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ALASKA , THE BEST SALMON REGION

by

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Photographs by the Author

Many people are interested in the conservation of our natural resources. They have felt the fish of this nation are of vital importance, but they are not properly protected and this is our greatest wild-life problem. Salmon are the most important fish runs. It is well known that they were abundant in many of the rivers of the west in the early days, but there has been a great decrease and the cause is well known.

It is said that the most interesting story of the salmon of this world is in Alaska. Years ago the commercial fishermen were destroying the salmon runs of Alaska. Since the government controlled this region, they took charge of the salmon runs and did not allow any commercial fishing until approximately 50% of the fish had escaped up stream to spawn naturally. They are using no hatcheries for artificial propagation of the fish, as with this law they need none. Since that time, salmon runs in Alaska have been increasing. It should be a lesson to the states of this country to protect their fish runs in the same way instead of allowing them to be depleted by political profiteers.

In Alaska the rivers are not blocked with big dams that prevent the salmon from swimming up to their natural spawning beds. They are not polluted like the Willamette which has poisoned our fall runs of fish and are completely exterminated. The Izaak Walton League of America has been working on the woods, waters, and wildlife of this nation. The water is the property of the people and should not be destroyed. The facts show the majority of the members of congress seem to be governed politically by commercial and private interests, and they have not passed a law to prevent the pollution of the rivers of this nation.

In the early days game birds that migrated from state to state were being destroyed as no proper state laws were passed to protect them.

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The final and only chance of saving these migratory birds was the international treaty passed by the United States and Canada. It is fortunate for our people that the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior has regulated the laws to which all of the states have to conform, and as a result these game birds have been properly protected and have greatly increased.

The proof is clear that migratory fish in all parts of this country have been greatly reduced in numbers. The question to discuss is why we do not have proper state, national, and international laws to protect our commercial fish for our own future. While we passed the laws for the protection of migratory birds, it was easier because they were not allowed to be killed and handled commercially. Since many kinds of fish are caught and sold by commercial fishermen, it has been impossible up to date to properly protect these fish because private interests make a vast amount of money on public property. They are able to govern the states and nation politically rather than from a business standpoint.

Let us for a moment consider the migratory fish of the east and along the Atlantic where there has been a much larger population than on the Pacific Coast. Certain salmon runs of the Atlantic were completely destroyed like the passenger pigeon. Others have been greatly reduced. Unfortunately, from a political standpoint there have been no proper state or federal laws or international treaties to protect the migratory fishes either in the eastern states or the Atlantic Ocean.

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The most valuable fish runs in this nation are in the west and the Pacific Ocean is the great home of migratory fishes. The question is why we have not protected our salmon runs as they are a valuable food that is more needed in war than at any other time. The Columbia River has produced more and better salmon than any other river. The spring chinook is the most valuable salmon run in the world. They stay in the ocean and feed about three or four years, and according to the food they get they weigh from twenty to eighty .

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pounds. For certain reasons they have been decreasing in size and numbers. The spring chinook has been decreasing in the Columbia for the past fifty years. This river has been used for the development of power, irrigation, and transportation. If present conditions continue, this great fish may be exterminated. Why haven't we had the same escapement law that Alaska has of allowing one of every two fish to work up stream to spawn before any commercial fishing is done? In the Columbia only about one out of seven or eight fish escape to the spawning beds, and many of these spawning grounds have been destroyed.

The salmon in the ocean from Alaska to California have no protective laws, and many young salmon are caught that would increase several times in weight before being taken for food. The former Senator McNary introduced a bill in congress to regulate our salmon fishing in the Pacific Ocean. The senate approved the bill, but it was not passed by the house. Since we have laws to protect salmon in our rivers, why should they not be protected in the ocean?

The only protected fish in the ocean is the halibut. In 1930 they were in a sad state of depletion. A treaty was ratified by the United States and Canada and the International Fisheries Commission was established. This was the only ocean fishery in the world that has been controlled by international regulation. It is the first successful restoration of a depleted ocean fishery. The facts prove that the halibut industry will be properly protected for generations to come. It is a demonstration of what can be done between friendly nations.

The only other treaty that was finally passed between these two nations relates to the sockeye salmon of the Fraser River. This valuable fish in order to reach its spawning grounds must swim through the waters of Puget Sound into the waters of the State of Washington and up the Fraser River in Canada. This was a clear case of where the fishermen of both nations in competition were destroying this fine run of salmon. After some forty years of controversy a treaty was passed in 1937. Although the International Pacific Salmon

Fisheries Commission was created, the fishermen on the American side prevented the Commission from having the authority to regulate the fishery for a period of eight years, which does not end till 1945. The facts show that without proper protection, these fish runs have been decreasing (more and more every year,) and it is a detriment to the fishermen of both nations to allow this valuable salmon to be destroyed. The law should have been changed and the time limit shortened, but throughout this nation you will find that the commercial interests control and will keep on destroying our fish resources.