

STEELHEAD ANGLING NOT AFFECTED BY CANNERY-MACLEAY

Commercial Fishing Operation Detailed by Cannermen—Offers to Pay Expenses of Investigators and Forfeit \$1000 If They Find He is Violating Law and Taking Trout.

The following letter from R. L. Macleay, president of the Macleay Estate Co., owners of one of the salmon canneries at Wedderburn, at the mouth of Rogue river, states the canneryman's point of view regarding fishing in Rogue river. He denies that commercial fishing as conducted at present interferes in any way with steelhead angling. Mr. Macleay has offered to pay the expenses at Wedderburn of investigators sent by the State League of Sportsmen's Clubs and to forfeit \$1000 if it can be established that he is violating the law or taking steelheads. The letter follows:

To the Editor:

Inasmuch as there is a belief among some of the residents of the Rogue River valley that the commercial fishing at the mouth of the river was the cause of the unsatisfactory fly fishing for steelhead trout in the Rogue river during the past season, I am writing this letter hoping you will publish it in your paper, so that those interested may become conversant with the facts in the case and not continue to be misled, as may have been, by statements emanating from untrustworthy or uninformed sources, or from sources interested in causing trouble between the Jackson county people and the commercial fishing interests at the river's mouth. I have spent three fishing seasons at the mouth of the river, and I have carefully observed the run and habits of fish of all kinds, including chinook, steelheads and silversides, and from the experience gained by this observation I can state confidently that the commercial fishing is in no way connected with the absence from or the presence in the river of steelhead trout.

Winter Steel Heads

I wish to state first of all that the steelheads which formerly were commercially taken were caught in January, February and March, and are known as winter steelheads. They were taken in very considerable quantities. For instance, in 1907, 39,163 steelheads were caught in nets, and in 1908, 17,374 steelheads were taken. These fish were frozen in the cold-storage plant and shipped in carloads to the east and to foreign points, as they cannot be canned.

On the other hand, the steelheads that run in the Rogue river in the spring and summer, and which are the fish which furnish the sport for the fly fishermen in the upper river, seem to be of a different variety, for the following reasons: When the winter steelheads enter the Rogue river about the first of the year they do not ascend the river to its source, but enter the first tributaries of the river in large quantities, turning into Indian creek, Saunders creek, Jim Hunt creek, Lobster creek, Cosatone creek, Silver creek and the Illinois river. These creeks constitute the main tributaries of the Rogue river between the Illinois river and the ocean.

Difference in Variety

I think it will be noticed that very few of the winter steelheads ascend the river as far as Medford, although undoubtedly some few fish get up that far. It is on this account that the steelhead fishing in winter is not good on the upper Rogue river, and I understand that fishing is not indulged in to any extent during the winter time. Furthermore, the winter steelhead is a larger fish than the summer steelhead, averaging in weight over eight pounds, whereas the summer steelhead averages from four to five pounds.

The summer steelhead when it enters the river in the spring and summer does not turn into any of the tributaries of the lower river, except in individual cases, which is proved by the fact of their absence in the tributaries of the lower river, the reason being that the summer steelhead ascends the river towards its source without turning into the tributaries of the river. It is evident therefore that the habits of the winter steelhead differ from the habits of the summer steelhead in that the former is a much larger fish, has different habits and enters the river at an entirely different season of the year.

Summer Fish Never Used

I mention this matter in order to make it clear that whereas the canning interests at the mouth of the river formerly caught many steelheads, they were not after the summer steelheads at all, and at this

writing it can be stated truthfully that the summer steelheads in the Rogue river have but a small commercial value. In addition it is prohibited by law to take or catch or have in one's possession any steelhead trout of any description, the only exception to this is the steelheads that are caught with rod and line, commonly called angling. This law has been in effect for more than three years, during which period the commercial interests at the river's mouth have operated canneries and packing plants for the packing of chinook and steelhead salmon.

Wardens have always been stationed on the river to enforce the laws and in addition the local authorities have had authority to enforce the law. Nevertheless there have been no arrests or prosecutions of any canneries for breaking the law in regard to the illegal taking of steelheads. This ought to convince any fair-minded man that no such infractions of the law have taken place. It should be considered also that there is no motive for a cannery to break the steelhead law on account of the fact that steelheads cannot be sold or shipped, and in addition, the price of summer steelheads in the market can hardly justify the expense of taking them. It is a fact, easily susceptible of proof, that the steelheads are not taken commercially by the canneries; that is to say, neither the summer steelheads nor the winter steelheads, and any statement to the contrary is false, either intentionally or the result of ignorance, misinformation or malice.

Operation of Nets

Statements have been made that on account of the number of drift nets and set nets in the waters of the Rogue river during the fishing season, the ascending summer steelhead is hindered or barred in its journey to the upper river. This statement is not in accordance with the facts.

It should be borne in mind that during the spring and summer season the nets that are used for fishing in the Rogue river are of a mesh of 8 1/2 inches or more (as a matter of fact, we use an 8 3/4-inch and 9-inch mesh) and are designed to catch chinook and salmon only, which last year were of an average weight of 20 1/2 pounds each. A net designed to catch fish weighing 20 pounds on the average cannot catch fish which weigh on the average only one-fourth of that amount. It is impossible to catch steelhead trout in one of these nets, for the reason that the steelheads can swim through the meshes without being gilled, and it follows, therefore, that the number of nets in the river has nothing to do with the hindrance to the steelhead.

A statement has been circulated to the effect that set nets have been overlapped to such an extent that the river has been blocked by the nets and that the steelheads could not pass these obstructions. This statement is not in accordance with facts, and I would be glad to explain this matter at length to any interested parties.

Size of Nets Used

It is not until the 10th of September that nets with mesh smaller than 8 1/2 inches are used in the Rogue river, at which time 6-inch mesh nets are used for the taking of silverside salmon. At that season of the year, namely, the last part of September and the first part of October, there are no steelheads in the lower Rogue river. If there were steelheads in the river at that period some of them might be caught by the smaller mesh nets, provided they were of the winter variety of steelheads, but I very much doubt if the summer steelhead could be caught with the 6-inch net, except in the case of large individual fish.

I have gone into this matter at

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some length in order to show that the number of drift nets or set nets in the river, or the distance between set nets, has nothing to do with the summer steelhead.

I now come to the matter of seining. It has been stated that the seines in the river destroy a large quantity of summer steelheads. This statement is no true. It may be recalled that at about the same time it was stated that a woven wire fence had been placed across the Rogue river in order to stop the salmon and steelheads from ascending the river.

Wire Fence Canard

The master fish warden of the state descended the river from Grants Pass to the ocean in a rowboat, looking for this fence. There was, of course, no fence to find, nor ever had been, and there is just about as much truth in the story that the seines destroy a large number of steelheads as there is in the story of the wire fence. Unfortunately there are people who have an interest in circulating these false reports, and I appeal to the fair-minded people of Jackson county that although such stories will continue to be circulated to defer judgment on the matter until both sides have been heard.

It is manifestly unfair to condemn the actions of the commercial fishing interests on hearsay, and in this connection it is well to remember that a committee has been appointed by the Oregon Sportsmen's League to investigate the conditions of steelhead fishing at the mouth of the river. It is my understanding that this committee will go down to the mouth of the river and make a thorough investigation, and no credence should be placed in rumors calculated to injure the commercial fishing interests until this committee has made its investigation and rendered a report.

Seeks Investigation

The committee referred to, as I understand it, has been intrusted to go down to the Rogue river during the fishing season and observe for themselves what goes on. I only regret that this action had not been taken in previous years, for I know very well that the investigation will show that the seining operations do not destroy the fish in large quantities.

It is possible that during the seining season one or two hundred steelheads may be killed by the operation of the seines, because in the taking of thousands of large chinook salmon it occasionally happens that some steelheads are taken with them in the seine, and in the struggles of the large fish a few of the steelheads may be killed. This is unavoidable, and is a matter that does not affect the main question, because the destruction of one or two hundred steelheads can have no bearing, in prac-

tice, on the fly fishing in the upper river.

If we would assume, for the sake of argument, that twenty-five fly fishermen at the mouth of the river annually caught twenty-five summer steelheads each, it would amount to far more than the number of steelheads that are unavoidably killed in the commercial fishing, and I am sure no objection would be made by the Jackson county people to the taking of the steelheads by the fly fishermen at the mouth of the river.

Must Be Give and Take

There must be a little "give and take" between the sportsmen and the commercial fishing interests, and I feel inasmuch as the canneries are barred from taking the winter and summer steelheads, preserving them in their thousands for the fly fishermen, whereas on all other rivers the commercial interests are allowed to take steelheads at will, that the sportsmen should be willing to overlook the fact that a negligible quantity of steelheads are unavoidably killed in the transaction of a large and legitimate business. So far as I know, the Rogue river is the only river in the state of Oregon, or the state of Washington, or in Alaska, where there is commercial fishing, where the steelheads are reserved exclusively for the sportsman, and it seems to me that it is unreasonable to raise a row over the matter of the killing of a few steelheads when it does not affect the main question of the fly fishing.

Coming now to the real reason why the fly fishing in the Rogue river during the past season was very poor, I wish to state that I am firmly convinced that it was on account of the fact that the steelheads did not enter the river in 1915 except in very small quantities. To those who are not acquainted with the habits of fish, it is only just to have them consider that the runs of fish vary every year, not only the run of steelheads, but the run of silversides and chinooks as well. For instance, in 1905 the commercial fishing interests at the mouth of the river took 69,344 chinooks. In 1909 they took only 15,353 chinooks, or less than one-fourth of the amount taken four years previously.

Variation in Runs

This shows that there were not as many chinook in the river in 1909 as in 1905, and the same fact applies to silversides, because in 1910, 20,898 were taken and in 1905 only 855 were caught, and in 1915 only 4129. In 1907 nearly 40,000 steelheads were caught in nets, and in 1905 only 2000.

I give these few figures in order to show that in some years large quantities of fish of different varieties enter the river, and in other

years only a very small number of the different varieties of fish enter the river. In 1915 it was evident that there was a very small quantity of summer steelheads in the river, and I can confidently state that if there had been no commercial fishing at the mouth of the river, the fly fishing would have been poor for the simple reason that there were very few steelheads in the river in 1915. Also the Rogue river had less water in it than in any other year in the memory of people living at the mouth of the river, and on account of the water being very warm and the river being extremely low, it is possible that the few summer steelheads that did enter the river did not ascend in any great numbers beyond the long reaches of deep pools which are in the river between Agness and Mule creek.

In order to present the entire situation with clearness it would be necessary to write at very great length. There are many points upon which I have not elaborated, but I am willing to answer any questions that any one will address to me in connection with the matter of commercial fishing in the Rogue river.

Support of Curry County

I have understood that there is a movement on foot in Medford and its vicinity to try to close the Rogue river to commercial fishing by initiative law. I maintain with entire sincerity that the operations of the commercial interests are not the cause of the poor fly fishing, and I feel that a very thorough investigation should be made before any action should be taken looking toward the closing of the river.

There are malicious persons in every community, but the actions of such persons should not influence the community to perform an unjust act, particularly when it is evident that they have been misinformed as to the facts in the case.

The fishing industry is the main source of support and revenue in central Curry county, and the closing of the river would be a disaster to the community and would mean the confiscation of a large sum of invested capital without any compensating advantages to the sportsmen of the upper river.

I am, yours truly,
RODERICK L. MACLEAY,
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