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UNITED STATES

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

In reply refer to:
N1423

January 18, 1957

Memorandum

To: Superintendents, Crater Lake, Lassen Volcanic, Mount McKinley, Mount Rainier, Olympic, Sequoia and Kings Canyon, Yosemite

From: Regional Chief of Interpretation, Region Four

Subject: Proposed fishery resources management in natural areas of the National Park System

There is attached a copy of a statement on the Service's fishery policy and proposed fishery management objectives in the natural areas of the National Park System which has been submitted for review and comment.

The statement, we believe, is self-explanatory. A firm program definitely is needed which will be suitable for consistent application throughout the Service for trout and other cold-water fisheries. Fishery management in the recreation areas such as Lake Mead would be undertaken under somewhat different policies and objectives as befit their status.

It will be appreciated if you will review the attached statement, discuss it with those concerned with fishery problems in your area, and furnish us your comments not later than February 11.

(SGD) DORR G. YEAGER

Dorr G. Yeager
Regional Chief of Interpretation

Attachment



THE FISHERY POLICY AND PROPOSED MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES FOR THE NATURAL AREAS OF THE NATIONAL PARK SYSTEM

POLICY

Fishing within the parks is permitted under management programs, stocking procedures, and regulations directed toward the protection, perpetuation, and restoration of native species and natural populations of fish.

FISHERY MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

The laws establishing or accepting exclusive jurisdiction over many individual areas specifically permit hook-and-line fishing in waters under the administration of the National Park Service. Fishing has become a deep-rooted tradition in many parks and monuments despite the fact that it appears to be inconsistent with fundamental conservation concepts of the Service. Now the Service is faced with the problem of regulating the continued public utilization of fishery resources under increasing angling pressure which, in many cases, threatens to exceed or already has exceeded the normal capacities of individual waters to produce harvestable surpluses.

The stocking of lakes and streams with hatchery-raised fish to offset overutilization has long been practiced in most areas. If the Service continued to depend primarily upon artificial replenishment of fish populations by stocking, one of its basic conservation objectives would be further undermined--that of preserving natural conditions. Aside from scenic considerations, it would be just as logical to harvest mature trees and replant seedlings. Because fish are relatively easy to produce in hatcheries does not alter the basic fact that such fish are not produced naturally. Moreover, stocking programs commonly have led to the introduction of non-native species. These observations are not made to imply that fish stocking is not a useful tool of good fishery management. They are made only to raise the question of the propriety of fish stocking as a primary management measure in the natural areas of the National Park System.

Consideration of some basic facts-of-life respecting trout is important, recognizing that these are the principal species with which the Service is concerned in most areas. The capacity of a given stream or lake to produce fish is limited by its inherent quality. Stocking other than catchable-sized fish in waters having suitable natural spawning habitat usually fails to improve fishing success. Thus management to provide fish for the creel becomes increasingly artificial as greater dependence is placed upon stocking with fish ready for the hook. The question again is not whether this type of management is right or wrong in heavily-fished streams, but whether or not it is appropriate in the national parks and monuments.

Another important consideration is the relation of fish production to the welfare of native fish-eating birds and mammals. Fish for food are essential to the welfare of some species. In Yellowstone Lake, for example, 10 pounds of blackspotted trout are removed by birds and mammals for every 5 pounds removed by fishermen, according to one serious estimate. Also, habitat in and adjacent to some waters becomes unattractive to certain terrestrial and amphibious animals when fishing activity is the rule. Thus, the conservation and utilization of fishery resources plainly is important to the over-all conservation of animal resources.

The Service, in an increasing number of areas, is at the crossroads where a decision soon must be made on the future direction to take. The choice is between primary reliance upon artificial replenishment or the preservation and rehabilitation of native stocks of fish and the regulation of fishing within the production capacities of the waters concerned. The latter choice would not necessarily mean that compatible fishing opportunities would be denied to the public, but it would mean a reduction in the taking of fish for the pan in many cases. Low creel limits or fishing-for-fun only, without keeping the catch, are methods that are being tested. Complete closure of some waters might be balanced against management for fishing in others, including stocking. Several combinations of techniques are possible, and local situations would have to be considered in making these decisions.

Proposed Basic Management Program

The foregoing discusses the basic problem confronting the Service in fishery management, particularly as it pertains to trout. The following suggests a pattern of management calculated to pull together the varying practices now in vogue in the System and to direct them all toward a common objective. This objective is stated generally in the approved policy quoted at the beginning which envisions closer agreement between fishery resources management and the conservation of other biological resources in the National Park System.

1. The first step in developing a management program would be an orderly appraisal of existing fisheries resources. This must be accomplished by qualified fisheries technicians. The Service is now planning to strengthen both its own program and cooperative arrangements for research on fisheries matters with the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service. Appraisal by areas would include:

a. A review of original conditions and the history of introduced species, if any.

b. A classification of waters based on their capabilities of supporting indigenous aquatic animals and plants.

c. A review of fishing success and fishing demands.

d. A determination of the importance of stream and lake habitat to nonaquatic animals.

e. A review of area development programs in relation to fish habitat protection and utilization.

2. Development of fishery management plans would follow this appraisal. First the problems in individual areas would be identified and evaluated. In some areas a transition period for adjusting from present practices to a long-range plan would be necessary. A determination of the extent of fishing that could be permitted would be fundamental to developing the plans for each area. If practicable, the elimination of exotic species and the re-establishment of native fishes would be prominent objectives considered in developing the plans.

a. Development of plans for immediate implementation.

b. Development of long-range plans, coincident with MISSION 66 planning.

3. The development of a positive information program to acquaint the public with the objectives and policies of the Service in fishery management would be essential to the successful and harmonious achievement of the desired results. A unified and consistent approach to this important objective necessarily would be followed by all Service personnel.

4. Throughout the initial and long-range phases of this program, the counsel and advice of fishery management authorities, both Federal and State, would be sought and utilized to the fullest advantage. Understandings would be sought on problems shared jointly with agencies administering fishery resources in adjacent areas and in waters contiguous with streams arising in or flowing through the Service areas.

5. Cooperative fisheries research would be encouraged within the framework of general Service policies and the Service fishery management objectives.

Warm-water, coastal, and marine fishery resources under the jurisdiction of the Service would require separate consideration based upon their specific characteristics and needs. Fishery management and fishing in the recreational areas where the preservation of natural conditions is not a primary objective also would be treated accordingly.