



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

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UNITED STATES FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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INTERIOR OPPOSED TO PAYING BOUNTIES ON FISH PREDATORS

The bounty system has not proved to be the most effective and practical way to control pest species, Assistant Secretary of the Interior Ross L. Leffler said today in submitting to Congress a report opposing enactment of S. 2719.

The purpose of the proposed legislation is to provide for the payment of bounties for the control of certain predators such as hair seals and sea lions in the fisheries of the Pacific coast and Alaska.

Assistant Secretary Leffler stated that the Fish and Wildlife Service, backed by 40 years of experience, has found that bounties generally serve more as a means of harvesting an annual crop of the pest species being bountied, rather than as an effective measure of control of the predators. Under such a system, predators are taken where the task is easiest and least expensive, and not necessarily where their taking does the most good, he said.

For many years the Alaskan Territorial Legislature has authorized bounties on hair seals along most of the southern coast of Alaska. More recently the bounty has been applied to hair seals in the Bering Sea and part of Norton Sound. Many thousands of dollars have been spent on these bounties, however, without any appreciable benefit to the salmon or other fishery resources.

In preference to paying bounties, Assistant Secretary Leffler declared that direct control measures which provide for the employment of professional hunters and trappers who concentrate their efforts in problem areas are much more effective and less expensive. In the Copper and Stikine River districts, for example, where hair seals prey on the salmon runs and also cause damage to fishing gear, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game has applied direct control measures which are proving to be far more practical than a bounty system.

The United States Fish and Wildlife Service is now conducting a vigorous restoration program to rehabilitate the Alaska salmon runs. Studies are being carried on in cooperation with the Fishery Research Institute of the University of Washington to ascertain what effect hair seals, sea lions, and other predators have on the abundance of salmon.

The Pacific halibut fishery is in a very productive condition, according to reports of the International Pacific Halibut Commission, and has yielded maximum catches in recent years. Assistant Secretary Leffler, in his report to the Congress, pointed out that the Commission has never made any attempt to control halibut predators.

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