

THE CONCRETE HERALD

Formerly the Hamilton Herald Established Nov. 23, 1901. Oldest Paper in the Upper Skagit.

August 26, 1954

The Open Forum

OPEN LETTER To James Ovenell, State Rep.

(The letter below is written to acquaint Mr. Ovenell with the feelings of the upper Skagit sportsmen in regard to closing of the upper Skagit to sport salmon fishing. He has offered his help in seeing what can be done to correct the situation.)

“Mr. Ovenell:

Some years ago, the Skagit River was closed to salmon fishing by the Dept. of Fisheries. Why this was done remains a mystery to hundreds of sportsmen up and down the Skagit Valley. At that time the Dept. of Fisheries claimed the salmon that came above the mouth of the Baker River were unfit to eat – which is about the most ignorant statement the Dept. has made to the public.

“At one time the river was closed down to salt water, but due to pressure from larger sportsmen clubs at Mount Vernon and Sedro-Woolley, it was opened up to the mouth of Gilligan Creek. This is far out of reach for us who live in the upper Skagit.

“Mr. Schoettler, who is the head of the Dept. of Fisheries and has the say of the river being open or closed, was called in to several sportsmen meetings in the past few years with the sole intent of asking him to open the river up to salmon fishing. Nothing was ever gained by any of the meetings. Mr. Schoettler has made it very clear to all that were present

that he was working for the commercial fishermen’s benefit and not the sportsmen. Mr. Schoettler also admitted there had not been any research done before closing the river as to what harm the sportsmen had done to the salmon run. He was told of the gill netters and purse-seiners who were fishing far up in the mouth of the river (which is illegal). He made the statement that he had not known this was going on, but it seems very strange that even the people of Marblemount have known of this condition for years.

“Morris Splane, our state game warden, was present at some of these meetings. He stated that when the river was opened to the Skagit Bridge he would check possibly 30 or 40 salmon in a season caught by sports fishermen. He was up and down the Skagit River every day.

“If the gill-netters and the purse-seiners were closed out of the bay or mouths of the river for one day during a salmon run it would mean more for the salmon spawn than closing the river to sports fishermen for ten years in the upper Skagit.

“A biologist at one of the meetings stated that they had counted the spawning beds between Concrete and Marblemount by airplane, and could even tell which were King salmon and which were other species. This is about as fantastic a statement as has been made by the Dept. in some years.

“We of the upper Skagit want the same privileges of salmon fishing as those on the lower Skagit, which is only fair to all

concerned. A salmon is a salmon no matter where he is caught. If left alone down in the bay or in the mouth of the river he will spawn in the upper parts of our rivers. So why should we be deprived of trying to catch one up here, which is often only a very few hours from the time it leaves the mouth of the river. Anyone knows we are not interesting in fishing the salmon spawning on the riffles of the Skagit.

“The way the river is closed now is making law breakers out of good, clean sportsmen who are asking no more than other fishermen are getting elsewhere. Some of the fishermen have even gone out with a gaff hook to get a salmon for their family only to be caught and fined by standing out in the open trying to catch a salmon on a spinner in a sportsman-like fashion.

“Most of the salmon eggs that are taken for the fish hatchery here at Marblemount are taken by local talent. The Dept. of Fisheries has found out that a college education just doesn't fit on the end of a gaff pole. In closing I would like to say this – any law enforcing agency which doesn't have the will of the people behind it is pretty weak. The closing of the Skagit River to salmon fishing certainly doesn't have the will of the people behind it.

Very truly yours,

MERVYN PETERSON”