

PROCEEDINGS
OF
THIRTY-NINTH ANNUAL CONFERENCE
OF
WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF
STATE GAME AND FISH COMMISSIONERS



PORTLAND, OREGON

JUNE 29, 30 AND JULY 1, 1959

FISH AND GAME ADMINISTRATION IN OUR NEW STATE - ALASKA

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(Paper read by James Brooks, Alaska Department of Fish and Game)

On the upcoming Fourth of July, Alaskans will celebrate the addition of a new star on our American flag. Privileges and responsibilities, long sought after, are now realities or near realities. And much of the motivation responsible for our great advance and achievement was the intense desire of Alaskans to manage their own natural resources. The diversified economies common to the southerly states have not yet developed in Alaska; our fish and game resources are, and will remain, of paramount importance. It is now for us to apply the same wisdom and energy responsible for the attainment of statehood to the basic task of administering our own affairs and resources in the best interests of the state and nation.

Many problems connected with the administration of our fish and game are ones which we have inherited - some have a long history, and others are of recent development. It will be enlightening, therefore, to touch on this history and some of the events that contributed heavily to the creation and evolution of problems existing today. I will confine my remarks mainly to fisheries, for despite the dramatic and exciting history of Alaska's fur and game resources, their historic aspects are currently of much less significance.

The Russians, never numbering more than about 500 during their occupation, ignored almost all resources except the fur mammals. The sea otters and fur seals, in particular, were exploited nearly to the point of extermination before conservation measures were, fortunately, imposed. Commercial fishing in Alaska began on a meager scale in 1840 with a few whaling and salmon salting operations. But it was not until 1878, 11 years after Seward's purchase of Alaska, that a newly developed canning technique enabled processors to preserve the salmon in cans. In this year, two small canneries were established in Southeastern Alaska, and their production was valued at \$16,000. Year by year, fisheries production accelerated until, by the mid nineteen forties, over a hundred canneries were contributing to a pack valued at close to one hundred million dollars.

Alaska is popularly known as a land of gold, and the belief is widespread that the gold strikes which excited the world around 1900 marked the commercial awakening of the Golden North. In reality, the modest inception of the salmon canning industry a generation before was of vastly greater importance to the economy of the Territory, as it is now to the new State.

Within a few years after the gold rush, the surface placer gold was exhausted and the sourdough tide receded - leaving in its wake shrunken towns and mining camps throughout the Interior. Alaska is a mineral storehouse of wealth, but these untold treasures lie deep in the ground, and are not to be grubbed out in any quantity by a prospector's pick. Alaska, since its purchase, has produced approximately \$750,000,000 in gold. In the same period, Alaska's fisheries have produced approximately \$2,810,000,000.

in fishery products, about four times the total value of the gold production.

The fisheries have recently suffered an alarming recession, but never a total eclipse for the small producer, as was the case with gold production. For, despite scientific advancement, fishing is still an occupation in which the humblest fisherman can aspire to earn an independent livelihood.

For eighty years the Alaskan fishing industry has yielded millions to fishermen and processors. It has paid millions in taxes to the Territorial Treasury and has been the pulsating life-blood for scores of Alaskan communities extending along 10,000 miles of mainland and island sea coasts from Ketchikan to the Bering Sea.

Every spring, in numbers that rivaled the gold rush, fishing fleets and thousands of fishermen and cannery workers rushed north from Pacific coast ports to harvest the five species of Pacific salmon swarming in from the ocean to spawn. Many of these operations were totally self contained, having no connection with any Alaskan community. All supplies were purchased in the States. Alaska benefitted little from this type of operation.

A few barnacle-crustad pilings jutting out of the restless tides in a wilderness bay are often the only monument to mark the brief sojourn of the exploiters. Many of the canneries were easily built - and as easily abandoned. The philosophy of many who came to Alaska was "get rich - get out !" During this period entire cycles of salmon were wiped out. Chicken wire was stretched across the mouths of some streams close to a cannery. No fish were allowed to escape upstream to spawn. Whole runs were canned. Many barren streams today can be attributed to these practices by men who destroyed the very environment that supported them. While virgin streams remained to be exploited, Alaska's fisheries seemed inexhaustible - despite a lack of regulations and law enforcement.

In the beginning, the fisheries were under the jurisdiction of the Treasury Department, later they were taken over by the Department of Commerce and Labor. In 1940, the Bureau of Fisheries was combined with the Biological Survey to form the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service under the Department of the Interior. Since that time, and up to the present, Alaska's fisheries have been under the control of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

People began to see that Alaska was a magnificent country - some decided to stay and began building attractive homes instead of temporary log shelters. They called themselves "Alaskans" with a note of pride. A few far-sighted individuals began to talk of statehood and initiated action to achieve it.

Above all, there was a growing interest in the economy of the Territory. Alaskans began to realize that, revenue-wise, they were getting the short end of the stick. They viewed with growing alarm the wild squandering of the Territory's fishery resources, and suggested strongly that Alaskans should have the custody of their own fish and game. They reasoned that the Federal Government, in faraway Washington, could never take the understanding interest in administering the fisheries as could Alaskans, who were close to the everyday problems and dependent upon the fisheries for a livelihood.

Alaskans saw, in the whole fish and game picture, a taint of discrimination. The Territories of Hawaii and Puerto Rico have always controlled these resources, so had all the states when they were territories. To make matters worse, Congress controlled the appropriations and had consistently failed to appropriate sufficient funds to the Fish and Wildlife Service for adequate administration and management of the fisheries. Basic research lagged, and lacking adequate biological data, the making of wise and workable regulations proved extremely difficult if not impossible.

The total production of the Alaskan fisheries in the peak year of 1936 was nearly a billion pounds. In the following years there was a sharp decline in production, although fishing efforts were continually being intensified. By 1949, production had dropped to half of 1936 production. Most alarming was the decline of red and pink salmon - of prime importance to the canning branch of the fishing industry. By 1957, fishery production had dropped to 354 million pounds - a drop in the short span of twenty-one years of over a half-billion pounds annually. Alaskans viewed this decline with growing concern. A competent program of research and bold experiment seemed long overdue.

In 1949, some 70 years after the establishment of the salmon canning industry, our legislature created the Alaska Fisheries Board and the Alaska Department of Fisheries. Although the Federal government retained full control, Alaskans at last had a voice; it lacked authority, but it did exert a powerful moral force. This action was an important step in the conservation of the Alaska fisheries, as well as an important legislative step which led to statehood and self-government.

The Fisheries Board was composed of five members appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Legislature. It was empowered to choose a full-time executive officer and Director for the Department of Fisheries. While I was Acting Director of the Washington Department of Fisheries, I received this initial appointment.

The Alaska Fisheries Board laid down a basic policy: To assist in the conservation and perpetuation of the Alaska fisheries; to promote more resident ownership, management, and control; and to cooperate with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A carefully designed program to benefit the fisheries was immediately adopted. Trained biologists were recruited and several important jobs were undertaken.

Some of this work is worthy of note here. A pioneering investigation of the king salmon troll fishery shortly revealed that the Columbia and Frazer Rivers were the principal contributors to the Alaska catch. These findings indicate that Alaska faces a dwindling supply of king salmon due to dam building and diminution of watersheds in your states.

Another program was aimed at developing techniques to open new areas, hitherto blocked by falls or other obstructions, to salmon. Low-cost, portable aluminum fish ladders, which can be flown into remote areas and assembled quickly, have been designed and perfected by our engineer and biologists. These ladders are now being used successfully.

Elsewhere, we have installed, or are installing, conventional laddering structures to create new salmon spawning and rearing areas. Paul's Lake, on Afognak Island, which was opened and stocked with red salmon eyed eggs several years ago, had a return of 7,500 adult salmon last year. We predict it will soon support a commercial fishery. Other lakes hold equal or greater promise for future development as salmon producers. Adequate hatchery facilities to support this program have been constructed in widely separated areas.

Our investigations of sable fish, in cooperation with the west coast states, have contributed much worthwhile knowledge to this fishery. King crab studies, initiated early on the important Kodiak fishing grounds, have provided much new knowledge on the animals' life history and movements. Our research on salmon predators and competitors is perhaps the most intriguing and potentially rewarding of all. We have found that such diverse animals as the stickleback and beluga whale can have tremendous impact on salmon production. We look forward to having more of this work available in published form before long.

While not partaking in actual management, the Department has been training men to work in this capacity. Through the years they have become intimately familiar with the commercial fisheries and associated management problems. Their recommendations each year have reached the Fish and Wildlife Service. More direct contact with the fisheries has resulted from our hair seal control work in gill net salmon fisheries.

Lest it appear that we have been totally devoted to commercial fisheries, I must point out that a sport fisheries program was inaugurated within two years after the Department was created. One may exist on meat, and potatoes, but living requires ice cream, too. The excellent angling for grayling and trout, once everywhere available in Alaska, has suffered a serious decline near the heavily populated centers and along well traveled roads. The Department's program was aimed at lake rehabilitation and stocking in accessible areas which were subject to a heavy fishing pressure. Hatcheries located near Fairbanks, Anchorage, and Kodiak supply over a million rainbow, steelhead, and silver salmon annually for this program. Sportsmen's groups have shown a keen interest in our efforts, and actively assist with manpower and other resources.

We are justly proud of our research library which has expanded greatly through the years. It catalogues approximately 12,000 titles and handles over 300 subscriptions and exchanges annually.

The Department's Education and Information Division, started in a small way in 1955, and has enjoyed a steady, fruitful growth. Programs using the media of radio, television, newspapers, educational publications, and Department produced films have been presented increasingly often to promote better public understanding in matters of conservation and resource management.

In 1957, the Territorial Legislature by a new act abolished the Alaska Fisheries Board and replaced it with the seven-member Alaska Fish and Game Commission. The Alaska Department of Fisheries then became the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. This action permitted the recruitment of a small number of game biologists who could serve as a nucleus for an enlarged Game Division staff, an arrangement which was to become quickly apparent.

In June, 1958, Congress passed the Alaska Statehood Act. Included in it was the so called "Westland Amendment" which retained federal control of Alaska's fish and game until the first day of the first calendar year following the expiration of ninety legislative days after the Secretary of the Interior certified to Congress that Alaska had made adequate provision for the administration, management, and conservation of the resources in the broad national interest. The 90 legislative days provision has subsequently been amended to 90 calendar days by the Alaska Omnibus Act.

Although Territorial fish and game legislation served the purpose for which it was primarily intended, few people considered it ideal as a basis for administering the resources under statehood. Consequently, the first State Legislature enacted new legislation (Chapt. 64, SIA 1959) which created the Department of Fish and Game as one of the twelve major departments in the new government.

According to the act, the Department of Fish and Game is "vested with the duties, powers and responsibilities involved in the administration and development of the State's commercial fisheries, sport fish, birds, game and furbearing animals." These duties, powers, and responsibilities are divided between a Board of Fish and Game and a Commissioner of Fish and Game.

The Board of Fish and Game consists of eight members with overlapping four-year terms. Members shall have a general knowledge of the fish and game resources of the State and be selected without regard to political affiliation or interest. These men are appointed by the Governor but are to be confirmed by the Legislature and can be removed only for cause.

The Board is authorized to make rules and regulations dealing with commercial fisheries, sport fisheries, hunting, trapping, etc., and to establish policies for fish and game research, management, enforcement, propagation, stocking and investigation and control of predators. For the purpose of administering the preceding, the Board may delegate the necessary authority to the Commissioner.

The Commissioner of Fish and Game is appointed by the Governor from a list of qualified persons nominated by the Board of Fish and Game. The Commissioner serves at the pleasure of the Governor, but his appointment must be confirmed by the Legislature. He shall have general administrative, budgetary, and fiscal powers over the Department, and when emergency circumstances so require, may summarily open or close seasons or areas or change weekly closed periods by field announcement.

The details of the organization of the Department and of the powers and duties of the Board and the Commissioner are spelled out in Chapter 94, SIA 1959 - the "Fish and Game Code of Alaska". This bill provides a code of laws relating to fish and game, provides for licensing, prescribes fees and provides penalties for violations. The law covers many items that will be of interest to other states. I will cite a few examples.

(1) Advisory Committees are to be established throughout the State at places designated by the Board and composed of persons well informed on the fish and game of the locality. These committees shall submit recommendations for widely separated communities in a state $2\frac{1}{2}$ times the size of Texas.

(2) Every dam or obstruction shall be provided with a durable and efficient fishway, or in the event this is considered impractical, provisions must be made for a hatchery or other suitable compensation. (It is interesting to note no such provision is found in the present Federal law.)

(3) In regard to other hydraulic projects, plans and specifications must be approved by the Commissioner before commencement of construction. (Here again, there is no Federal law covering this subject.)

The Secretary of the Interior has made his certification to Congress that Alaska is prepared to assume control of its resources, and the transfer of authority is scheduled for January 1, 1960. Adequate funds have been appropriated by the Legislature to finance a very substantial program. On July 1 of this year, we also qualify for Federal Aid in Fish and Wildlife Restoration funds. Our Federal Aid projects have already been drawn up and submitted for approval. Literally hundreds of job applications are being screened in an effort to build a professional team of biologists and conservation officers, second to none on the Continent.

I am under no illusions that there will not be problems and difficulties ahead for our Department - but when we measure these against the resources we have to work with and the organization we have built up to resolve them, the assurance is great.

Alaska has her great salt water commercial fisheries which are potentially some of the richest in the world. Along her coasts and inland from the bordering seas, Alaska offers the sportsman and all others some of the finest sport fishing and big game hunting to be found anywhere.

Just as this great State of Oregon has achieved by its Centennial Year; the tree farm and sustained-yield logging in her forests - so will Alaska strive to place its fish and game on a sustained-yield basis so that they may be maintained at maximum production in perpetuity.

We, too, are done with the boom and bust communities that grow and wither with the exploitation and decline of the resources on which they have depended. Our desire is for something more lasting - this goal constitutes our great challenge.

The Alaska Board of Fish and Game and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game personnel nourish a growing confidence that what they visualize today can be turned into a functioning fact tomorrow.

We believe that with long-range planning, based on basic and continually interpreted biological research, adequate watershed protection and management and a continuity of constructive efforts applied to all of Alaska's fish and game resources that this challenge can be met.

DISCUSSION

HAROLD S. CRANE (Utah Fish and Game): Jim has given us a very interesting review of the history that leads up to their present game department and certainly, they must have gotten on the ball in a hurry to get the Secretary's approval already, to go ahead with their State program. I am sure there are plenty of questions about Alaska and their new set-up.

JOHN AMACHER (Roseburg, Oregon): The gentleman states that "adequate" funds were budgeted for the Fish and Game Department. How much funds were budgeted?

JIM BROOKS (Alaska): In terms of funds that you gentlemen are used to playing with, I suppose it won't sound like much; we have all together an appropriation of between two and three million dollars, but some of it is tied up in contingency funds. The reason being that when the Legislature made the appropriation the Secretary had not yet made the necessary certification to Congress, so it was not known, whether or not this amount of money would be required. However, it is available to us now. This will provide for a staff equal to and in some areas substantially larger than that which the Fish and Wildlife Service has previously provided for the administration of the fish and game resources in Alaska. For example, the Pittman-Robertson program will now employ about fourteen people whereas it employed four in the field previously. The enormity of some of our problems will be difficult for you people to grasp. We have need for some 250 to 300 enforcement agents during the summer as stream watchers. Needs such as that, which we have anticipated, will be provided for. I can say that our Legislature gave us the amount of money which we asked for, and we asked for what we thought we would need.

HAROLD S. CRANE (Utah): Jim, I have one question. With your great, tremendous area and limited population, the paper has dwelt mainly on fish. What about your game situation? Do you have people there to harvest your game?

JIM BROOKS (Alaska): We are unable to manage our game in Alaska at this time in the sense that we don't have enough hunting pressure to crop it. Natural factors for the most part are still dominant in determining the course of our big game and as far as that goes, our small game population trends. I am very pleased to report that the Federal Government is turning over the game resources to the State in very fine condition. In fact, too fine. I rather doubt that we will be able to sustain them in present numbers very long. Our deer in Southeastern Alaska have never been so abundant in the memory of mankind. Our moose populations are very high. Our caribou population on the Arctic slope is extremely high. We are unable to harvest these vast herds. They are in many instances out of control, so it is natural to expect that there will be decline. When you hear of such declines in the newspapers and outdoor magazines, don't be concerned. We know they are coming, they are inevitable and we can do nothing about them unless we can talk a whole lot of you people into coming to Alaska and buying our non-resident licenses and going out for some good hunting.

HAROLD S. CRANE (Utah): I thought I had better give you a little chance to get in a little sales talk.

RON MATZLER (Pendleton, Oregon): What is your population today?

JIM BROOKS: One hundred and seventy thousand.

RON MATZLER: The other question I have regarding your population is that you mention somewhere in the neighborhood of some twelve Departments of State, is that correct?

JIM BROOKS: That's right.

RON MATZLER: Do you feel that you are going to have adequate funds from taxation to take care of your wildlife resources besides your eleven other departments from your population of one hundred and seventy thousand?

JIM BROOKS: I am not too concerned in the game division. We have a sound license law, and a reasonable fee schedule and I believe that since sports fishing and hunting license fees are ear-marked that the game division will get along fairly well. We don't wish to spend any of our license money on enforcement or predator control. However, commercial fisheries is another thing. The commercial fisheries will be dependant on appropriated money.

I know in the past that Alaska has been hard up. Our teachers have gone for two and three months without being paid. All states occasionally get into a bind. Michigan is having it pretty tough right now, but baring developments such as that, I think that we have very little to worry about. Alaskans are very conscious of their resources. They mean so very much to us. You could get away with cutting a school budget just as easily as you could get away with cutting our commercial fisheries budget if you were a legislature. If there is one way of being a popular politician in Alaska, as I spoke, you must support the schools and fish and game. Most of the people who come to Alaska are interested in the outdoors, they gravitate to that wilderness area that affords so much in the way of outdoor recreation, hunting and fishing. By and large, the average man on the street is conscious of the wildlife resources.