OREGON FISH FIGHTS

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Fish fights have been a characteristic of Oregon's salmon fishing industry since the 1880's when rapid expansion in the kinds of gear used to harvest salmon on the Columbia River led to the first awareness of declining resource availability. Initially, fish fights were acts of violence between groups of commercial fishermen. The legislature was also one of the battle grounds, and since 1908 the public, in deciding 21 fisheries related initiatives and referendums, have been arbitrators of conflicts between fishermen. The early fish fights were between groups of gillnetters and trapmen, gillnetters and fishwheel operators, and upriver and downriver fishing interests. Since 1910 fish fights have increasingly focused on the relations between sports anglers and commercial fishermen.

The overt issue sparking most fish fights has been the question of what were the best means for conservation of the fisheries resource? Beneath this facade of conservation were social and economic issues of resource use and allocation. Conservation is a resource management philosophy which emphasizes wise-use of resources without waste. The history of Oregon fish fights reveals, however, that conservation has been used as a political wedge for one group to take a larger share of the fisheries resource from competitors. Conservation more than a process of resource protection for the future was as much a process of resource allocation among competing uses and users.

Nearly one hundred years of historical records on various fish fights reveals no consistent pattern. Fish fights reflect more, the larger philosophic issues which continue to be debated in American society. Issues such as whether decisions should be made by elites or by broad participation, too many fishermen and too few fish, fish for food or fish for fun, allocation of rivers and streams among competing uses, and the meaning of the facts which explain a situation have all interacted to make fisheries management a complex social and economic problem, not just simply one of resource conservation.
The initial fish fights were on the Columbia River between trapmen and gillnetters, and upriver and downriver fishermen. These conflicts, as well as being fought on legal and political grounds, at times also erupted into overt aggression. Conflict developed between gillnetters, most of whom lived in Astoria, and trapmen fishing pound nets, most of whom lived adjacent to Baker's Bay on the Washington side of the Columbia River. The gillnetters had organized the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union which evolved from organizations of gillnetters dating back to 1876.\(^5\) Gillnetters were organized for the purpose of mutual aid, proposing and opposing legislation related to fisheries, buttering fish prices, and maintaining drifts. Trapmen were organized into the Washington Fishermen's Association, principally to counter the actions of gillnetters.

Since the best fishing areas were along the north shore of the Columbia River from the mouth into Baker's Bay, the two groups competed with one another for access to the salmon resources. With the increase in the number of trapmen and gillnetters, traps were built farther out into Baker's Bay into drifts which the gillnetters had fished, and the gillnetters were forced to fish closer to and on the treacherous Columbia River bar. The gillnetters charged the trapmen's pound nets were hazards to navigation, destructive of the resource by catching undersized fish, and the monopoly of a few.\(^6\) The trapmen countered by claiming that the gillnetters of the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union were greedily coveting the salmon resource, trying to intimidate the trapmen by threats of violence, and wastefully throwing away fish which exceeded the capacity of canneries.

Threats of violence were backed up with numerous violent incidents. Each time a drowned gillnetter was found in or near a pound net the aggravation over the pound nets was heightened. The gillnetters' scow, used to clear drifts, was also used on occasion to clear away pound nets thought to be illegally placed and hazardous to navigation. In the early fall of 1887 a contingent of gillnetters attempting to organize gillnetters of Gray's Harbor, Washington, just north of Baker's Bay skirmished with a group of trapmen. Nine gillnetters were arrested and one later died from wounds received during the fight.\(^7\) In 1886 the governors of Oregon and Washington called out their respective national guards to police the actions of trapmen and gillnetters during the great strike of 1886. The conflicts between upriver and downriver fishermen were just as violent. June 21, 1890, three Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union members were killed in an attempt to prevent upriver fishermen near Rainier from fishing during a union ban for higher prices.\(^8\)

Violent acts such as these were but one of the tactics used in the fights between groups of fishermen. A 1902 constitutional amendment providing for initiatives and referendums, means by which the people of the state could both make and veto laws, provided a less violent but an equally effective tactic (Table 1). One of the most interesting ballot measure episodes was one on June 1, 1908. Two initiative petitions relating to the Columbia River salmon fishery were on the ballot. At issue were the fishing advantages of gillnetters on the lower Columbia and the fishwheel operators at the Cascades and near Celilo Falls on the upper Columbia. The initiative petition of the downriver fishermen, which passed, closed the Columbia River above the junction with the Sandy River to all gear except hook and line. This in effect eliminated the seines and fishwheels used on the upper river. The initiative petition of the upriver interests, which also passed, restricted commercial fishing to daylight hours. Since night was the principal time for gillnetting, this effectively closed the lower Columbia to gillnetting.

Master Fish Warden H. C. McAllister vigorously attempted to enforce these laws adopted by the people of Oregon. He arrested fishermen from both Oregon and Washington. A restraining order issued September 1908, by Circuit Judge William B. Gilbert prevented McAllister from enforcing the new law within the territorial limits of the State of Washington. So as not to give an unfair advantage to Washington fishermen, the injunction was then extended to include the territorial waters of Oregon as well.\(^9\)

The 1909 session of the Oregon Legislature, working in conjunction with the Washington Legislature, attempted to straighten out the problem but only succeeded in adding confusion by neglecting to add the words "and its tributaries" to fishery legislation jointly agreed upon by the two states. This omission left the fishermen in the vicinity of Oregon City who fished the Willamette and Clackamas Rivers with 15 days of fishing in March and April while all the other commercial fishermen were restricted from fishing the mainstream of the Columbia and its tributaries in Washington. This omission provided a considerable advantage for the Oregon City fishermen in the spring of 1909.\(^10\)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Election</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Vote</th>
<th>Date of Election</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Vote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 1, 1908</td>
<td>Regulating time of fishing in Columbia River and tributaries</td>
<td>+46,582 -40,720</td>
<td>Nov. 8, 1952</td>
<td>A bill prohibiting commercial fishing on the Rogue River</td>
<td>+127,445 -160,527</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prohibiting fishing for salmon in the narrows of the Upper Columbia</td>
<td>+56,130  -50,280</td>
<td>Nov. 3, 1942</td>
<td>Bill restricting and prohibiting net fishing in coastal streams and bays</td>
<td>+97,212 -137,177</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 8, 1910</td>
<td>Prohibiting commercial fishing in Rogue River and tributaries</td>
<td>+49,712 -33,397</td>
<td>Nov. 5, 1946</td>
<td>Bill regulating fishing in coastal streams and inland waters</td>
<td>+196,195 -101,398</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 5, 1918</td>
<td>Closing Willamette River to commercial fishing south of Oswego</td>
<td>+55,555  -40,908</td>
<td>Nov. 2, 1948</td>
<td>Prohibiting salmon fishing in Columbia River with fixed appliances</td>
<td>+273,140 -184,834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 5, 1918</td>
<td>Prohibiting seine and set-net fishing in Rogue River and tributaries</td>
<td>+45,511  -50,227</td>
<td>Nov. 2, 1954</td>
<td>Prohibiting certain fishing in coastal streams</td>
<td>+232,775 -278,805</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 7, 1922</td>
<td>Salmon fishing and propagation amendment</td>
<td>(a)</td>
<td>Nov. 6, 1956</td>
<td>Prohibiting certain fishing in coastal streams</td>
<td>+401,882 -259,309</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 2, 1926</td>
<td>Fish wheel, trap, seine and gill net bill (prohibits and limits use in Columbia River)</td>
<td>+102,119  -73,086</td>
<td>Nov. 6, 1962</td>
<td>Restricting commercial fishing on Columbia River</td>
<td>(b)</td>
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<tr>
<td>June 28, 1927</td>
<td>Nestucca Bay fish closing bill</td>
<td>+53,684 -47,552</td>
<td>Nov. 3, 1964</td>
<td>Prohibiting commercial fishing for salmon, steelhead</td>
<td>+221,797 -534,731</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 6, 1928</td>
<td>Deschutes River water and fish bill</td>
<td>+78,317 -157,398</td>
<td>Nov. 6, 1928</td>
<td>Deschutes River water and fish bill</td>
<td>(a) Marion County Circuit Court declared the petition to be invalid because of an insufficient number of genuine signatures. Accusations were made that this initiative petition was designed to &quot;hold up&quot; the salmon packers statement by Master Fish Warden C. D. Shoemaker, Official Voters' Pamphlet for November 7, 1922, p. 12.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 6, 1928</td>
<td>McKenzie River water and fish bill</td>
<td>+77,974 -153,418</td>
<td>Nov. 4, 1930</td>
<td>Rogue River fishing constitutional amendment</td>
<td>+96,596 -99,490</td>
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<td>Nov. 6, 1928</td>
<td>Umpqua River water and fish bill</td>
<td>+76,108 -154,345</td>
<td>Nov. 6, 1928</td>
<td>Rogue River water and fish bill</td>
<td>+79,028 -156,009</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(a) Marion County Circuit Court declared the petition to be invalid because of an insufficient number of genuine signatures. Accusations were made that this initiative petition was designed to "hold up" the salmon packers statement by Master Fish Warden C. D. Shoemaker, Official Voters' Pamphlet for November 7, 1922, p. 12.

(b) Ruled off the ballot by the Oregon Supreme Court because petitions were improperly titled.

Source: Official Voters' Pamphlet and Official Abstract of Votes by Oregon Secretary of State.
The 1908 initiative in which up and downriver fishermen tried to eliminate one another's gear was followed by the first of the sports angler versus commercial fishermen ballot measure conflicts. November 8, 1910, Oregon voters passed a sports angler initiative closing the Rogue River to commercial fishing. This was the first of five ballot measures dealing with the status of commercial fishing on the Rogue River. The sports anglers of the Rogue River Fish Protective Association claimed the ballot measure was "to prevent the utter extermination of fish in the Rogue River." The Rogue River Fishermen's Union blamed the conservation problem on dams and defective fish ladders and claimed that the Fish Commission possessed the authority to take appropriate action. Sports anglers chipped away at the commercial fisheries closing the Willamette River south of Oswego to commercial fishing in 1918, the Nestucca in 1927, the Rogue, Chetco, and Elk Rivers in 1935, and finally all coastal streams in 1956.

The last major fish fight between groups of commercial fishermen was the 1926 initiative to exclude fishwheels, traps, and seines. It illustrated how social and economic issues become infused with conservation arguments. Gillnetters with the sponsorship of the Oregon State Grange, Oregon Federation of Labor, and Fish Commission placed an initiative on the ballot to eliminate fishwheels, traps, and seines. Opposed were the upriver processing interests who owned most of the fishwheels, primarily the Warren and Seufert families, along with their employees, and upriver businessmen. All the canneries in Astoria, with the exception of the Union Fishermen's Cooperative, opposed the initiative. Most of the seines were owned and operated by the canneries who leased the valuable Sand Island seining grounds from the government. Sports anglers sided with the proponents of the initiative petition.

Each side accused the other of monopolistic practices, absurd and untruthful assertions, and of being a threat to conservation of the salmon resource. The proponents claimed that fishwheels were "a practical monopoly of the fishing industry on the Upper Columbia River" where "a few wealthy and powerful individuals have succeeded through enactment of special privilege laws, in virtually appropriating the right of public fishing to themselves." The upriver interests countered, "The grossly unjust and un-American purpose of this dangerous bill is to monopolize the fish industry and to control—so as to raise—the price of fish to the consuming public." The proponents found the fact that only 7-8 percent of the fish were caught in wheels absurd because "the fact remains that they take practically all the fish that, having escaped the gear in 150 miles of tidewater, should be entitled to proceed, to the spawning grounds to lay their eggs and perpetuate the industry." The upriver interests claimed that the Columbia River salmon runs were on the increase and that the claims of salmon scarcity were "designed to deceive" the voters. On this conservation issue the upriver interests followed the argument of U.S. Fish Commissioner Henry O'Malley who said, "Each form of gear used is responsible for depletion in proportion to the number of fish it takes." The upriver interests went on to assert that "the greatest destroyer of salmon have been the upper-country power dams and canals." The proponents countered by claiming that fishwheels took too many early run royal chinook and criticized the drag seines for taking too many silversides and steelhead saying, "Three seines which operate above the Cascade Rapids in pools, where tired fish stop to rest after their struggle through the turbulent waters, take hundreds of tons of fish." Upon passage of the initiative upriver interests sought to use the courts and legislature to reverse the decision of the people arguing that "the initiative manner of making laws deprives those living in sparsely settled districts of proper representation, is it not un-American . . . ., is it not the intention of the Constitution to afford protection to the minority?" (Figure 1)

The upriver argument regarding the rights of minorities and their attempt to reverse the popular decision in the courts and legislature where a more studied approach to the facts could be made, illustrated more of the fish fight tactics and raised the issue of how decisions should be made. This decision-making issue has pervaded the American democracy since its inception. It is an issue with no definite solution, only a continual search for a satisfactory mix. Elitism and broad participation in decision-making were highlighted in the arguments between Hamilton and Jefferson. Hamilton favored a strong central government with a strong chief executive. He did not trust the electorate to study the issues carefully and to act with wisdom rather than self-interest. Jefferson, on the other hand, argued for participatory democracy in which people played a continuous role in setting the tone and direction of the nation. In Jefferson's view every man should be free
Response of F. A. Seufert to 1926 Ballot Measure (Oregon Historical Society)

to choose and therefore also be responsible for governing the nation. The argument of the upriver interests against the fishwheel, trap, and seine initiative and their actions to reverse the will of the people were more Hamiltonian than Jeffersonian.

In a May 10, 1924, letter, Master Fish Warden Carl D. Shoemaker wrote Governor Pierce and presented a Hamiltonian argument for the successful practice of conservation.

I want to call your attention to one pertinent fact, and that is that the salmon has no friend except the Fish Commission. If the packers and fishermen were allowed to carry out their own ideas, fishing would be conducted throughout the year, and the streams would be open from the mouth to the source. 20

Shoemaker expressed the opinion that only the action of the Fish Commission established the nursery pond system over the opposition of fishermen and packers.

Broad participation has been practiced in two ways. The first and most obvious was the 21 ballot measures in which the Oregon electorate have had to make major policy decisions relative to management of fisheries. The second was more subtle and was the situation in which citizens undertook to influence the actions of other citizens. One case for this was the 1964 initiative sponsored by Save Our Salmon, Inc. This initiative would have closed the Columbia River to commercial gillnetting. An emotional campaign was conducted in which 1000 people from Astoria mounted 30 buses and took their case to the citizens of the Willamette Valley. The initiative was defeated. 21

In between the extremes of decision-making by knowledgeable members of the Fish Commission and ballot measures decided by the electorate was the Oregon Legislature which each session acted on numerous fisheries issues. As early as 1887 a special committee was appointed by the legislature to review the fisheries problem. The committee found that:
perhaps the greatest obstacle that the legislature will have to surmount, is the feeling that exists more or less among fishermen that the particular mode of fishing in which they are engaged is the only proper one and the least injurious to the fish industry of the State.

In fact, many fishermen of each locality judge of the question solely with a view to what is most advantageous to them, and argue as to the mode of fishing employed by them wholly from the standpoint of self-interest.\textsuperscript{22}

This committee concluded that the claim that fishwheels, traps, and seines took too many fish was due to prejudice and misinformation, and they recommended repeal of many gear restrictions which did not accomplish their intended purpose. The committee even went on to comment on such social and economic issues as gillnetters being driven out of business by fishwheels and traps.

Even if this were true it might be said, in answer to this complaint, that the trap wheel and like fishermen are generally riparian owners; they are resident citizens and taxpayers, while many of the gillnet fishermen are not residents of this state or Washington Territory, but come here from abroad and stay merely through the fishing season.\textsuperscript{23}

The recommended solutions were to extend the closed season, build hatcheries, improve enforcement of regulations by allowing the informer to keep half the fine, make the fine reasonable, and prohibit the dumping of sawdust in streams.

In fish fights each side selects either elitism or broad participation as it may best benefit its view. One interesting case of shifting to achieve the greatest decision-making advantage was the question of closing the Rogue River to commercial fishing. Sports anglers took this issue to the public in 1910 and won closure of the river. In 1913 commercial fishing interests had the legislature reopen the river. Sports anglers went to the initiative again in 1918, but failed to win closure. In 1919 sports anglers were able to get the legislature to close the Rogue, but Governor James Withycombe vetoed the bill after the session ended. A compromise between commercial fishing interests and sports anglers passed the 1921 legislature. A 1930 closure initiative failed, but the legislature closed the river to commercial fishing in 1931. Commercial interests went to the public in 1932 and by referendum had the closure repealed. Finally, the 1935 legislature closed the Rogue River to commercial fishing, and this decision was not reversed.
Competing Uses and Fisherman

One of the principle causes of fish fights was too many fishermen and too few fish. The Columbia River and other salmon producing streams have had to meet the demands of loggers, miners, irrigators, polluters, electricity customers, purveyors of regional economic growth, shippers, planners, etc. Each of these groups wanted the rivers and streams to serve their uses first and the uses of others second. Numerous studies have detailed these problems. For fishermen, however, the problem was more than just competition between users; the problem was too many fishermen.

Fishing is an activity which people can enter with a small investment, and there is the chance for a quick profit. Prior to 1888 canneries provided both the net and boat to encourage more fishing. A percentage of the fisherman's catch paid the rent for the net and boat. In 1888, the canneries required fishermen to purchase their nets. This required $200-450. For about $600 a trap could be constructed. Thus, entrance into fishing was relatively easy, and soon over 3000 fishermen were competing for a share of the resource. The editor of the Weekly Astorian, commenting on the poor financial success of the 1887 season, recommended:

... to cut down the number of boats in the river at least one-half; just as many salmon would be caught as under the present ruinous way of carrying on business, where the only reason that Jones can give for running 60 boats is that Robinson is running 65 ... The only reason this summer that 1500 boats were on the river was that every time a cannery put on a half dozen, every canner had to follow suit. ...

In 1896 the Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union tried to negotiate as part of the strike settlement a plan which would reduce the number of fishermen. The union wanted the cannerymen to take the twine for knitting nets away from the "floating element of the craft, who have no home ties in the city, and who only come during the season to work." This group was estimated to be 25 percent of the men fishing. This time the
Astorian strongly supported the side of the many.

Like nearly every other line of business, that of fishing the waters of the Columbia, has to a certain extent been overdone. As is well known, some months ago there was considerable talk among the fishermen to the effect that there were too many men engaged in the business to make it profitable to all. At that time there seemed to be quite a sentiment in favor of some means of reducing the number of men fishing on the river. Butchers, bakers, grocers, dry-goods men, lawyers, doctors, and even the farmers, have passed through the same experience, and many of them are today suffering from too much competition.

From all appearances the same competition will last to the end of time. The fittest survive. The number of men fishing while long recognized as desirable, was not accomplished. The ideas of fishermen as well as the wider society emphasized that this country was built on the principle of "free enterprise" which means people should be allowed to try to make or break themselves in whatever enterprise they choose. The successful, it is hypothesized, will stay and flourish. The unsuccessful will quit and try another activity.

In an 1890 statement on the condition of the salmon fishery the Columbia River Fishermen's Protection Union stated:

The business is still beset by many great difficulties, of which we intend to give a short resume, and believing that the greatest good to the greatest number is still an over-living maxim among our fellow-countrymen.

The union pamphlet then went on to discuss how the traps, seines, and fishwheels were reducing the number of fish. This set the tone of what has been the pattern of fish fights, to eliminate kinds of fishing apparatus rather than control the number of fishermen using each kind of gear. As Table 2 indicates, gear catching large quantities of fish was eliminated from the salmon fishery.

Fishermen, however, are by nature innovators, searching for techniques, gear, and fishing patterns which will enable larger catches. Fishermen developed the concept of drifts, the divenet, fishing the Columbia River bar, the Columbia River gillnet boat, and ocean trolling. They adopted power boats and power operated gear with the development of the gasoline engine at the turn of the century. In order to conserve a resource in a context in which the resource is to serve the largest number of innovative fishermen possible, regulations must operate to make fishermen less effective at catching fish. Of course each rule to reduce effectiveness results in a new innovation on the part of fishermen to maintain and improve their catches. Thus, in addition to there being too many fishermen, the problem was too many innovative fishermen.

Three ways can be used to establish a balance between too many innovative fishermen and too few fish. One, suggested by the Daily Astorian in 1887, was to reduce the number of fishermen. This approach, while long recognized, has not been implemented in Oregon. In 1874 British Columbia, Alaska, and Washington were attempting to implement regulations of this type, referred to as "limited entry." The other approaches, controlling the length of fishing time and restrictions on the type of gear used, have been used in Oregon since 1878 when closed seasons and mesh and trap slot regulations were implemented.

Having conservation rules was one thing; enforcing them was another. The closed season and gear restrictions were viewed by fishermen, processors, and state officials as a farce. The State Board of Fish Commissioners stated in an 1889 report that the law:

... was very well observed for one year; the second year there were many violations, and the past six years the law has been a dead letter on the statutes.

Enforcement was not an easy proposition because it adversely affected the well off and the less well off.

... had the literal law been enforced this year, private property to the amount of $200,000 would have been rendered worthless, and while owing to the wealth of the packers they could have borne the loss without serious hardship, but it is not so with the fishermen who have their all in their fishing gear. ...

New laws and new regulations have been written restricting the time of fishing and the type of gear used. Fisheries managers were typically reluctant to decide, however, which types of gear could be fished. Conflicts over what type of gear provided "the greatest good to the greatest number" have generally been decided in ballot measure
elections (Figure 2). Ballot measure elections illustrate the public being asked to decide if a specific type of gear can be used, or if commercial fishing can be practiced at all. The fish fights fought through ballot measures have placed upriver and downriver, trapmen and gillnetter, sports angler and commercial fishermen in conflict with one another over access to the fish resources.

The trend of the results of these ballot measure elections has been for the gear which take the most fish to be eliminated. The argument generally accuses these items of gear as being a threat to the conservation of the fishery resource.

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Remove
MURDEROUS
FISH TRAPS
VOTE
Yes
318
"FISH BILL"
A TAX-FREE MEASURE
THAT WILL BENEFIT EVERY OREGON CITIZEN

Ballot Measure Advertisement, 1948 (Oregon Voter, October 30, 1948, p. 20)
**TABLE 2. Comparative Gear Effectiveness, Columbia River**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gear</th>
<th>Case I, 1889-92&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Case II, 1926-28&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Case III, 1930-34&lt;sup&gt;c&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Case IV, 1963-72&lt;sup&gt;d&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(pounds per unit of gear per year)&lt;sup&gt;e&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fishwheel&lt;sup&gt;f&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>90,100</td>
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<td>Haul Seine&lt;sup&gt;g&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<td>no data</td>
<td>2,900</td>
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<sup>e</sup>Pounds of salmon and steelhead. For 1889-92 steelhead were 10 percent of the harvest; for 1926-28, 10 percent; and for 1963-72, 6 percent.

<sup>f</sup>Fishwheels were banned in Oregon by a 1926 initiative. They were legal in Washington until 1934. An average of one man was required to operate each wheel.

<sup>g</sup>Haul seines were banned in Washington in 1934 and in Oregon in 1948 by initiative petitions. An average of 11 men were required to operate a haul seine along with 8 horses.

<sup>h</sup>Traps were banned in Oregon by a 1926 initiative. Fish traps were more important on the Washington side of the Columbia River, where they were banned by initiative petition in 1934. An average of one man was required to construct and operate a fish trap.

<sup>i</sup>Gillnets were most important on the Oregon side of the Columbia River.

<sup>j</sup>Trolling became possible off the Columbia River with the introduction of the gasoline engine in the early 1900's. Data available for 1963-72 were for all licensed vessels and for the entire Oregon coast. The figure given is underenumerated.
Salmon for All

Scarcity of salmon resources in relation to the number of fishermen was the basic issue underlying each of Oregon's fish fights. That there was not enough to satisfy all the desires of the many different fishermen led to conflict with one group attempting to gain its allocation over others. Sixteen of the 21 ballot measures dealt with issues between sports anglers and commercial fishermen. Typically sports anglers have pointed to scarcity while commercial fishermen have claimed that by observing conservation rules there was enough "salmon for all."[10]

The background of these arguments is easily seen. Sports anglers are many but take few fish per fisherman, while commercial fishermen are few in number but take large numbers of fish per fisherman. Commercial fishermen are also perceived to take the largest portions of the harvest. Sometimes these perceptions are not supported with evidence. A detailed study by the fish and game commissions in 1946 on the Umpqua River situation revealed sport catches of 50 to 100 fish a day in the 1920's.[11] Catches of this magnitude would have made a gillnetter happy anytime during the more than 100 years gillnetting has been practiced on the Columbia River. In 1946 the Umpqua sport chinook catch also exceeded the commercial chinook harvest. Between 1962 and 1971 sports anglers caught 89 percent of the winter steelhead harvested on the Columbia River.[12]

In spite of these unique facts, the onus was on the commercial fisherman to leave enough fish to satisfy the interests of sports anglers. Therefore, commercial fishermen arguing for the referendum to overturn the actions of the legislature in closing the Rogue River said in 1932:

There are plenty of fish for both the touring angler and the commercial fishermen. The commercial industry should have the surplus of the harvest of chinook salmon. Otherwise they go to waste.[13]

Generally, commercial fishermen claimed they were providing fish for the consumer; that not everyone was able or willing to catch his own fish. The sports anglers
countered by arguing that their purpose was to preserve the opportunity to fish for everyone. The sports anglers claimed that commercial fishing benefitted only a few wealthy businessmen. The sports anglers also argued that commercial fishermen only worked part time, that they did not depend on fishing for their livelihood, and in the late 1800's and early 1900's commercial fishermen were criticized for being transients, coming from San Francisco for the fishing season and then returning. These fishermen, people said "were not a stable element of the population."

From the sport-commercial conflict a major philosophical question has evolved, "What is the appropriate use for salmon and other fisheries resources?" Is the appropriate use in stimulating a recreation industry? Before World War II salmon was an important food item. Its nutritional value was lauded, and its price made it competitive with other food items. After World War II with rapid population increase, with the increase in the productivity of land food crops and livestock operations, and with increased leisure time of workers and the retired, salmon fishing became one component of a recreation industry.

The ballot measures of 1956, 1962, and 1964 highlighted the fish for fun or food issue which dated back to 1910 with the first initiative attempt to close the Rogue River. Roderick L. Macleay, successor to R.D. Hume in the Rogue commented on the attempts by sports anglers to eliminate commercial fishing on the Rogue. He said in 1910, "They have enlisted the aid of those who for their own private purposes, are willing to make a 'play thing' of an Oregon industry."

Far more sports anglers fished for trout than for salmon and steelhead; however, fishing for fun became a major part of Oregon's third largest industry--recreation and tourism. Paradoxically, in the first quarter of the twentieth century the salmon canning industry was Oregon's third largest industry. The importance of salmon in stimulating a recreation industry is a secondary economic impact of exploiting the salmon resource. Studies have been conducted comparing the value of each. They have not been conclusive because the issue was not economic but philosophic, and the history of Oregon fish fights shows that there is no absolute right answer. The answer is based on people's philosophies and the politics of winning broad acceptance of these philosophies. (Figure 3) Coupled with this is the overall context of societal needs. The answers to the questions of fish for food or fish for fun, how salmon will best serve society, decision-making by specialized elites or through the electorate,

**VOTE 312 YES—FISH BILL!**

**YOUR FISH WILL SOON BE GONE!**

**It's Dangerous!**

**Going! Going! Soon GONE!!**

Help save Oregon's salmon and steelhead before it is too late!
The Oregon legislature has twice passed bills with overwhelming majorities to help save Oregon's FISH LIFE. Once in 1941 and again in 1943, Governor Earl Snell signed the bill. Each time the referendum, with less than 15,000 names, has been invoked by a few selfish fishermen to defeat our legislature. VOTE 312 X YES and help our legislature save our fish.

Ballot Measure Advertisement, 1946 (Save Oregon Salmon and Steelhead Committee)
elimination of gear which harvests the most fish, and too many fishermen have not been worked out once and for all. Each of these issues has been continually a part of the process of determining who should have access to fish resources and how much they should obtain.

Reviewing information on one hundred years of Oregon fish fights does not provide any absolutes in terms of what is conservation, what are continuing social needs which fisheries resources must serve, or what policies should be followed? Oregon fish fights illustrate that conservation is really a social and economic issue of competition for resource availability which is fought out with the politics of conservation. Even the pattern of competitors was not uniform. Gillnetters joined labor, the Grange, and sportsmen to pass the 1925 initiative measure barring fishwheels, traps, and seines over the opposition of business interests and upriver interests. Gillnetters joined with business interests in 1928 to help defeat a sports angler initiative petition to restrict water appropriations from the Deschutes, McKenzie, Rogue, and Umpqua Rivers. In 1948 gillnetters and sports anglers joined together to prohibit haul seines. In 1962 gillnetters, labor, and the legislature joined in opposition to a sports angler initiative to make steelhead a game fish, and in 1964 labor, industry, business, the Grange, and gillnetters opposed the sports angler initiative to close the Columbia River to gillnetting.

What did seem to have been a pattern in the politics of conservation was for each group to attempt to develop broad public support for its position. Having broad support then the initiative position or referendum was a route to get one's way. Not having broad support required a more elitist approach in attempting to protect or win an allocation of the resource. The Oregon Toter best summarized the politics of conservation on November 2, 1928, when it said: "the catch word of 'conservation' is employed to give respectability to what really is a bold attempt to seize...a fishing preserve."
Footnotes


3. ORS 506.028 defines conservation as "providing for the utilization and management of the food fish of Oregon to protect the ultimate supply for present and future generations, preventing waste and implementing a sound management program for sustained economic, recreational and esthetic benefits."


6. Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union, Columbia River Salmon Fishing (Astoria, 1890).


10. Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union, Minutes.


15. Ibid., p. 76.

16. Ibid., p. 75.

17. Ibid., p. 77.

18. Ibid., p. 75.


20. Letter, Carl D. Shoemaker to Governor Pierce, May 10, 1924. (Portland, Oregon Historical Society, Columbia River Packer's Association, Box 6.)

22. Oregon, Legislature, Report of Special Committee to Examine into and Investigate the Fishing Industry of this State (Salem, Frank L. Baker State Printer, 1893) p. 4.

23. Ibid., p. 10.


25. Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union, 1890, p. 5 and 14.

26. Weekly Astorian, August 20, 1887.


28. Columbia River Fishermen's Protective Union, 1890, p. 4-5.

29. Oregon, Board of Fish Commissioners, First and Second Annual Report for 1887-1888 (Salem, 1889), p. 4.

30. An industry organization opposing the 1962 and 1964 initiatives.


34. U. S. Bureau of Fisheries, Canned Salmon is Cheaper than Meats (Washington, G.P.O., 1914).


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