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FISHING-FOR-FUN AND NOT FOR MEAT ON YELLOWSTONE LAKE

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Montana Wildlife Federation at Bozeman, Montana on December 3, 1960.

Between June 15 and October 15, each year, Yellowstone Lake in northwestern Wyoming is one of the most heavily fished bodies of fresh water in the United States. The area of 139 square miles of water at an elevation of 7,731 feet is stocked with native black-spotted cutthroat trout. Natural reproduction alone sustains the fishery population. Of the 284,516 fishermen counted on Yellowstone River and the Lake in 1959, some 215,000 fishermen caught 393,467 fish from Lake waters at a fishing success rate of .716 fish per hour of effort. These fish averaged one pound in weight and were about 14.4 inches in length. More fishermen fish in Yellowstone National Park each year than in the whole State of Montana and take more fish. In 1959, Montana recorded 232,731 fishing license holders while those fishing in neighboring Yellowstone National Park exceeded 300,000 persons (no license required).

Fishing-For-Fun With Barbless Hooks

This (a gentlemen's sport), is a management device or tool to reduce the total number of fish taken from the Lake in order that they may spawn one or more times and still be available to the angler who wishes the thrill of hooking and playing a large native fighting fish prior to releasing it unharmed. The mark of the angler in Yellowstone will be the number of fish hooked and released unharmed from barbless hooks, rather than the number of fish or pounds of fish caught for the creel. Our brief experience of one season has shown that only 3 out of every 50 fish hooked securely with barbless hooks (flies and lures only, including treble hooks) are so damaged in eye, mouth or gills that they die in a short time when released.

However, for those visitors to Yellowstone National Park who want fish for camp use or who choose not to participate in the "Fishing-For-Fun" program, a daily bag and total possession limit of 3 fish per fisherman will be retained in Park regulations for the Yellowstone Lake area. Meat fishing will be discouraged at Lake and throughout the Park. There is no intent that a fisherman may catch his legal limit of 3 fish and then continue on a "Fishing-For-Fun" basis. Rather, the fisherman would fish and release his catch uninjured, keeping only the occasional fish hooked severely in gills or eyes.

Purpose of the Program

The bounteous native cutthroat trout resource of Yellowstone Lake has existed in a natural state since effective discovery of the Park in August 1870. Millions of fishermen since that time, have enjoyed this recreational resource unsurpassed in America. Through better management practice we hope to perpetuate this bit of the American Heritage for the enjoyment of future generations without artificial planting of fish. Due to the relative ease of catching one-pound fish in Lake waters, many inexperienced fishermen catch and retain more fish than can be eaten by a single family. This has led to great wastage of the resource. Others catch a string of fish for photographic purposes only and then discard the fish. A small segment of the visiting public fish solely to fill ice chests or lockers before returning home. This is in violation of the legal possession limit. Wastage of fish in the month of July 1959, alone, at Fishing Bridge Campground amounted to 7,500 fish counted in garbage cans. It is our belief that the "Fishing-For-Fun" campaign will materially reduce the wastage of this great natural resource.

Background of Need for Fishery Management

The Bureau of Sports Fisheries of the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service has studied the native cutthroat of Yellowstone Lake intensively since 1949. Their findings and recommendations are our guide to better management of Yellowstone's bounteous fishery resource owned by all people of these United States. Studies indicate that Yellowstone Lake will support an annual harvest of some 350,000 fish per year through natural reproduction with present season of June 15 through October 15. In 1958, the first warning of overfishing came to the research team when spawning trout suddenly gained size and weight above those recorded in past years. Fishermen that year had caught 349,000 fish from Lake waters, thus approaching the pre-determined limit of reduced return for the available resource. In 1959, the prediction of researchers was borne out when the average spawning fish declined in length and weight, indicating that the Lake was definitely being overfished. By the end of the season, some 215,000 fishermen had caught 393,000 fish or 43,000 more than the resource could stand under normal conditions. Fortunately, in 1960, the catch dropped to 328,000 fish allowing time for management to institute remedial measures to protect and prolong the resource.

"Fishing-For-Fun" - A Personal Appeal to Sportsmen

The Yellowstone Lake "Fishing-For-Fun" program was first announced publicly in January 1960. The summer was spent in making studies and in selling government employees and others on the merits of such a program on both a local and national level. To the surprise of management it has not become controversial, but has been heartily accepted in principle by employees, Park Concessioners, local sportsmen's clubs and by National Conservation organizations. On June 15, 1961, with the opening of fishing season at Yellowstone Lake, the program will officially go into effect with possible slight adjustment of present Park fishing regulations. Park Concessioners will offer barbless hooks and lures for sale and concessioner boatmen on the Lake will encourage public participation. By means of press releases, posters, talks to local clubs, and a series of public interpretive campfire talks, the Park Rangers and Naturalists will attempt to sell the idea of cooperative conservation of the fisheries resource to those thousands of fishermen who visit Yellowstone. From a public relations standpoint, we hope to appeal to the personal pride of organized sportsmen and the general fishing public who cherish the unspoiled abundance of fishing pleasure which can be continually perpetuated as a part of the American Heritage.