

A LITTLE HISTORY

In considering the proposal to remove or bypass the dams on the lower Snake River I wonder if a little review of history might be more pertinent.

Eighty years ago I was born within a mile of the lower Columbia River and my wife, Irene, was born on a farm near the little farming town of Richland. Most of lives we have lived within the Columbia River watershed.

When I was a boy living near a favorite fishing drift on the lower river I frequently heard the fishermen complaining about **NO FISH**. There were also no dams on the Columbia and very few on the tributaries. The simple reason for this lack of fish was **OVERFISHING**. There had been many canneries along the river but by the time I was a boy there were buildings falling down and rotten pilings which marked closed canneries. Some of the lower river communities disappeared along with the canneries. All this before any dams were started on the river. The single factor which caused this decline was overfishing. The fish traps had been outlawed and purse seines were voted out of the river. Then the fish came back to a degree but primarily because hatcheries were located on tributaries.

I grew up in a little fishing and logging community where many of the loggers tried to farm small places. They had no power driven equipment either on their farms or in the woods where they worked. We did have electricity for lights but even the store didn't have any refrigeration or other conveniences. Residents of Portland and Seattle had refrigeration if they had money enough to buy ice when the ice man came by.

Irene grew up on a poultry farm at the end of the irrigation ditch Northwest of Richland. They had no electricity. The irrigation was ditch irrigation which meant constant checking to see if the water was going where it should. This was wasteful by today's standards but the only way it could be put on the ground. Their place was typical of those in Eastern Washington at the time.

With the coming of the dams there was a lot of discussion about how they would be and work included ways for fish to migrate. Until after World War II little change was discussed. With the post war period the fish started to decline but much of the decline was due to increased ocean fishing. Now all over the world the ocean fish population is declining. It would appear that much of the damage is occurring in the ocean. It is time to regulate and reduce the take to sufficient level to get a reasonable return of fish to the spawning areas. Perhaps a no fishing area all along the coast would help this.

Also rules as to some of the wild animals have changed. With the efforts to restore sea lions and seals it would appear the program has been too successful. When I was a boy we very seldom heard of sea lions in the Columbia River. Now they are reported clear up to Bonneville Dam. A picture several years ago in the Longview News showed about 250 sea lions at the mouth of the Cowlitz river. They were there because there was food.

A number of years ago I stayed at Gearhart, Oregon and walked on the beach. One tide there were several hundred dead salmon, each with one bite taken out. The sea lions had been very busy.

We have also heard about the terns taking young fish from Rice Island on the lower river. These kinds of taking fish should be studied more and ways to regulate them found.

We hear that the young fish are getting into the ocean but are not coming back. Rather than taking out the dams lets find ways to cure the ocean problem. At the same time we need to continue working on the problems of movement with in the Columbia and Snake Rivers to accomplish a better return.

Growing up in the Northwest during the depression and seeing how people lived then, I feel

that we need to develop the rivers to provide the best overall use. When I was born there were a million people living (existing) in Washington. Now we have five and a half million living here and we are all living a kind of life not imagined by those living here before the dams were built. Also when we travel we find people eating the produce resulting from the better use of the land and water in our area. I don't care to return to the earlier form of living.

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