

Willamette River Disputes Over Fish Ladders Draws Articles

Lakeview, Ore., Examiner - May 23, 1940

(by William L. Finley, So. D.)

The State Fish and State Game Commissions of Oregon have claimed that the suggested high dams, which the Army Engineers say cannot be equipped with fish ladders, will be destructive to our valuable fish resources. Certain promoters of these dams claim they will not destroy, but benefit fish life, especially trout and salmon. Referring again to leading promoters of the Willamette Valley Project, in the Portland Journal of December 20, 1939, was a letter entitled, "Plan no Peril to Fish," signed by Mr. Douglas McKay, chairman of the Willamette Valley Project committee and Mr. O. D. Eby, chairman of the Willamette River Basin Commission. Among other things was the following statement.

"Outside of perhaps 100, many of whom reside in Portland, we find those interested in fishing and fish life are not only satisfied with the project as planned, but believe it will increase sport fishing and not decrease commercial fishing."

Such a statement mininforms the public. Many commercial fishermen in Astoria and other parts of the state, sportsmen's organizations, as well as state officials and employes, have publicly expressed their opinion that if the upper Willamette is blocked with dams, it will greatly decrease our trout and salmon runs.

We know, or should know, that the spring Chinook salmon runs of the Columbia river represent the most valuable fish resources in America and perhaps the world. As a food supply, they form the basis of an industry supporting thousands of families. Although the records show that the spring Chinook runs have been gradually decreasing on the upper Columbia, its tributary, the Willamette is the best remaining spawning area.

What will be the effect of the proposed dams on these valuable migratory fish runs? It is known that certain species of trout and the Pacific salmon runs develop in the ocean, enter fresh water and work their way to natural spawning beds at the headwaters of rivers. The next necessary step is the safe return of the fingerlings from these up-river spawning grounds to the sea, in order that the life cycle may be completed.

The United States Bureau of Fisheries states that our spring Chinook salmon runs have been gradually falling off during the past forty years. This is due to the fact that not only have the fish been depleted by commercial over-fishing and by the destruction of oxygen in the water through pollution, but they have also been blocked from their natural spawning beds by many man-made dams. Another contributing factor is that when rivers are dammed and changed to lake formation, the temperature of the water is raised and food conditions for the fingerlings are changed. Then again, untold millions of little fish seeking food and protection have found their way into irrigation disches and have died in the fields. Others are destroyed by bass and other predatory fish that thrive in the more sluggish waters of man-made lakes. Some are even drawn into the turbines

of power plants.

"But," say the dam promoters, "we will establish more artificial hatcheries on the upper Willamette and this will not only conserve, but increase the fish runs in spite of the dams." Continued publicity of the propaganda type has led many people to believe that artificial propagation is the real basis of fish conservation, but as yet scientists have not been able to establish what proportion of Chinook salmon that are now spawned artificially actually grow to maturity.

From a biological standpoint, any expert scientist knows that there is a definite difference in the survival of fingerlings that develop in a natural state in the head waters of streams as opposed to those that are reared in hatcheries. While it is often true that where salmon are spawned artificially, a larger number of eggs and fish fry are saved than when the salmon deposit their eggs in the sand and gravel of their native streams, the fact remains that when the fingerlings are furnished abundant food in hatchery ponds, they develop into a dependent state where they do not have to hunt for themselves or guard against enemies. After several months of such development, they are released in an open river only to find no such food as they have been accustomed to. They are like wild animals raised in a circus or zoo, which would be quite unable to fend for themselves if released in the wilderness from which their ancestors come. It is believed that very few of these tame salmon fingerlings escape the army of their enemy.

Moreover, artificial spawning, as proposed by the promoters of the Willamette dams to compensate for the destruction of natural spawning grounds, has unquestionably failed in other places where the same theory has already been tried out. The Baird Hatchery on the head waters of the Sacramento river in California was established years ago by the United States Bureau of Fisheries. For some time this hatchery handled about 20,000,000 salmon eggs each season, but nevertheless it has been abandoned simply because, in spite of its efforts, the salmon have disappeared. The same thing occurred where Chinook salmon were artificially propagated in the Salmon river in Idaho and that hatchery was also abandoned. Again, years ago when the Clackamas built a hatchery a few miles up in the hope of maintaining the Chinook runs. They stopped all the salmon at River Mill Dam and they were spawned artificially. Instead of increasing or holding their own, the numbers of fish returning to the river steadily dropped. Where 2,428,000 eggs were taken in 1931, the supply had dropped in 1938 to 300,000. Finally the salmon were permitted to ascend a fish ladder at River Mill and a new fish ladder recently constructed at Cazadero, because the only hope seemed to lie in allowing them to spawn naturally.

Regardless of all these facts, the Willamette River Basin Commission has informed the public that an extra million will be

spent on hatcheries and will not only save the fisheries from the destructive effects of their proposed dams, but will actually improve both commercial and sport fishing.

In order to conserve the fish resources of Oregon, certain state laws that dams that will block our migratory fish runs cannot be constructed unless authorized by the State Fish and Game commissions. Disregarding these laws, the promoters of the Willamette Valley Project are doing everything possible to have more money allotted by congress to build high dams that are not equipped with fishways and which do not have the consent of State Fish and Game officials.

Journal - May 24, 1940 Quoting Fish Experts

As Against Testimony Printed Recently in The Journal in a Letter from Stayton Parties Who Indorsed the Willamette Valley Project.

JENNINGS LODGE, May 19.—To the Editor of The Journal—In The Journal of May 7 was a letter headlined "Valley Project Favored," by V. R. Ince, president of the Stayton Lions club, and L. H. Wright, president of the Chamber of Commerce, announcing the passing of a resolution indorsing the Willamette Basin project.

The fish and game commissions claim that the suggested high dams on the McKenzie, Santiam's north and south forks, and the upper Willamette, which army engineers say cannot be equipped with fish ladders, will be destructive of valuable fish resources. Yet Messrs. Ince and Wright state, "Our ardent fishermen are convinced that the dam (North Santiam) will not affect the sportsmen's paradise."

Perhaps their reason is that certain promoters of these high dams claim that hatcheries will be built, which will not only conserve but increase fish runs in spite of dams. Along with such statements from dam promoters and sportsmen should be considered opinions of scientists, expert on fish life. There is a definite difference in survival of fingerlings developed in the natural state at headwaters, in comparison with those reared in hatcheries. Often, where salmon are spawned artificially, more eggs and fish fry are saved than when the salmon deposit in sand and gravel of native streams. Fingerlings abundantly fed in hatchery ponds develop into a dependent state where they need not hunt food or fear enemies. When released in an open river they find none of their accustomed food. Very few tame salmon fingerlings escape their enemies.

Artificial spawning, as proposed by Willamette dam promoters to compensate for destruction of natural spawning beds, has failed in places where the same theory has been tried out. The Baird hatchery, on the Sacramento, established years ago by the bureau of fisheries, has handled about 20,000,000 salmon eggs each season, but has been abandoned because salmon have disappeared; the same, where Chinooks were artificially propagated in Salmon river, in Idaho. Years ago the Clackamas was blocked with dams. The bureau of fisheries built a hatchery, hoping to maintain Chinook runs. All salmon were stopped at River Mill dam, for artificial spawning. The numbers of fish returning to the river steadily dropped. From 2,428,000 eggs taken in 1931, there was a drop in 1938 to 300,000. They were permitted to ascend a fish ladder at River Mill, and a new ladder at Cazadero, as the only hope seemed to lie in natural spawning.

William L. Finley.