

Waterway Plans Held Costly to Taxpayers

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Portland, June 11.—To the Editor of The Journal—In The Journal of June 2 was an article from your Washington bureau entitled "Umatilla Dam Project Plan Nears Action." This stated "The Umatilla Dam-Snake River Navigation project, contemplating the \$64,000,000 plan advocated by the Inland Waterway association, moved a step nearer today."

Since there is a strong campaign under way and a bill introduced in congress by Senator McNary and Representative Pierce to get the federal government to construct another dam on the Columbia river at Umatilla rapids to advance inland waterway transportation, it is fair that the people be given some of the facts as to the use of the Columbia river. The changing of this big stream into a series of lakes completely alters the biological condition of the river and destroys the most important run of spring Chinook salmon.

Why not measure the uses of the Columbia river for barges or salmon and decide which has the greater public value? We all know the salmon runs support thousands of families and bring in a big annual income from a commercial and recreational standpoint.

In the 1937 report of the national resources committee is the following statement: "Existing policy with respect to inland navigation involves the improvement and maintenance of river channels at public expense for the free use of shippers . . . Federal expenditures to June 30, 1937, for the improvement of these streams aggregate approximately \$2,186,000,000."

When we speak of inland waterway transportation, we are not including the lower stretches of rivers like from the mouth of the Columbia to Portland, where the water is deep and will always be available for sea-going vessels. It is only the use of upper stretches of rivers, like the promotion plan of barging from The Dalles up to Idaho.

What is the status of inland waterway transportation? In earlier days our deeper rivers were important for commerce. Water routes were competitors of steam lines and kept the freight rates down. What is the situation today? The whole country is a network of steel rails, and every populated district is lined with modern highways where trucks and automobiles supply numerous traffic demands. There is no chance for a monopoly. Inland waterway transportation is now 75 years out of date.

The old saying, "Transportation by water is cheaper than by land," is also 75 years behind the times when it refers to inland waterways. Cheaper for whom? Not for the public, because they pay for the subsidies to help barge owners and shippers. The entire expense and

upkeep of inland water routes are taken from the pockets of the taxpayers.

About 25 years ago, promoters figured that \$3,500,000 would make the Missouri river navigable between St. Louis and Kansas City. But any river keeps changing, and a stream bed is like a railroad bed that needs continual repair. Twenty years later the government had spent \$58,000,000. In 1932 over \$2,000,000 were spent on maintenance costs. Counting the total amount spent and 4 per cent. as a fair interest on the investment, every ton of freight moved on the river cost the taxpayers over \$5000.

The next step was for the government to provide a six-foot channel in the Missouri river between Kansas City and Sioux City, a distance of 417 miles, where plenty of people lived and there was a prospect for plenty of freight. About \$30,000,000 were spent and \$50,000,000 more will be needed. In 1929, 489 tons of freight were moved along this inland waterway. The taxpayers paid the freight bill at \$2900 per ton.

People are lead to believe that rivers and canals furnish cheaper transportation than steam lines. In places water rates are 20 per cent. lower than those of the railroads. Why not? The Ohio river transportation system gets a free gift of \$11,000,000 a year, the Upper Mississippi \$5,000,000, the Lower Mississippi \$12,710,000. The railroads rightly claim if they were given the same subsidies and the same privileges, they could cut rates 40 per cent., which would be twice as low as the boat rates, and still make money.

There are numerous examples of pork barrel legislation where large appropriations are forced from congress by local influences for private gain. Eight hundred thousand dollars has already been spent to deepen the channel between The Dalles and Umatilla rapids. The report of the army engineers is to build additional dams for inland waterway transportation from The Dalles to Lewiston, Idaho. The cost of this project is estimated at \$375,000,000. Where does the taxpayer come out? If we take the top figures of the promoters for the tonnage that may be moved on barges on the Upper Columbia, the taxpayers will pay an average of about \$50 per ton.

Why should the government furnish funds to promote schemes that wreck our salmon runs? When a river has various public values, why should be not prevent one use of public waters from destroying its other values? Before our important rivers are exploited, is it not common sense to make detailed and careful studies and find out which is the most important service of a river.

William L. Finley.

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The Symposium on Salmon

The problem of the missing, or at least sorely depleted, spring salmon run in the Columbia river was naturally submitted to the scrutiny of conservationist, fisherman and scientist alike. Each of these gentlemen has definite opinions on the matter, and their opinions, it must be conceded, are of not less definite worth. They may safely be assumed to know what they are talking about, and they do. Who else?

The symposium suggests—nay, declares—that the so-called lost salmon run was occasioned not by one abuse, but by the combination of several. These are, mainly, overfishing, trolling at sea, pollution of streams, construction of dams, construction of irrigation works, and lack of proper screening of the latter. Salmon are so prolific that for a number of years, assisted by artificial propagation, the decrease in their numbers was but gradual. It was, however, cumulative. And it is the finding of the symposium that at length the alarming penalty is upon us, and the writing too plain, too calamitous, to be mistaken. It is significant that, although they allude to other slack seasons, the fishermen themselves cite all of these reasons for the present depletion. For once they are in utter accord with science and conservation. One speaks now of the Columbia river fishermen, and not of the trollers, for these will resist any curtailment of their catch.

The lesson is obvious, quite as William L. Finley, a foremost champion of conservation, asserts it to be. We can no longer expect that artificial propagation will compensate for our sins against the salmon. It is evident that, while this has retarded the evil day, such propagation is not sufficient to the needs of the species. Natural spawning is of vastly more import than many optimists held it to be. The lesson is that we must, if we expect to save our salmon runs, not only in the Columbia, but in other salmon streams, proceed without debate or delay against the evils that we have done the salmon—pollution, overfishing, destruction of spawning areas and the casual sacrifice of myriads of infant fish to industry. Tomorrow may be too late. Tomorrow is cursed by the indefinite and indecisive.