

THE CHALLENGE OF FISHING-FOR-FUN

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Former President Herbert Hoover, an ardent fly fisherman, sums up the benefits of fishing in his new book, Fishing For Fun and to Wash Your Soul: "Fishing is a chance to wash one's soul with pure air, with the rush of the brook, or the shimmer of the sun on the blue water. It brings meekness and inspiration from the scenery of nature, charity toward tackle makers, patience toward fish, a mockery of profits and ego, a quieting of hate, a rejoicing that you do not have to decide a darned thing until next week."

Furthermore, he adds: "The reason for it all is that fishing is fun . . . nor is it the fish we get that count. We could buy them in the market for mere silver at one percent of the cost. Fishing is much more than fish; it is the vitalizing lure to outdoor life . . . I am for fishing for fun as a contribution to constructive joy because it gives an excuse and an impulse to take to the woods and to the water."

Each of you share this conviction. We are all gathered here at this national convention of Trout, Unlimited to determine ways and means of perpetuating the fun of trout fishing.

Fishing-For-Fun is a concept that there is more to fishing than filling one's creel. It is a philosophy that numerous authors have expressed and that a multitude of anglers have enjoyed for many years. Now this concept is being translated into trout management plans; initially, of course, on an experimental basis.

These plans feature the catch and release of wild trout and regulations which require the use of artificial lures or flies, reduced creel limits or no-kill restrictions, increased size limits, and special seasons. They recognize and enhance the traditional quality of trout angling.

The origin of Fishing-For-Fun is somewhat obscure. Upon a search of the literature on fishing, one finds that writers have long extolled the pleasures of angling amid scenic and placid surroundings and not the thrill of the kill alone.

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Ninety years ago, in 1873, W. C. Prime, in his volume, I Go A-Fishing, fostered the concept of catching and releasing of trout and critically condemned the thoughtless ones who find pleasure in killing fish for the mere sake of killing them. He presents one of the first citations in American literature of fishing with a barbless hook to permit the return of trout unharmed.

The obvious value of conserving trout populations by catching and returning of fish has been observed by many anglers who followed. Earnest fly-fishermen have voluntarily followed this practice. Private clubs have required the observance of this procedure on waters they control.

Shortly after the turn of the century, William B. Mershon, the famed Saginaw sportsman, expounded the merits of this practice. At his urging, Michigan Legislature enacted one of the first fly-fishing-only laws in this country to protect the trout on the Au Sable River.

John Alden Knight in his book, The Modern Angler, reports on the requirement which permitted the fly fisherman on the Kennebec River, Maine, to catch as many fish as he could but required that he return all but one trout to the water. He also mentions the formation of the "Fourteen Inch Club," the membership of which consisted of a group of young anglers who vowed to return all trout caught that measured less than 14 inches.

Starting during the early 1940's there has been a trend toward reducing the creel limit as a means of protecting trout populations. Dr. Albert S. Hazzard in 1943 wrote about the necessity of this measure. A couple of years later he wrote that "The only hope for improving trout fishing is by restricting the kill on waters now overfished . . . if the trout fisherman wants such exceptional fishing at a reasonable cost he can have it if he is willing to release most of the trout he catches after he has had the fun of deceiving and landing them."

Pennsylvania Fish Commission adopted the motto, "Kill Less -- Catch More!" in 1949 and later revised it to read "To Catch More, Kill Less!" This was one of the educational objectives of the creation of "Fisherman's Paradise."

Dr. R. W. Eschmeyer's thought-provoking article, "Want Less Fishing?" contained facts which are even more vital today than they were when published in Sports Afield in October 1948. He commented that "the catchable portion of the fish population must be shared with hundreds of anglers instead of with just a few. Our portion is becoming so small in some localities that fishing may no longer be attractive to many of the anglers . . . We can try to educate anglers to fish for fun. We no longer need the meat as the pioneers did. Fishing now benefits us mainly in providing relaxation . . . we must learn to fish for fun . . . one way to provide more fishing is to put back the fish we catch."

He predicted that "Folks will be slow to support the suggestion that the fish be returned to the water to provide another thrill later."

In 1952, Dr. Hazzard made the startling suggestion that fishing could be made even better if laws required the return of all fish by making it illegal to have trout in possession at anytime. With the exception of restrictions on the types of lures, additional regulations such as closed seasons, creel limits or size limits would become needless under such a proposition and an angler could fish for wild trout at anytime.

Responding to this suggestion, the National Park Service and the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service cooperated in the establishment of a pioneer Fishing-For-Fun, no-kill program in Great Smoky Mountains National Park, North Carolina-Tennessee. This seemed to be a logical place for such an experiment as park regulations already required the use of artificial lures and a U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service research team, headed by Dr. Robert E. Lennon, was engaged in studying park waters and trout populations.

At the start, the program was placed on the Bradley Fork in North Carolina and on the West Prong of the Little Pigeon River in Tennessee during the regular season with a requirement that all fish caught should be returned to the stream.

Public acceptance of the new concept was forthcoming to the degree that the program was extended in 1958 with provisions that anglers could fish the year around on these waters and had the option of retaining trout which measured more than 16 inches. In addition, Little River, Tennessee, and Oconaluftee River, North Carolina, were opened on a Fishing-For-Fun basis during the winter and to regular regulations during the normal fishing season.

By 1959, the number of fish caught and released per hour of angling increased to four on the Bradley Fork and three on the West Prong. Pounds of Rainbow Trout in Bradley Fork expanded from 52 pounds per acre in 1954 to 60 pounds in 1959; in the West Prong the increase was from 15 pounds in 1954 to 53 pounds in 1959. Improvement in sporting opportunities was reflected on the West Prong by an increase in the number of trout, measuring 7 inches and longer, from 48 per acre in 1954 to 164 per acre in 1959.

The program is continuing in Great Smoky Mountains National Park although subsequent studies have not been conducted recently to determine the status of the trout populations.

Meanwhile, in Pennsylvania, Dan Reinhold, fishery biologist of the Pennsylvania Fish Commission, had been instrumental in inaugurating a Fishing-For-Fun program on the Left Branch of Young Woman's Creek

with no-kill, artificial-flies-only, and all-year season regulations in 1958. The project was expanded in 1961 to incorporate the Right Branch and the Renova Club waters. Although the program had favorable angler support and was biologically successful it was terminated without public notice in 1962.

A Fishing-For-Fun program opened on the Rapidan and Staunton Rivers in Virginia in 1961. The stream sections lie within the Ward-Rue Wildlife Management Area and Shenandoah National Park; thus the project is a cooperative effort between the National Park Service and the Virginia Commission of Game and Inland Fisheries.

Anglers are required to use artificial lures only, armed with barbless hooks, and to release all trout caught. Native brook trout and a small number of planted rainbow trout make up the stream populations. The program attracts much angler interest as few waters in this section of the country contain wild trout. The catch per hour on these streams is greater than on nearby streams which are planted with "put-and-take" trout and the angler-use extends throughout the entire season rather than rapidly declining after the opening day's rush.

At Yellowstone Lake, it has been discovered that many anglers discarded fish they catch. To stress the return of trout, a Fishing-For-Fun program was inaugurated in Yellowstone National Park in 1961 on a voluntary basis and more as an educational than as a regulatory activity. Fishermen are encouraged to use barbless hooks and return the fish they catch.

In California, Fishing-For-Fun was established on the Dana Fork of the Tuolumne River in Yosemite National Park as a 3-year experimental project in 1961. Fishermen on this stream are required to fish with flies and to return all trout caught. After two years of operation, it has been demonstrated that the wild stream populations, composed of brown, rainbow, and brook trouts, have increased ten fold.

In Kings Canyon National Park, California, a portion of the South Fork of the Kings River, and a section of the Middle Fork of the Kaweah River, in Sequoia National Park, were set aside as Fishing-For-Fun streams in 1962. Restrictions provide that fishermen use artificial lures only, armed with barbless hooks, and return all fish caught under 14 inches. On the Kings River, which is the better trout stream, angler-use and acceptance has proven to be greater than on the Kaweah River.

Additional waters in Katmai National Monument, Alaska, Mount Rainier National Park, Washington, Catoctin Mountain Park, Maryland, Yellowstone National Park, Wyoming, and Blue Ridge Parkway, North Carolina, are managed under fly-fishing-only or artificial-lures-only regulations.

Colorado in 1961 started a program on Parvin Lake and several other waters designated as "Quality Fishing Waters," on which an increased size limit of 14 inches and the use of artificial lures are required. Purpose of this program is to put the emphasis on the recreational qualities of trout fishing.

All trout under 14 inches must be returned in the Fishing-For Fun program operating in the Kettlefoot, Laurel Fork, Uniconi, and Andrew Johnson Wildlife Management Areas, managed jointly by the U. S. Forest Service and the Tennessee Fish and Game Commission between August 7 and October 6 when artificial lures only may be used.

In Oregon's first test of Fishing-For-Fun, no-kill restrictions, Mud Lake is open to fly fishing only and the use of barbless hooks with the stipulation that all Atlantic Salmon caught must be released.

Pennsylvania placed the "Fisherman's Paradise" Project on a Fishing-For-Fun basis in 1962. The stream is open to fishing the year around to anglers using artificial flies only but the trout must be returned.

By law, the Schoharie Creek in New York was established in 1962 as a Fishing-For-Fun project to ". . . permit a greater number of sportsmen to enjoy the sport of fishing with a minimum of disturbances to the natural production and maintenance of trout populations." Single hooked lures are required but the law did not specify "artificial lures." Fishermen return all trout they catch.

The Amawalk Outlet Fishing-For-Fun project, New York, was created in 1963 with restrictions which provide for no-kill and the use of artificial lures only. The protection of angling for wild trout is the aim of this project.

On the Delaware Wildlife Area in Ohio, three ponds are managed under Fishing-For-Fun regulations which require the use of barbless hooked artificial lures and the return of all fish caught. This program started in 1962 and operates for muskellunge and bass. In a similar program, Virginia has setup Fishing-For-Fun project on two ponds at the Front Royal Fish Hatchery.

Special regulation waters for trout on which the use of artificial flies or lures only are permitted are now found in 25 States. Eighteen States have fly-fishing-only waters; 15 have artificial-lures-only waters and 8 have both types of restricted waters. These States include: Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Some of these special restriction programs are primarily directed toward the increase in number of trout available for the creel, the spread of available trout amongst greater numbers of anglers, the decrease of pressure on specific waters; or the protection for populations of wild trout and specific species of fishes.

The Fishing-For-Fun type programs, additionally are conducted for the expressed purpose of experimenting with measures to recognize and to enhance the quality aspects of trout angling without damaging the basic trout populations and with minimum reliance upon the use of hatchery fish.

The catch-and-release concept is now well established amongst salt water fishermen along the east coast. Many tournaments feature the return of fish caught and give extra points for this activity.

There is a growing concern that in efforts to provide trout fishing for the masses, insufficient consideration has been given to perpetuating the traditional quality of trout angling and the protection of populations of wild trout.

Robert G. Martin, Chief of Fisheries in Virginia, has stated that an extension of the Fishing-For-Fun philosophy will fill the bill for anglers who prefer the thrill of fishing for natives at the expense of a full-take-home creel. He cites the Rapidan project as an example of getting more fishing pleasure from restricted trout stocks. He acknowledges that 95 percent of Virginia's trout anglers depend upon "put-and-take" plantings and that 5 percent of the State's trout fishermen really try to ignore hatchery fish.

The objective of the Rapidan Fishing-For-Fun program is expressed differently by Bill Cochran, who writes in Outdoor Life (June 1962) that the purpose is to see that plenty of trout are around to grow up and spawn and give fun to sportsmen who seek recreation and relaxation.

As solutions to the problem of more anglers and less water, the Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife (in: A Report on Sport Fish Restoration, September 1957) advocated the needs for: 1) Fish For Fun (Fishermen must put more emphasis on the fun of fishing than on filling the creel.); 2) Facts--not Fancy (need for research); and 3) Better Management.

The Outdoor Recreation Resources Review Commission (Report No. 7: Sport Fishing -- Today and Tomorrow, 1962) predicts that: "Fishing-For-Fun may eventually occupy a significant place in providing a special type of recreational fishing on selected waters. Wholesale application of the plan is not advocated by its strongest supporters, and widespread use would likely meet with determined resistance from the fishing public."

In a review I have just completed of Fishing-For-Fun, fly-fishing-only, and similar projects throughout the nation, the following general conclusions become obvious: 1) Anglers generally accept special restrictions when preceded by adequate educational programs and a conditioning period; 2) Special restrictions frequently reduce the angler-use of a water; 3) Trout populations build up under such regulations on many waters but on others such an increase is not noticeable and any benefit is offset by winter mortality; 4) The number of trout caught and the number of sporting opportunities (strikes at lures and misses and fishes hooked but not landed) increase on Fishing-For-Fun waters (many fish are caught more than once); 5) Such programs foster a spirit of conservation and thus have significant educational value; 6) Such waters provide ideal places for the novice fishermen to learn the art of fishing with artificial flies or lures; 7) Fishing-For-Fun programs perpetuate and enhance the recreational qualities of fishing for wild trout; 8) There is a continued need for research on special regulation programs.

Fishing-For-Fun and similar restriction programs create certain problems such as: 1) Adequate posting of waters; 2) Need for increased law enforcement; specialized regulations and the unfamiliarity of anglers with them require additional patrols; 3) Lack of sustained angler interest and use; 4) Pressures to select waters for special programs without adequate examination to determine the suitability of the water and its trout potential (poor selections have proven detrimental to the establishment of additional waters for special regulations); 5) The inability of some inexperienced anglers, even after being "sold" on the concept, to catch trout; 6) Complaints of discrimination (although such programs set aside selected waters for special use in a manner that a portion of city park is devoted to a golf course).

Various methods are recommended for making Fishing-For-Fun, as a philosophy and as an operating program, a powerful force in the challenge obligation of perpetuating the traditionally high standards of trout angling and of preserving wild trout populations.

- 1) Educate fishermen and the public, and administrators in the concept of Fishing-For-Fun with its catch-and-release philosophy for better sport. A multitude of approaches must be employed such as: a) incorporation of the message in newspaper articles and fishing columns in newspapers and magazines; radio and television programs, sport fishing tackle catalogues, and in talks.
- 2) Conduct of fly fishing classes to teach art of fishing and conservation, as well.
- 3) Finance scholarships for promising fishery biologists.
- 4) Support and work with State Fish and Game Commissioners and their professional staffs in the selection of waters and the operation of special programs.

- 5) Make use of special waters once established and inform officials in charge of your continued interest and participation.
- 6) Urge necessary research on special restriction programs.
- 7) Urge for adequate biological investigations to afford proper stream and lake classification based upon natural conditions and existing wild populations as the basis for individual stream management.
- 8) Support programs for the control, correction and prevention of pollution, of adverse land management practices; detrimental effects of dams and highway construction; creation of new waters; and acquisition of increased access to suitable fishing waters.

By doing this, members of Trout, Unlimited will accomplish its goal to do everything possible to help conserve, protect and improve trout fishing and to guard the heritage as it has been handed down through generations.

The challenge of Fishing-For-Fun is more than adequately presented in the statement of philosophy of Trout, Unlimited which reads:

"Philosophy of Trout, Unlimited believed that trout fishing isn't just fish for trout.

It's fishing for sport rather than for food where the true enjoyment of the sport lies in the challenge, the lore and the battle of wits, not necessarily the full creel.

It's the feeling of satisfaction that comes from limiting your kill instead of killing your limit.

It's communing with nature where the chief reward is a refreshing body and a contented soul, where a license is a permit to use -- not abuse, to enjoy -- not destroy our trout waters.

It's subscribing to the proposition that what's good for trout is good for trout fishermen and that managing trout for the trout rather than for the trout fishermen is fundamental to the solution of our trout problems.

It's appreciating our trout, respecting fellow anglers and giving serious thought to tomorrow."