

to barter, which might have produced a temptation to waste their animals. By these regulations their game was preserved undiminished, the consumption being no greater than the natural increase. This law continued in force until the Chukkatank or white people came to this island.

Among the still more northern hunting Algonkians what amounts almost to game farming appears, evidenced in the accounts of Speck, Davidson, Hallowell and Cooper among the various bands. The native owner of a family hunting tract explains:

"The beaver is the Indian's pork; the moose, his beef; the partridge, his chickens; the caribou or red deer, his mutton. All these formed the stock of his hunting ground, which would be parcelled out among his sons when the owner died. He would say to each of his sons: 'You take this part; take care of this tract; see that it always produces enough.'"

Beaver was made the object of the most careful "farming"; the numbers of occupants, old and young, to each "cabin" of the animals was kept account of; breeders were not killed; each year only young or very old animals were slain.

In certain districts moose or caribou would be protected during one year; in other districts during the next year. Some proprietary families went so far as to divide their own territories up into quarters around a center, "hunting in a different quarter each year and leaving the tract in the center as a reserve to be hunted over only in case of shortage from the exploited tract."

A conservation practice which might conceivably have led on to the development of agriculture was observed by E. S. Curtis among the Kwakwilt of northern Vancouver Island. Among them, clover beds, like other lands, are held within families, and were particularly valuable because clover roots were a high-priced luxury, being considered indispensable to good health. "For this reason the land is well cared for. The main root stocks are never taken, and such pieces as are not deemed good for food are put back into the ground."

Back in their own country over a century and a half earlier the Iroquois, however, were conservationists, as evidenced by their statement of the cause of the war between them and the Eries. La Hontan writes that the Iroquois made war on and exterminated the Eries because they had trespassed on Iroquois territory and "had acted contrary to the customs of all Indians, for they had left none of the beavers alive; they killed both males and females." The Eries were exterminated in the 1630's, a time when the fur trade was just having its effect in this area.

The fact is that the natives of the northwestern woodlands had sometimes to struggle against the breakdown of their conservation system from some fur-trading influences. About 1811 "free hunters," including a band of Iroquois detached by the fur trade, entered the northwest country and killed the beaver recklessly. As a result they incurred the hatred of the Piegans, Cree and other natives of the region because of the diminution of the numbers of beaver.

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J. Dunn, in 1842, in his "History of Oregon," would seem to imply that the northern woodlands Indians were taught conservation by the fur companies; but D. W. Harmon was in the same western country many years before Dunn. He was the first white man among the Carrier Indians of the western plateau, and found conservation there among them, quite without the possibility of fur company influence. Incidentally, he also found private or family ownership of hunting lands, another thing general among the hunting peoples of North America which some skeptics have thought might be a result of white influence.

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Fishermen Plan Protest Against Building of Dams

The Dalles, Or., Dec. 12.—Sport as well as commercial fishermen will be represented at the hearing here Tuesday before army engineers, when the advisability of complete development of the Columbia river by means of a series of dams between here and Lewiston is argued.

William L. Finley, Oregon wild life authority, will attend as leader of a sport fishermen's group that will include a number of prominent sportsmen. They plan protests against further dam construction in the Columbia river as threatening the extinction of future salmon runs.

In addition some 200 commercial fishermen will attend the hearing from Astoria, contending that fishways such as those now provided in the Bonneville dam would prove inadequate for free passage of salmon up the river to natural spawning grounds.

By way of rebuttal the various communities of the Inland Empire, now united on behalf of a complete river development program without regard to individual projects, are planning to attend the hearing armed with data supporting economic justification for the huge project, which might embrace as many as 10 low dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. The contention will be advanced that scientifically constructed fishways over or around these low dams will offer no obstacle to passage of salmon, and that artificial propagation such as the government is undertaking at the base of the Grand Coulee dam will assist in preserving the annual runs.

Colonel Thomas N. Robins, division army engineer of Portland, will preside over the hearing, which will be held in circuit court.

Salmon, Seals and Skullduggery

Activities of Commissioner of Fisheries Open to Question

BY WILLIAM L. FINLEY

Condensed from "Nature Magazine" for November

One of the agencies of the Federal Government entrusted with vital natural resources is the Bureau of Fisheries, of the Department of Commerce. It is now headed by Frank T. Bell, real estate operator and political appointee, whose knowledge of the past and present fisheries situation is sketchy at best.

Evidence of this is to be found in the strange manner in which Mr. Bell has handled certain specific items under his administration. We refer to the amazing story of the Bristol Bay salmon and to the equally peculiar matter of the sale of fur seal skins.

The salmon fisheries of Alaska were headed down grade years ago from over-exploitation and a lack of constructive legislation. During the Coolidge administration these fishing waters were set aside as a Federal reservation to permit the Bureau of Fisheries to make careful surveys. The Secretary of Commerce was given authority to limit fishing in any region by fixing the size and character of nets and other gear, by restricting the catch, and by establishing other rules needed to build up the fish resources.

The conditions at the time justified this method of restoring a dwindling resource. However, these are autocratic powers, and their proper exercise depends on the integrity of the dictator. The annual Alaskan salmon pack of more than 5,000,000 cases, put up by more than seventy companies, is valued at about \$30,000,000. This industry is under the thumb of a Federal officer who can close up traps on a day's notice, rule out nets or seines, or close a fishing season here or open it there.

After the close of the 1930 fishing season in Bristol Bay, former Commissioner Henry O'Malley met with the various packing interests. As a result a gentleman's agreement was reached not to operate in 1935.

During the summer of 1934, while in Alaska, Mr. Bell said he approved of a closed season in Bristol Bay for 1935. Later, at a meeting of the salmon packers in Washington, D. C., Mr. Bell again made the statement that the season would be closed.

The "Federal Laws and Regulations for Protection of Fisheries in Alaska," issued January 19, 1935, by the Department of Commerce, provided that: "All commercial fishing for salmon is prohibited in the Bristol Bay area from six o'clock antemeridian June 25, to six o'clock antemeridian August 3." This was certainly definite.

But the policy of conserving the red salmon of Bristol Bay was to yield to one of exploitation.

Among the larger companies operating in Bristol Bay waters are Libby, McNeil & Libby, Alaska Packers, and Pacific American Fisheries. Early in the spring of 1935, Libby, McNeil & Libby began loading their Bristol Bay vessels on a full capacity scale just as if the season was to be open. Hiring and taking a full crew north with a supply of cans to put up 150,000 cases of salmon was a big gamble unless this firm knew exactly how the cards were to be dealt.

Although the Alaska Packers and the



The annual Alaskan salmon pack is valued at \$30,000,000.

Pacific American Fisheries are both large corporations with plenty of funds, they apparently could not see any reason for spending several hundred thousand dollars preparing for a fishing season when the various canneries had agreed on a closed period, and the government so ordered.

The Bristol Bay salmon season had been open in previous years from June 25 to July 25. The supply ships of the Libby corporation and their associates arrived at Bristol Bay early in June. Before the end of the month their fishing boats and scows were manned for the usual open season and their nets were ready for a haul.

The bomb was touched off in Washington, D. C., on July 3. A new Federal regulation opened up the Bristol Bay salmon season at six o'clock on July 4.

Section 1 of the Act of Congress of June 6, 1924, protecting the fisheries of Alaska provides: "That every such regulation made by the Secretary of Commerce shall be of general application within the particular area to which it applies, and that no exclusive or several right of fishery shall be granted therein, etc." Technically, last year, there was no violation of this law. The Alaska Packers, Pacific American Fisheries and others had equal rights to net and can salmon. They also had every reason to stand by the Federal law and live up to the closed season. They were unprepared for the sudden change from conservation to exploitation.

How did the Libbys come out? In the *Fisheries Service Bulletin* of March 2, 1936, the 1934 pack of salmon of all species for all of western Alaska is given as 1,859,319 cases of which, according to the *Pacific Fisherman's Yearbook* (1935) the Libby com-

pany packed 347,091, or about nineteen per cent. For 1935, the *Bulletin* credits 276,853 cases to this area. According to the 1936 Yearbook, the Libby company's 1935 pack in this area was 132,875 cases, about forty-eight per cent of the total. If to this official total is added Libby's reported pack in co-operation with a floating cannery, their pack in Bristol Bay amounted to about sixty per cent of the total output.

Yet the victims dare not protest so long as the Commissioner of Fisheries holds the position of dictator. He might retaliate and close their traps on a day's notice, eliminate some of their nets or seines, or close the fishing season in some other section of Alaska where they operate.

The situation demands a thorough investigation where all the facts can be recorded under oath.

Now let us consider the fur seal industry of Alaska. The Bureau of Fisheries for many years has had complete charge of the Pribilof Islands, in Bering Sea, managing the native Aleuts and the entire natural resources of this area. The rehabilitation of the fur seal herds has long been referred to as an example of how the government can profit in conserving these animals with proper supervision and application of scientific principles of breeding.

When Mr. Bell took office, the experts who had successfully administered this work for many years were discharged, with the single exception of the superintendent. The former regime was upset and a new personnel, including Mr. Bell's daughter and son-in-law, as well as others with no experience, was put in charge.

For many years a certain percentage of the seal herd has been taken each year for skins. These were mainly three-year-old males called bachelor seals. The skins were blubbered and salted, then shipped to St. Louis, where they were tanned and dyed, and sold at public auction, by the Fouke Fur Company.

According to contract while the late Henry O'Malley was Commissioner of Fisheries, the Fouke Fur Company received \$12.50 per skin for the first 25,000 of each year, processed and marketed, with the processing cost reduced by \$1.00 per skin for each additional 25,000. When the seal skins were tanned and dyed, the company sorted, stored and advertised them for sale, taking charge of the public auctions at St. Louis. In return for this service the company was given a commission of three and one-fourth per cent on all sales.

When Mr. Bell took office the prices of all furs were low. Mr. O'Malley proposed, early in 1933, a new contract with the Fouke Company. Under this contract the company was to receive \$10.50 each for processing the first 25,000 skins, less a reduction of \$1.00 per skin for each additional 25,000. The government was to pay the same percentage for auctioning and selling and receive all the profits.

Inasmuch as Mr. Bell was to take office, Mr. O'Malley felt that it was fair to hold up this contract for the new Administration to sign. It was then that Mr. Bell insisted on certain changes that are difficult to understand since, under it, the government takes a big loss.

Under this contract, signed by Mr. Bell on April 29, 1933, the Fouke Fur Company guaranteed the government \$1.35 for each skin they processed and sold. Next, for all processed skins then on hand the Fouke Company was to pay the government \$3.35 each when sold.

At the time Mr. Bell made his contract, in 1933, he claimed through the press of the country that he had gained a big advantage for the government, intimating that the previous contract did not protect the people's interests. Let us consider this contract and its results.

During the year 1933, at three auctions, a total of 49,900 processed skins were sold at a total value of \$873,585 and at an average price of \$17.50 per skin. If the Fouke Fur Company was paid \$12.50 each for processing these skins and the government received \$3.35 each, the company took a cash bonus of \$82,335 on the 1933 sales which should have gone to the United States Treasury under a sensible business administration.

On all skins taken after April 30, 1933, and up to January 1, 1936, the Fouke Fur Company in return for a small guarantee to the government of \$1.35 per skin presumably received one-half of the government's profits on the fur sales, plus three and one-fourth per cent of the gross sales for sorting skins and handling auctions.

A few months after the Fouke Company signed this contract of April 29, 1933, with Mr. Bell, the conclusion must have been reached that this guaranteed too large a profit to the company because on December 28, 1933, another written agreement modifying the earlier contract was entered into. This increased the minimum guarantee to the government from \$1.35 per skin to \$2.35. It stated that whereas the company has offered to increase the minimum sum, it is deemed best to the interests of the United States to obtain the aforesaid increases. This clearly proves that the contract of April 29, 1933, was unfair to the United States.

Later figures also indicate that Mr. Bell did not protect the government, but played into the hands of the Fouke Company. On April 27, 1936, 22,373 Pribilof seal skins were sold at an average price of \$26.85. The cost of processing was \$10.50 each. To this \$2.35 was added, which the Fouke Fur Company voluntarily gave the government instead of the contracted price of \$1.35 per skin, making a total of \$12.85. Since the average selling price was \$26.85, this left \$14 profit per skin, \$7 going to the company and \$7 to the government. In other words, the government lost \$156,611 on this auction sale.

Just why this concession to a private company was allowed by Mr. Bell is rather difficult to comprehend. His announcement through the press that for the first time in history the Pribilofs were on a paying basis and had turned a profit into the Treasury due to this new contract, does not agree with the facts. Few people have ever seen this contract or studied its contents. Few know that under the Bell administration the fur seal industry of the United States appears to be a private and not a public business.

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