



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 8, 1941

All elaborate gear and tackle gadgets notwithstanding, angling is still a horse-and-buggy sport!

And, thanks be that, this is so, adds Milton C. James, Assistant Chief of the Division of Fish Culture, in commenting on the new policy of the Fish and Wildlife Service regarding methods of distributing the output of its fish hatcheries, in the current issue of The Progressive Fish Culturist. This, "even though it has acquired some modern embellishments, and the time is not yet ripe for the complete banishment of that little piece of paper known as the 'fish-application' whereby the sportsman and his Government got together to preserve angling until Science could get around to tackling the same job."

In the belief that methods of disposing of the game and pan-fish production at the Federal hatcheries could be modernized, the views of several members of the staff were canvassed and pooled, with the result that on November 26 Secretary of the Interior, Harold L. Ickes, approved a new statement of policy. Condensed, its salient features are:

- (1) Primary obligation of the Fish and Wildlife Service will be in the stocking of waters on lands under the control of the Federal Government--such as national parks, national monuments, national forests, etc.

(2) Secondary obligations will lie in stocking state waters, including the lakes, streams, ponds, etc., which are open to public fishing.

(3) After apportioning the hatchery output to meet the above obligations, any remaining fish may be utilized in filling applications for private waters, this term to be construed as meaning lakes, ponds, or streams which are not open to the general public and which are not commercialized in any way.

"The Service", according to the statement, "will continue to receive applications bearing Congressional endorsement as in the past. However, the Service will exercise full freedom of action in assigning species and determining the time and method of delivery. It shall be the Service's effort to cooperate as far as possible with the applicants and members of Congress who have endorsed the applications but the applications shall be handled in accordance with the priority set forth above."

In explanation of the new fish stocking policy, James says, "The fish-application and the assignment of fish to non-public waters will still be with us. A fish-application, of itself, is not a pernicious instrumentality. Taken literally, as an 'application' and not as a promissory note of the U. S. Government, it need not breed any of the evils which have been charged to it....The local sportsmen, organized or as individuals, through the submission of their applications, can be a vital agency in taking care of the stocking requirements of such waters until such time as the areas may be brought under management practices. These applications, shorn of their status as an obligation and subject to sound administrative judgment and discretion, will no longer keep the Federal hatcheryman on a production treadmill.

"Under this re-statement of policy", continues James, "Federal fish can go to waters which are not open to the general public. If such waters are commercialized, either directly or indirectly, the owners will have to look to commercial sources for their fish."

Always retaining the right to head off abuses of the privilege, the Service can render an indirect public benefit by reserving the right to stock certain categories of private waters when circumstances warrant. Thus, provision can be made to allot fish to the farmer and the small landowner having a pond or creek on his property which he may have constructed at his own expense, who is recognized as performing a public service as laudable as the planting of trees or the feeding of birds and game.

"In this shuffling of stocking objectives", concludes James, "the Government dealt from the bottom and took care of its own requirements first. Federal land holdings are extensive and as far as possible they are dedicated to multiple use. These lands include some of the premier fishing waters of the Nation, and many of them are readily subject to varying degrees of fishery management. Such management plans cannot be fully realized unless there is a dependable supply of hatchery fish to be managed. At this time no one can say to what extent the strictly Federal requirements will consume the output of the Federal hatcheries. However, the ever-increasing production of game and pan-fish will probably be sufficient to leave a generous quota to be placed in State waters to complement and supplement the programs which the States have devised."

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