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CLUSTER LAKES REGIONAL REPORT

by

John R. West
September 3, 1976

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to summarize and discuss the findings of preliminary lake inventories performed on lakes in the Cluster Lakes area. Cluster Lake #1, #2, Big Bear, Little Bear, Silver and Feather Lakes were studied between August 19 and 21, 1976

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Experimental gill nets were set in Cluster Lake #2, Big Bear Lake, Silver Lake and South Feather Lake on the nights of August 19, 20 and 21, respectively. Gill nets were set in the evening between 1700 and 1900 and removed between 0700 and 0900 the next morning. The nets remained in the lakes for approximately 14 hours each set.

Smaller lakes in T31N, R5E, Sections 13, 22, 23, 24, 25 and 27, including Soap and Emigrant Lakes, were inventoried during the same study period.

All inventories included a photograph of the lake and descriptions of various physical, morphological, chemical and biological factors important not only to fish and wildlife, but to man's recreation and enjoyment as well.

RESULTS

Results of each lake inventory are given in separate lake reports.

None of the lakes in the area appeared to be capable of supporting naturally reproductive populations of rainbow trout (Salmo gairdneri). Water level in most lakes was lower than normal and in some cases (ie: Cluster Lake #1 and Little Bear Lake) surface acreage was reduced to less than 50% of acreage at "full pool". Spawning areas in streams were noticeably absent and none of the lakes had flowing inlets or outlets.

Signs of human use are abundant and many visitors were seen in the area during the latter part of the study period. At most lakes environmental damage had not been too extensive, but Cluster Lake #1 and Little Bear Lake appear to have suffered moderate damage. No campers were seen at either of these lakes, probably because of extremely low water levels during the study period.

NB# 24592
NPS

West
(Cluster)

Wildlife was abundant in the area. Black tailed deer (Odocoileus hemionus columbianus), mule deer (Odocoileus hemionus hemionus), pine martens (Martes americana), golden mantled ground squirrels (Citellus lateralis), chipmunks (Eutamias sp.) and Douglas squirrels (Tamisciueus douglassi) were most evident and appear to dominate the mammalian fauna of the area.

DISCUSSION

Lack of cold-water sportfish populations in this area does not surprise me. The factor most likely responsible for this lack of fishlife is probably the absence of spawning areas. Most lakes in this region were at one time stocked with rainbow trout and apparently those stocked populations have since died off or been removed by anglers.

Although no fish were captured in the nets, this does not preclude their presence. A catch of zero fish indicates that a population is either absent or present in such low abundance that it is of little value as a sport fishery.

Many, if not most, of the lakes investigated would probably support a stocked trout fishery. Physical, morphological and biological conditions in the lakes meet minimum standards for supporting maintenance stocked populations, but fall short of criteria necessary to maintain self-sustaining populations. Some of the lakes may be able to support reproductive populations of eastern brook trout (Salvelinus fontinalis), but as an exotic it is undesirable in National Park wilderness area waters.

I would recommend that these lakes be left in their present fishless condition. I do not feel that maintenance stocking of a "native" or stocking of an exotic would enhance the recreational value or quality of the backcountry experience for most visitors. None of the visitors I spoke with had fishing as their primary interest, in fact, most considered "solitude" and "naturalness of the area" the most important factors.

Although I am not concerned over the fishless state of the area, I am concerned about possible future damage to it. All of the systems investigated are somewhat fragile. The area receives moderate to heavy use and could easily be overused.

I recommend a closer look at the "human carrying capacity" of the area. Following this, I advise regular and frequent patrolling to ensure its protection and rehabilitation. In addition, I would recommend that closure to camping at Cluster Lake #1, Little Bear Lake and Feather Lake (North) be given serious consideration.

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