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INTERIOR DEPARTMENT ANTI-POLLUTION DAM SAVES FISH RUNS IN CALIFORNIA'S UPPER SACRAMENTO RIVER

Thousands of migratory steelhead and salmon in California's Sacramento River will owe their lives to the apparently successful operation of a Department of the Interior anti-pollution dam.

The Department's Spring Creek Debris Dam--built by the Bureau of Reclamation to protect valuable commercial and sport fish spawning grounds--traps silt and chemical laden water, then slowly releases it in amounts below levels potentially toxic to fish in the Sacramento River.

Spring Creek flows into the Sacramento above Keswick dam, carrying water which drains the historic mining areas near Redding. The water spilling from the watershed brings minute particles and soluble forms of copper, arsenic, lead, zinc, and other chemicals.

By storing large quantities of runoff, then releasing the potentially toxic water in small quantities, the water below Keswick dam, where salmon and steelhead concentrate during spawning season, has been kept safe. Before construction of the dam, large numbers of fish were periodically wiped out by the polluted water from Spring Creek.

Assistant Secretary of the Interior Frank P. Briggs noted that the Spring Creek Dam marked a major milestone in the development of answers to problems of water pollution management. The dam facilitates nearby power production, provides flood control, and--most critically--handles the carefully controlled discharge of potentially dangerous polluted water. The primary effect of the dam is to preserve and protect uncounted thousands of salmon and steelhead, favorites of both sport fishermen and commercial operators, he said.

"It is an interesting footnote to the reported success of the dam," Assistant Secretary Briggs said, "that this dam is, in reality, one of the prices we are paying in the 1960's for the development of northern California's rich

mineral deposits a century ago. Its success, however, strengthens the determination of Federal and State water planners and officials to put the full weight of modern scientific technology into solving the complex problems of water throughout the Nation."

The Spring Creek Dam reservoir provides storage space for some 2,000 acre-feet of sediment--enough to last an estimated 50 years. The dam was completed in the summer of 1963 and with heavy rains in September 1963, it received its first crucial test. The largest storm so far was in November, when the reservoir was filled to more than half its holding capacity.

Regulated releases began November 8 and continued through the first week in January. As the Spring Creek water was mixed with Sacramento River water and with water from the Trinity River, it was diluted to the point of being safe to fish in the lower river. Despite the runoff of an estimated 6,000 acre-feet of polluted water from the old mining areas so far this season, there has not been a single report of damage to salmon or steelhead in the Sacramento River.

Before construction of Shasta Dam, heaviest runoffs of these polluted waters coincided with flood flows from the Upper Sacramento, and the toxic compounds were diluted before they could do serious damage.

But since 1944, Shasta Dam has controlled flooding on the Upper Sacramento and the polluted water from Spring Creek has been entering Keswick Reservoir at times when releases from Shasta were low.

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