

COMMERCIAL FISHING SALMON CULPRIT

by Hamlet Hilpert, Centralia, WA
The Chronicle, March 5, 1999

In 1908 President Theodore Roosevelt, an ardent conservationist, commented that the magnitude of Columbia River salmon runs was a fraction of those 25 years earlier.

At that time, in 1883, there were more than 30 salmon canneries located on the Sacramento River. By 1908 there were more than that along the Columbia River, some as far upstream as Lewiston, Idaho, that captured the fish with shore-based nets and fish wheels.

At the conclusion of World War I, the fishery had been depleted to the extent it was no longer profitable. But as late as 1928 more than 1,100 fishing boats were operating out of Ballard. Today, there isn't a shore-based cannery south of Alaska.

The precipitous decline toward extinction in less than a century of the northeast Pacific salmon resource is primarily the result of rapacious commercial fishing.

While resource biologists, environmentalists, Northwest governors, and legislators babble about loss of habitat, blockading of spawning runs by dams, predation by sea lions, water pollution, etc., the declining remnant of wild breeding stocks is being plundered by ocean trawlers scrambling to catch the last salmon.

If stream habitat could be instantaneously restored, pollution eliminated and sea lions exterminated, the resource would still be wiped out if the plunder within the 200-mile off-shore area between San Francisco Bay and Alaska's North Slope is not terminated.