

THE COURIER-TIMES

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Game Protector Splane Cites Reasons For Skagit Closing

So much interest and open condemnation of the state game department was expressed by sportsmen and others, following the recent announcement of the closing of the Skagit river for its entire length to all sport fishing, from the first of April to the twenty-eighth of May that it seemed advisable to contact Game Protector Morris Splane and learn the game department's side of the story.

After announcing that all lowland lakes would be open to fishing beginning next Sunday, April 2, Splane gave the following reasons for the closing of the Skagit.

"As you know, the new closure will go into effect on the Skagit river the first of April. From the first of April to the twenty-eighth of May, the entire Skagit river will be closed.

"You are familiar with the fact that a change such as this is a conservation measure, designed to protect and perpetuate migratory game fish inhabiting the stream. Possibly, however, you are not entirely familiar with all of the reasons which were taken into consideration when the closure was put into effect. Fundamentally it was for the management of the steelhead and cutthroat in the coastal waters, and for their protection during two periods or stages in their life history.

"We have assembled considerable data which indicates that the majority of young steelhead go to salt water when they are approximately two years of age. At this time many of them, if not most of them, are legal sized fish. Their migration from fresh to salt water extends over a period of several months. It is heaviest from about the first of April to the middle of May. It has been found that these fish may be readily taken at this time and it follows that if the catch

of these immature fish is large, the numbers of returning adults is proportionately reduced. Therefore, in order to avoid depletion from this cause, we find that it is necessary to have a closed period so as to guarantee a sufficiently large escapement.

"In some of the streams, such as the Skagit, returning adult steel-

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SPLANE DISCUSSES SKAGIT CLOSING

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head will ascend the stream during every month of the year. The winter run fish reach the peak of their run from February to April. It is rather fortunate that this situation exists, as a single spring closure will serve a dual purpose. The immature migrants as well as the late spawning adults will both be protected by the one closure.

"You should also bear in mind that a peculiar condition exists on the Skagit at present. For the last three winters, the flow of this stream has been controlled to a large extent by the orders of the Federal Power Pool. The power industry at present is being operated with the basic idea of conserving as much fuel as possible for the war effort. This has resulted in a more or less erratic release of the waters impounded behind the Skagit dams. The sudden rise and fall of water which the Skagit has been subjected to for the last three seasons undoubtedly will have some effect on future runs of fish. Just what this effect will be, we cannot tell at present, but it serves to emphasize the need for rather strict conservation measures.

"You must remember that we have been talking principally of steelhead; however, it has been found that runs of steelhead and cutthroat had many factors in common and that conservation methods employed for the protection of either of the two species, will materially aid the other. Also remember that steelhead are primarily a four year fish—that is, they reach maturity at the age of four years.

"Laws or conservation measures established for the protection of any fish, birds, or animal, often require several generations before any permanent or greatly enlarged benefits result. Therefore, we ask that when a closure such as the present one which is being put into effect April 1, it be given sufficient time to prove either its merit or lack of merit. Sometimes we are impatient and desire changes before the older methods have been given a fair trial. When such changes are made, at frequent intervals, we are still unable to measure the results with any degree of accuracy.

"We have found that nearly everyone, whether sportsman or conservation agent, who has worked with migratory fish, has formed rather definite ideas as to the life history of the fish and as to what is needed for the protection of it. Strangely enough, these ideas vary quite widely and, in many cases, conflict with each other. Do not be confused by this fact, but just remember that we are only following the most fundamental and basic principals of migratory fish management. It adds up to allowing a sufficient number of migrants to escape seaward in order to bring back a run of adult fish sufficient to provide a sports fishery, plus an adequate escapement of spawning stock for the maintenance of the runs.

"Suggest that you get a little necessary newspaper publicity on this new closure in order that the public will be given every opportunity to be informed of this change."