



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release to PM's MONDAY, MAY 7, 1945.

The smallest domestic sponge production in all the years for which figures are available brought the highest price in history at the Tarpon Springs, Fla., sponge exchange in 1944, the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior reported today.

The Service revealed that 37,531 bunches of sponges brought fishermen the record total of \$2,551,863. In the previous year 41,773 bunches sold for \$2,305,079. Prior to the war years as many as, or more than, 200,000 bunches of sponges changed hands in a year on the unique exchange.

It was estimated last year that the sponges sold averaged \$13 a pound. It is probable that this price was exceeded in 1944. A "bunch" of sponges is the number of sponges a fisherman puts on a wire four feet ten inches long. In recent years the weight of these bunches has varied from three to ten pounds. The average weight of the bunches sold at Tarpon Springs last year has so far not been obtained by the Fish and Wildlife Service.

Lack of skilled divers is primarily to blame for the shortage of sponges although the effects of a blight which destroyed huge numbers of sponges in the 1930's is still being felt. Sponge diving is a highly specialized occupation, usually handed down from father to son, and replacements for divers taken into the armed services are not often obtainable.

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