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NATIONAL ASPECTS OF ANGLING AND THE PROTECTION  
OF GAME FISHES



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## NATIONAL ASPECTS OF ANGLING AND THE PROTECTION OF GAME FISHES.

By H. WHEELER PERCE,  
*President National Association of Scientific Angling Clubs.*

In view of the many mightier subjects confronting this distinguished body, I feel constrained to be brief, particularly as I know you will accord the official delegates from this association an opportunity to voice the sentiments for which we stand. My love of the sport of angling, however, and my regard for my fellow-anglers, are so great that I can not refrain from presenting a few of my ideas, Utopian though they may be, regarding the situation as I see it, and commenting also upon those points, reforms, and conditions which I know my fellows advocate. We are indeed gratified that angling and sport fishing constitute a portion of your programme, and I think it safe to say that many thousands of people will be more or less affected by what you may do in this one branch of your deliberations.

Whatever the arguments pro and con may be concerning angling as a sport, the fact remains that it is contributory to the happiness and health of very many of our citizens. The number of people who engage in the sport either crudely or in the most scientific manner, ranging from the boy with the cotton string and penny hook to the deft master of the delicate bamboo weapon, is simply astounding, and can not at present be estimated. But their name is legion.

Thousands upon thousands of dollars are invested in enterprises devoted solely to supplying these people with the paraphernalia appertaining to the sport. From one end to the other of this broad land of ours, wherever the waters attract, will be found buildings ranging from the rude slab cabin to the great caravansary, devoted to the needs of angler guests and in numberless instances catering only to this class. These investments aggregate millions of dollars and with their necessary operatives constitute an industry in themselves.

Land and water transportation companies reach out for the business the angler's patronage means to them, in many instances even going so far as to expend funds in stocking the waters along their lines in order that these waters

may remain prolific and an allurements to the lover of fishing. Guides and boatmen by the hundreds, the owners of vehicles, the builders of boats, the dealers in specially prepared clothing, food, and equipments make up an army in themselves. Laying aside all my natural bias due to the intense interest with which I regard all matters appertaining to angling, frankly, it seems to me that these few enumerated facts are prima facie evidence of the importance attaching to the sport.

These great interests, however, combining both the strictly commercial and the no less important simply recreative, find themselves confronted with conditions that if not bettered will in a few years be no less than appalling from our standpoint. The causes of these conditions are many and varied and the necessary steps looking toward their reformation are fully as numerous.

Ruthless deforestation, that most horrid mark of man's insatiable greed, has contributed to the depletion of our beautiful waters. The inference here is plain that a renewal of the forests would be contributory to a reestablishment of earlier good conditions. Streams in many localities that but little more than a decade ago sheltered the fastidious grayling are now barren, for this beautiful creature must have eternal shade.

Manufactories by the thousand pour their foul refuse into the living streams with which God has blessed this glorious land. As a practical man, with some knowledge of filtration and disposal of refuse matter, I feel warranted in boldly asserting that this type of offense could be remedied in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred without any severe tax on the offender.

Night fishing with jack lights, seining, spearing, dynamiting, and all wastefully destructive methods of capturing game fishes, together with the use of obnoxious, murderous lures, constitute an unending menace to the game fish life of our American waters, both fluvial and lacustrine. The remedy here, as in all cases, is proper laws, but, more important still, their proper enforcement. It may be asserted in generalities that the different state laws now in existence, and all more or less meritorious, fail in results because of their nonenforcement in an efficacious way. In many cases this nonenforcement is not venal because of no available resources from which to raise funds to provide for the maintenance of a proper force of officers. It is gratifying to know that in a few localities wise laws prevail and are properly enforced, and in these few localities results indicate splendidly the value of such conditions.

Another potent cause of the falling off in numbers of our game fishes is their capture during the spawning season. This needs no dissertation, for we all know how prolific fishes are if given a chance to reproduce properly. Here again is a question for the lawmaker.

Not the least cause of trouble arises from that peculiar phenomenon in human nature, the respectable lawbreaker. Honorable men, who would not pick a pocket or cheat in business or lie or break any of the usual laws, in many

instances seem devoid of an appreciation of the law in its relation to game or game fishes. They not only do not seem to think it is wrong to break the law but to imagine it is entirely justifiable, their only concern being to avoid detection and capture. This type of offender usually reforms, particularly if he comes under the educational influences of some friend possessing the true sportsman's instinct, but his activities would be materially lessened and his education in sportsmanship hastened if the laws of the United States hung over him.

Would it not be possible, feasible, and advisable to have a federal law in relation to all of these abuses and concerning the proper protection and conservation of game fish? And would not the lawbreaker under such circumstances face the more serious difficulties always attendant upon federal prosecutions? Would not his respect for the law be greatly enhanced and his fear of the consequences of his ill doing increased? To-day, at the best, the lawbreaker confronts simply a state law enforced by a petty officer more or less subject to influences of an irregular sort and oftentimes in a community not in touch with the spirit of the law. Would not a federal law establishing a latitudinal closed season during the spawning period be of inestimable value? This would permit of the legal and sportsmanlike capture of game fishes immediately after the spawning season and would protect the fishes in those sections where spawning occurs earlier than in others and so on up through the different latitudinal sections from south to north. These divisions could easily be established from our knowledge of the spawning habits of game fishes and naturally apply more to basses than to trout, but in the latter case proper sectional provisions could be made.

Regulations restricting the number and size of game fishes to be taken in a given time in the open season by any one person and governing the type of appliance permitted for their capture—the number and kind of hooks used, etc., cuts an important figure—in the minds of many of us should be very stringent.

The sale of game fishes at any time, except for stocking purposes, should be absolutely prohibited, and in many quarters it is conscientiously believed this is the crux of the situation, and that if such a condition could be brought about the problem of depletion would be almost if not fully solved.

Another serious matter which threatens the welfare of the game fishes of our rivers and lakes is the introduction and rapid increase and spread of coarse types alien to the waters they now infest. Their ready adjustment to the new environment and their destructive habits are too well known to need comment, and their extermination is assuredly expedient, even at the expense of the small commercial value they represent, for this is surely of no moment as against the inestimable value of clear, undefiled streams, well supplied with noble food fishes, the rightful heritage of all the people and for their honest use in an honest way and as originally given by the Giver of all good.

Still another question that appeals to many of us and which could be adjusted through national legislation is nonresident discrimination in the matter of rod or gun license which exists in some of our States and which is unpatriotic and selfish, contrary to the spirit of the Constitution, and repellant to every free-born American who loves his entire country. To the true sportsman there are no divisional lines, and his neighbor from afar is as welcome to fish in his home waters as the citizen of his own county. Would it be asking too much of Congress that a congressional committee on game and game fishes be established? Assuredly it would not be too much to ask that the subject of game and game fishes be incorporated in the work of some existing congressional committee.

I have tried to restrain my enthusiasm and be as brief as possible, while according my subject at least some scant consideration. I have viewed the situation only as it exists in the United States. Surely our good friends from the older countries can give us great help and advise us wisely from their store of knowledge acquired through their longer experience.