

THE CONCRETE HERALD

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Steelhead Closure Arguments Reveal Many-Sided Theories

A group of upper valley fishermen attended a meeting of the Wildcat Steelhead Club in Sedro-Woolley last Friday night to hear Clarence Pautzke, state game department biologist explain why the upper part of the Skagit is being closed this year during a special season while the lower river from Grandy Creek down is being kept open.

The up-river fishermen protested the closure in a widely circulated petition, urging that instead of closing the river to catching of the adult steelhead, a size limit be placed on the small steelhead fry that are caught in great numbers each spring as "trout".

Mr. Pautzke explained in great detail the history of the steelhead run on the Skagit, what they were now doing in the way of planting a new run of the fish in the river and what their plans were for the future. He explained that the partial closure of the river was in the nature of an "experiment".

But when finally pinned down to any specific reason why the river above Grandy Creek to the Marblemount bridge had been singled out for the sole closure in the experiment, he could give no reason except: "Because we don't want you to fish there."

While the river will be closed from Grandy Creek to Marblemount, it will be open in all tributaries in this area and open above the Marblemount bridge. With this situation the upper valley men could not follow the reasoning in the closing of one short section.

The discussion at this point reached a stalemate and the session was concluded without result.

Witham Tells Steelhead Story

Ed Witham of Marblemount, who has lived on the Skagit all his life and is an ardent fisherman, was

quick to take up the biologist's challenge for someone to explain the cycle of the steelhead run.

Witham stated that the steelhead fry come out of the upper spawning areas as minnows during July, August and September, then disappear until the next July when they show up in great numbers as small trout from 4 to 6 inches in length. After a month or so going upstream they again turn back down and in October appear again in sizes up to 9 inches long. After that they go into the salt water for two years and return as adult fish.

He stated that the biggest run of adults hit Marblemount in April and May, are spawned out in May to July. The peak run from Birdview up is in March and April.

Mr. Pautzke differed with Witham on the length of time the small fish are in the upper part of the river. He said they moved down into the lower water quickly and did not return as small trout. His opinion was that they spent their entire second year on the lower river.

In explaining the present experiments on the Skagit the biologist said that it had been the opinion of the department that the Skagit would never need plantings, but as the runs began to deplete from the changes made by dams, logging, etc. it was discovered in 1934 that a definite dropping off was in process.

Through experiments on the Green river it was found that the Skagit was just not producing as many steelhead as its waters were capable of maintaining. So the experiments began here.

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