

THE COPPER RIVER FISHERY.

When the fishing season of 1917 opened, it was found that seven canning companies had made preparations to take salmon from the Copper River. It was also learned that there would be a large increase in the amount of fishing gear employed, all of which gave promise of intensive and perhaps exhaustive fishing of those waters. The activities in this locality in 1916 were sufficient to cause some apprehension that serious inroads into the continuing supply of salmon might be made, thus threatening the existence of a valuable fishery. Special inquiries were therefore made in order to ascertain the facts and real conditions of the fishery that out of the knowledge thus obtained the needs of the salmon of the region might be learned, and measures adopted to bring about their greater protection. Accordingly Mr. James H. Lyman, assistant agent in the Alaska Service, spent much of the summer of 1917 on the Copper River in observing the effect of increased operations upon the escapement of salmon and examining several of the spawning grounds. Dr. Charles H. Gilbert of Leland Stanford University, California, also made valuable observations in respect to the exhaustion of the fishery.

As a result of ^{Dr. Gilbert's} ~~his~~ work, coupled with that of Mr. Lyman, conditions were brought to light which, in the judgment of all interested parties, required careful and serious consideration if the permanency of the fishery were to be maintained. That the Copper River was over fished was admitted by all.

It was shown that approximately 60,000 fathoms of gill nets were used in the Copper River fishery in 1917, as compared with approximately 30,000 fathoms in 1916. The greater part of this gear was

operated in the waters of the delta, and the catch of salmon in that section was correspondingly increased over that of 1916. There was, however, considerably more gear employed in Miles Lake, but in proportion to the total number of fathoms used, the catch was much less than in 1916, thus showing conclusively the effect of extended operations about the delta. The Copper River fisheries produced 890,000 salmon of all species in 1917, as compared with 869,350 in 1916. Of that number, 62 per cent was taken from the waters of the delta, while the remaining 38 per cent came from all sections of the river above the delta. Although the catch was slightly larger than in 1916, the run of salmon in the river was regarded as being less for the reason that an increase of 100 per cent in the amount of gear operated under ordinary circumstances would net a proportionately larger catch.

The Indians of the Copper River valley, in accordance with their custom of the past twelve years, again protested against the extensive fishing operations on the river by the canning companies, and complained that the run of salmon was so light that they could not secure a sufficient supply of fish for their summer needs, much less those of the winter. The sincerity of the Indians in thus annually raising a cry of need, and picturing themselves as extremely destitute and reduced to the verge of starvation may well be questioned. It may be doubted that their murmuring and complaining would not be heard as a matter of course, frequent repetition having become habitual, if, unknown to them and those who encourage their manifestations of discontent, every salmon coming to the Copper River in 1918 should be allowed to escape and ascend to the spawning ground. It is not in evidence that they have fared worse than the Indians in many other

localities who may be even less fortunately situated; nor does it appear that they have been the object of any special benefaction by the people of Alaska or the Government. The plea of the natives is therefore discredited by its continual repetition. Their position at times has been so obviously at fault as to remove the possibility of adopting any efficacious measures in their behalf without a total disregard of the rights of others. Overzealousness on the part of their ostensible benefactors weakens their cause immeasurably and makes more difficult the accomplishment of plans for their immediate amelioration and ultimate betterment.

The general condition of the Copper River fisheries was not satisfactory, and the preponderance of evidence weighed against a continuance of unrestricted fishing in any of its stretches. It was regarded as one of unusual importance, and one that merited early attention. After due consideration of all phases of the matter, a hearing was held at Seattle, Washington, December 14, 1917, to consider the advisability of limiting or prohibiting fishing in the waters of the Copper River. It was attended by representatives of all the canning companies now operating in the Copper River district, and a general discussion of the entire subject ensued. Various plans were proposed and discussed, and much information of value was adduced. As a result of this hearing, an order was promulgated on December 29, 1917, restricting in several ways commercial fishing in the Copper River and the waters of its delta. This order became effective January 1, 1918.

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As a result of his work, coupled with that of Mr. Lyman, conditions were brought to light which, in the judgment of all interested parties, required careful and serious consideration if the permanency of the fishery were to be maintained. That the Copper River was over fished was admitted by all.

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operated in the waters of the delta, and the catch of salmon in that section was correspondingly increased over that of 1916. There was, however, considerably more gear employed in Miles Lake, but in proportion to the total number of fathoms used, the catch was much less than in 1916, thus showing conclusively the effect of extended operations about the delta. The Copper River fisheries produced 890,000 salmon of all species in 1917, as compared with 869,350 in 1916. Of that number, 62 per cent was taken from the waters of the delta, while the remaining 38 per cent came from all sections of the river above the delta. Although the catch was slightly larger than in 1916, the run of salmon in the river was regarded as being less for the reason that an increase of 100 per cent in the amount of gear operated under ordinary circumstances would net a proportionately larger catch.

The Indians of the Copper River valley, in accordance with their custom of the past twelve years, again protested against the extensive fishing operations on the river by the canning companies, and complained that the run of salmon was so light that they could not secure a sufficient supply of fish for their summer needs, much less those of the winter. The sincerity of the Indians in thus annually raising a cry of need, and picturing themselves as extremely destitute and reduced to the verge of starvation may well be questioned. It may be doubted that their mumbling and complaining would not be heard as a matter of course, frequent repetition having become habitual, if, unknown to them and those who encourage their manifestations of discontent, every salmon coming to the Copper River in 1918 should be allowed to escape and ascend to the spawning ground. It is not in evidence that they have fared worse than the Indians in many other

localities who may be even less fortunately situated; nor does it appear that they have been the object of any special benefaction by the people of Alaska or the Government. The plea of the natives is therefore discredited by its continual repetition. Their position at times has been so obviously at fault as to remove the possibility of adopting any efficacious measures in their behalf without a total disregard of the rights of others. Over zealousness on the part of their ostensible benefactors weakens their cause immeasurably and makes more difficult the accomplishment of plans for their immediate amelioration and ultimate betterment.

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The Copper River Fishery

When the fishing season of 1917 opened ~~on the Copper River~~, it was found that seven tanning companies had made preparations to take salmon from the Copper River. It was also learned that there would be a large increase in the amount of fishing gear employed, all of which gave promise of intensive and perhaps exhaustive fishing of those waters. The activities in this locality in 1916 were sufficient to cause some apprehension that serious inroads into the continuing supply of salmon might be made, thus threatening the existence of a

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H. Lyman, assistant agent in the
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in observing the effect of increased
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③ As a result of his work, coupled with that of Mr. Lyman, conditions were brought to light which, in the judgment of all interested parties, required careful and serious consideration if the permanency of the fishery were to be maintained. That the Copper River was overfished was admitted by all.

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The greater part of this gear was operated in the waters of the delta, and the catch of salmon ^{in this section} was correspondingly increased over that of 1916.

There was, however, considerably more gear employed in Mule Lake, but in proportion to the

④ total number of fathoms used, the catch was much less than in 1916, thus showing conclusively the effect of extended operations about the delta. The Copper River fisheries produced 890,000 salmon of all species in 1917, as compared with 869,350 in 1916. Of that number, 62 per cent was taken from the waters of the delta, while the remaining 38 per cent came from all sections of the river above the delta. Although the catch was slightly larger than in 1916, the run of salmon in the river was regarded as being less for the reason that an increase of 100 per cent in the amount of gear operated ~~would~~ under ordinary circumstances would net a proportionately

larger catch. If the Indians of the Copper River valley, in accordance with their custom of the past twelve years, again protested against the extensive fishing operations on the river by the canning companies, and complained that the run of salmon was so light that they could not secure a sufficient supply of fish for their summer needs, much less those of the winter. The sincerity of the Indians in ^{thus} annually raising a cry of need, and picturing themselves as extremely destitute and reduced to the verge of starvation may well be questioned. It may be doubted that their murmurings and complaining would not be heard as a matter of course, frequent repetition having become habitual,

if, unknown to them and those who encourage their manifestations of discontent every salmon coming to the Copper River in 1918 should be allowed to escape and ascend to the spawning ground. It is not in evidence that the ~~Indians~~ of that region have fared worse than ~~those~~ ^{the Indians} in many other localities who ~~are~~ ^{may be} even less fortunately situated; nor does it appear that they have been the object of any special benevolence by the people of Alaska or the Government. The plea of the natives is therefore discredited by its continued repetition. Their position ~~has at times been~~ at times has been so obviously at fault, as to remove

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