

IS OUR SALMON FISHING BECOMING A SPORT OF THE PAST?

by R. H. Seeton

This article is a reprint from the April, 1934 edition of The Forest Crusader. Dr. Gordon Silver gave it to us. Dr. Silver, 17 years of age and Dr. Gordon, 19 years old, were both medical students in 1928, when they caught five fish on the St. Mary's River in one great day of fishing.

I have fished for salmon for over a quarter of a century, but I am still a novice, as there are many salmon fishermen in Halifax with a longer experience than mine (Many of these are like Johnnie Walker, still going strong).

In my early years I only fished for trout, as did most of the sportsmen. Salmon fishing was then confined to a very small minority. Gentlemen constituting this minority were, and are sportsmen of the best type, and an article from one of them would give a far better idea of salmon fishing in the earlier days when the fish had a free run in the rivers to their spawning grounds. The advent of the motor car has greatly increased the number of salmon fishermen. Rivers are now very easy of access and there are now probably fifty rods to one of twenty-five or thirty years ago.

Hydro development has played havoc with our rivers. The East River, Sheet Harbour, one of the finest salmon rivers in Canada, has been practically ruined, and Indian River at St. Margaret's Bay reduced to a river-bed of rocks. The latter was a favourite haunt of salmon fishermen. Fresh run fish were taken as early as March. The Gasperaux River, one of the most beautiful in the province, has now one or two pools below the power dam where a few fish may be taken, but all the other pools are practically ruined. One cannot belittle the use of hydro, but surely our salmon fishing from both a sporting and commercial angle is also an asset. If salmon cannot get to the spawning grounds it will only be a question of time when our salmon industry will be a thing of the past.

I have always contended that our own people should be able to enjoy the privilege that they had years ago, and any appeal that I have ever made has been more on those lines than the attracting of tourists. However, they have many sportsmen in the United States and if our rivers were looked after properly we would undoubtedly greatly benefit. But what have we to offer them today? Rivers blocked by hydro, no real enforcement of the law regarding netting, and abuses in the way of jigging, etc., in our rivers and a constantly diminishing of our salmon.

Not long ago the writer was called on by a prominent citizen to say that he had a message from a gentleman in New York who wished to come down for a few days' fishing. I told him the truth about our fishing conditions, and said that he might have fair fishing but that only. After this information was supplied, the next day the gentleman

telephoned that he would not come. He went to Newfoundland. When one realizes that thousands of dollars are being spent annually in Newfoundland by our Nova Scotia sportsmen, is it not time to call a halt?

The question of netting in the estuaries in the rivers has come up on different occasions and the pros and cons have been trashed out. The net fisherman refers to the sportsman as the white-collar. I have always thought that education in this matter is a very necessary thing, and I think it would be well that a meeting should be arranged between some of our legitimate net fishermen and sportsmen of the province to go thoroughly into this matter.

Two things must be done. The netting in the estuaries of our rivers must be cut down and some protection given in the rivers that have hydro development to see that the fish get to their spawning grounds and that the specimen and young fish are protected from the turbines on the way down.

This article is written with the hope of interesting not salmon fishermen but Nova Scotians in general, as to my way of thinking it is of vital interest.