



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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INTERIOR'S FISHERY AGENCY BEGINS ITS NINETIETH YEAR

Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall today congratulated Interior's Bureau of Commercial Fisheries which began its 90th year of activity this week.

It was on February 9, 1871, that the Federal Government entered the field of fisheries. On that day, the Congress created a one-man fish and fishery commission. Later an appropriation of \$5,000 was made. The law provided that the Commissioner was to be a qualified person who was already on the Government payroll and who was to receive no extra compensation for the new duties.

The Bureau of Commercial Fisheries of the Fish and Wildlife Service now has a responsibility in charting America's course in the development and utilization of fishery resources by developing the scientific facts pertaining to the many facets of those resources.

To do this, the Bureau has at this time 18 biological laboratories, 28 biological field stations, 5 technological laboratories, 2 technological field stations, 7 gear research and exploratory fishing bases, 10 market development offices, 36 statistical collection points, 7 market news service offices, as well as field headquarters for river basin, marine mammal, and fishery management activities; loans and grants offices; and several biological research and exploratory fishing vessels--again a far cry from the "two rooms in the basement" which housed the Commission some nine decades ago.

These far-flung operations are supervised from Regional Offices at Juneau, Alaska; Seattle, Washington; St. Petersburg Beach, Florida; Ann Arbor, Michigan; and Gloucester, Massachusetts. There are Area Offices at Terminal Island, California, and Honolulu, Hawaii.

That the Congress in 1871 had little idea of the enormity of the task ahead or that the work of its one-man Commission would extend over a lengthy period of time is evidenced by the fact that no provision was made for quarters or office space. Hence the Commissioner had to convert a portion of his private residence at 1445 Massachusetts Avenue, NW., Washington, D. C., into an office-laboratory. Later the house next door was rented with Congressional approval. Still later, in 1889, the Commission, which by that time had grown, was collected under one roof in the Armory Building at Sixth and B Streets, SW., where it remained for about 40 years until it moved into the Department of Commerce Building.

The Fish Commission got off to an auspicious start by the selection of the first Commissioner, Spencer F. Baird, an outstanding biological scientist at that time. In fact, when Professor Baird moved to Washington from Dickinson College, Pennsylvania, in 1850 to become Assistant Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution, he shipped his huge private collection of two carloads of biological specimens to the Institution.

Professor Baird's studies substantiated the reports that the supply of fish in New England waters was decreasing, but he found no evidence of any shortage of food for those species nor any evidence of epidemic disease. He came to the conclusion that the chief reason for the decline was the activities of man. For that reason, he recommended that the taking of fish by trap or pound be stopped on weekends during the spawning period, which was about six weeks each year for the species concerned.

The construction and the launching of the vessel Fish Hawk in 1880 was the beginning of a fleet which has included as many as 17 "ocean-going vessels" ranging in length from 57 feet to 179 feet and 100 inboard and outboard craft varying in length from 16 feet to more than 40 feet.

The second vessel was the Albatross (the first of three by that name) constructed in 1881. The Albatross was used for biological research and exploratory fishing in the Atlantic from Halifax to the West Indies. Later it sailed through the Straits of Magellan and did 28 years of service in the Pacific Ocean.

Both the Fish Hawk and the Albatross did a "hitch" in the Navy. The Fish Hawk was a gunboat in the Mosquito Fleet in the Spanish-American War, and the Albatross was an auxiliary cruiser in the same conflict. The Fish Hawk was decommissioned in 1926 after 46 years of service. The Albatross was decommissioned in 1924.

The early years of the century saw many changes in fishery activities. By an act of Congress passed February 14, 1903, the Fish Commission was made part of the Department of Commerce and Labor, effective July 1 of that year. The name of the organization was changed by order of the Secretary to the Bureau of Fisheries.

And the Bureau of Fisheries or the U. S. Bureau of Fisheries it was to remain until 1939-1940 when it was transferred from the Department of Commerce to the Department of the Interior and united with the Bureau of Biological Survey to become the Fish and Wildlife Service. Its present title, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, stems from the reorganization of 1956.

In 1911, an international convention was formed for the protection of fur seals. Signatory powers were Russia, Japan, Canada, and the United States. The result is that under the management and protection given through the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, the Pribilof Islands seal herd has stabilized at about a million and a half animals, about ten times the number there when the convention was signed. The herd produced a \$4 $\frac{1}{2}$ million harvest last year.

It was in 1923 that the first of a series of international conventions on fish was signed. That year the United States and Canada formed the International Convention for the Conservation of Pacific Halibut. As a result, the annual harvest has almost doubled and the yield is sustained year after year.

The famous Fraser River sockeye salmon fishery was converted from a dwindling resource to an enlarged and sustained one by the agreement between the United States and Canada in 1937. These two nations, again working in unison and utilizing information on sea lamprey control developed by the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries scientists, are about to emerge victorious from the long fight to rid the Great Lakes of the predatory sea lamprey. Other international conventions are also showing results in the effort to provide management and sustained yields of designated fish stock.

There are many milestones in the 90 year history.

Bureau biologists investigating tuna resources in the Pacific some 10 years ago discovered what is now called the Cromwell Current (after the oceanographer who found it) deep in the Pacific Ocean. This great river well beneath the surface is probably a thousand times greater than the Mississippi.

An air bubble curtain has been found to be a veritable stone wall in stopping and turning traveling schools of fish in the sea and in aiding their capture.

Chemical analyses of fish and fish oil have opened the door to many things, one of which is the possibility of controlling cholesterol levels in the bloodstream and subsequently lessening the danger of heart attacks by including fish or fish oils in the diet.

Secrets of refrigeration, transportation, and otherwise handling of fish have been probed and techniques developed to assure the consumer top quality fishery products. Product inspections and grade standards have been instituted.

Consumer buying habits have been probed; methods of preparing intriguing fish dishes have been made available to the housewife. Market reports, including data on prices, supply, and demand, have been made available daily to both buyer and seller.

Exploratory fishing has discovered new shrimp stocks in the Gulf of Mexico, in Alaska waters, and off the coast of the northwestern States; new lobster beds have been found in deep water areas off New England; tuna, in the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic Ocean and in various areas in the Pacific Ocean; commercial scallop beds have been found off the southeastern coast; hard clams, discovered off North Carolina shores. Gear research has developed through the use of underwater television, and the telemeter has been adapted to midwater trawl fishing.

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