require the same methods to keep the salmon running year after year. There is no relief from the necessity of artificially hatching both salmon and trout. No specious argument will ever do away with this need.

From the viewpoint of the commission there is no occasion for alarm over the future of the salmon industry under present regulations, restrictions and gear. The greatest danger which threatens the industry is not from without but from within its own ranks. That danger is the selfish greed of particular groups seeking advantage over other groups. From time to time slight modifications in the existing laws should be made to take care of changing conditions. On the whole the laws as they exist now for the protection of salmon are ample and the future of the industry is hopeful through their administration. But if the people lose sight of the main

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