

Contor Gives 'Super's' View Of ONP Native Fish Picture

The level of aquatic biomass in Olympic NP is "unnaturally low," according to Park Supt. Roger Contor. "What we are experiencing is a literal silent spring. With the introduction of exotic stocks of fish to the park streams and rivers, we no longer represent 'a primitive vignette.' Hatchery fish indirectly cause extermination of some wild stocks, and when wild fish don't go upstream then everything else that depended on those fish simply fades out of the picture."

Contor described "the whole vibrant tapestry that once buzzed with life" —the Dolly varden, whitefish, cutthroat trout, and steelhead that ate salmon eggs; the black bear, wolves, skunk, bob cat, eagles, ospreys, even the ravens and seagulls. All these life forms once were present in teeming numbers around the salmon runs. Now they are much less abundant."

Olympic is the only national park in the contiguous 48 states with major anadromy, yet "we have no built-in understanding or concern for salmon and the sea-run trout," he said. "We have been asleep at the switch at Olympic. We have had no fishery biologist, no involvement in court

disputes, no close role in setting the seasons."

Whereas other parks of major natural significance have taken leading roles in shaping public policy that affects these parks, Olympic NP has not. This is so, Contor said, "despite the fact that our policies are clear enough. Fisheries management shall be specifically aimed toward preservation or restoration of the full spectrum of native species, including fish; and regulated for native species so that mortality is compensated by natural production. Artificial stocking . . . may be employed only to reestablish native species."

That is our major — our **only** — mandate, Contor said. And it allows us to establish gene pools of wild stocks, allows much more rapid changes in sport fishing regulations than is possible outside the park, and makes possible more experimental kinds of regulations which would be difficult for State fish commissions to approve.

"To get our heads out of the sand," Contor told the conferees, "we have promulgated new special fishery regulations for Olympic NP, contracted for research, cooperated with Washington State Game and

State Fisheries departments and the local sportsmen's clubs, and gotten acquainted with most of the tribal fishery biologists on the Peninsula."

With some glee he added, "And now we're going to hire a fulltime fishery biologist at the park and work him to death."

A three-pronged approach to solution of the problem was proposed by Contor. "It has become clear to me," he said, "that the 1974 Boldt decision created a role for the National Park Service and that role will be exercised either by action or by default."

"Until the present, the so-called 'escapement' of fish has been a matter decided by two parties — the Indians and the State — and refereed by the judge. The solicitor who represented the Indians is now going to represent the National Park Service too."

Whenever the State and the Indians disagree on what the fishing seasons should be, they have to go to the court for decision. The court, said Contor, "has a lot of advisors, and the decision is made on the basis of all the advice."

In effect, what the judge has said is this: "You people cooperate, and set your seasons, or I will set them, and neither one of you will like it."

Faced with this reality, Contor devised his own holistic approach to what is essentially a holistic problem: "The problem is biological, legal, and political," he said, "and only an approach that matches the problem will make headway toward solving it."

In the biological area, the park is getting into contracted research with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and hiring its own full-time fish biologist.

"We're getting involved in the legal court decisions concerning fisheries, and we're making a heroic effort to communicate with all the user groups who have a stake in the fisheries."

"The facts are forcing us into all three areas," Contor went on. "With the exception of the Queets, we don't have control over the full length of a single river. We can't have our way alone. We have to cooperate with others who have what (to them) seem equally valid claims."