

Towing the Line: The State of Minnesota's Dichotomy as Both a Regulator and Promoter of
Sportfishing

by

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“Thirty Bass in Thirty Minutes” Big Stone Lake, Minnesota. 1909¹

For the first 50 years after Minnesota gained statehood in 1858, it seemed implausible that Minnesota could at some point run out of fish. A survey on national resources and general industry published in 1870 states that every county in the state reports of “abundance of fish in all the streams and lakes.”² During the early years of the 20th century, photos boasting of a large daily catch such as the one above was incredibly common sights on postcards and in tourism documents. Tourism pamphlets-often published by the Minnesota State Board of Immigration-were littered with photographs and tales of fruitful days fishing, promising a picturesque wilderness vacation to anyone who sought it. One such pamphlet, *Minnesota, Her Hunting and Fishing*, not only details the great catches of many anglers, but assures the reader that their

¹ “Thirty Fish in Thirty Minutes,” Big Stone County Historical Society Museum, Ortonville MN, 1909.

² J. W. (John W.) McClung, *Minnesota as It Is in 1870: Its General Resources and Attractions: With Special Descriptions of All Its Counties and Towns*, St. Paul, MN: 1870. <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/100603893>. pg. 180

opportunities to fish will be preserved through a robust system of fish hatcheries that maintain the stock of the “important” lakes, rivers, and streams.³ Published in 1913, the incredibly detailed and optimistic report takes an interesting turn at the end. It offers a foreboding warning to its reader, “not many years will go by before the native waters of America will be ‘fished out’ and the last of this fine sport will probably be here, because of the lakes in the big North woods not yet reached by railroads.”⁴ Perhaps the most ‘honest’ reflection within the tourism document, it leads the reader to wonder on the negative impacts of technology, industry, and the growing popularity of tourism-based fishing.

By 1924, the State did not promote neither abundance nor egregious consumption of their Minnesotan landscape. The state had implied practically zero limits on how much and what resources could be taken from their environment, and there was zero concern or understanding of repairing and maintain the landscapes that native communities had carefully cultured over generations. By the mid 1900s in Minnesota, the State’s conversation around fish and general environmental bounty had centered around talk of *conservation* and *preservation*, rather than *propagation*. An entire regulatory agency, the State Fish and Game Commission, had been attempting to manage the hunting and fishing opportunities in the state for the last 50 years. A minor outdoor recreation economy had become a full-fledged industry, complete with advertisers, a regulatory system, and an increasing number of patrons and hotels. Unlike previous decades where men took daunting outdoorsy trips into the unknown great woods, by the 1920s nearly all sportfishing in Minnesota was done near luxurious hotels and quaint towns. Fishing tourism had made the waters polluted, crowded, and overfished. Even more threatening, pursuits of the State Game and Fish commission were starting to display negative effects. The local

³ Minnesota. *Minnesota, Her Fishing and Hunting*, St. Paul, Minnesota State Board of Immigration, 1913.

⁴ *Ibid.*,

bulletin for the commission, “Fins, Feathers and Furs,” published articles titled “Why Are So Many Fish Dying in Our Lakes?” rather than their usual tales of abundance and opportunity that awaited in Minnesota’s waters.⁵ Other conservation organizations, such as the outdoor enthusiast Izaak Walton League, gained popularity amongst outdoor enthusiasts who desperately sought to preserve their sports.

From promotion, to propagation, to preservation, the state was heavily involved in maintaining the opportunity to catch fish in Minnesota waters. Opportunity is a key term here, as preserving the fish of Minnesota was not an environmental pursuit of the state, but an economic pursuit. Fishing held an important role in both the economy and national image of Minnesota. Outdoor sport often serves as proxy for which a narrative of a landscape can be formed or maintained. For Minnesota, that narrative comes in the form of an angler’s paradise of 10,000 lakes. At the turn of the 20th century when outdoor tourism was established as a major player in the economy and threat to the stock of Minnesota waters, the State Fish and Game Commission reframed itself as a both a regulator and promoter of tourism-based sportfishing, creating a strict regime and rationalized sportfishing as a commodity that was to be methodically conserved and managed for in priority of elite consumption.

From hindsight, a fiscal analysis from 1999 on Minnesota’s Game and Fish fund reported, “Hunting and fishing has become a part of the State’s heritage and has since become a large part of the State’s tourism. This strong outdoor heritage has led to a strong interest in game and fish, therefore creating a need for hunting and fishing regulations.”⁶ The emphasis on heritage and tourism may be a result of the document being an economic analysis, however,

⁵ Minnesota and Board of Game and Fish Commissioners of Minnesota, “Fins, Feathers and Fur.,” 1924, no. 1, 26

⁶ Peter Skwira, “The Game and Fish Fund: History and Current Status.” *Money Matters: A Publication of the House Fiscal Analysis Department* 14, no. 6 (n.d.): pg. 8.

profit and industry are often great motivators for regulation. In this case, maintaining fish stock meant preserving the lakeside tourism economy and its profits. It's easy to ascribe modern environmental ideologies of intrinsic right to older preservationist laws, however, respect for the biotic community was not present in legislation until the 1970s. Acts that came out of that era, such as the Endangered Species Act, sought to preserve species on their own merits, for the sake of biodiversity, and to prevent extinction for no reason other than for the animals themselves. Early fishing regulations on the other hand, did not seek to preserve the stocks of fish for the fish's sake, but rather to preserve opportunities for sport hunters and tourism.

It is also important to emphasize that conservation sought to preserve human opportunities within the environment, rather than just the environment itself. It is easy to view conservation and environmental regulation as an antithesis to commodification and industrialization. However, both lenses through which humans conceive land and nature revolves around *resource usage*. Though it may be easier to say that resource commodification is far more destructive and exploitative lens to interact with the environmental when compared conservation, both motivations of resource usage emphasize human benefit and control. Attitudes of commodification and industrialization viewed nature as a reserve of commodities that could be extracted and exploited by industrialists. When examining sportfishing through a 'usage ideology' of commodification, sportfishing guides are to be sold by hotels and bought by guests, and sportfishing is profitable. Resources should be controlled in order to maximize fiscal efficiency. Conservation seeks to reserve nature for recreational usage by sports hunters and wilderness lovers. For those examining sportfishing through a conservation lens, sport fishers are to enjoy their time by the water and catch fish, sportfishing is enjoyable. Resources should be controlled to ensure recreational usage.

The birth of Minnesota's Fish and Game Commission coincided with the rise in American conservation that's most infamously associated with Theodore Roosevelt and the establishment of national parks during America's 'Progressive Era.' Historians often reflect upon the conservation era through the rivalry between wilderness activist and Sierra Club founder John Muir, and Gifford Pinchot, head of the U.S. Forest service and a proponent of the 'gospel of efficiency.' Pinchot's utilitarian philosophies built to "ensure the most efficient, profitable use of the country's natural wealth,"⁷ are present within Minnesota's early fish and game regulations.

Neither conservation nor industrialization allows nature autonomy, *and* this is not a debate over which doctrine proved more detrimental. Rather, these ideas provide insight on how and why the numbers and species of fish in Minnesota have changed, providing a road map to deconstruct a history surrounding fishing regulations in Minnesota as a proxy for overriding environmental attitudes. In this paper, I seek to examine how and why the fishing opportunities in Minnesota have been maintained for so long and discover why clean fishable waters are an important lifetime pursuit for the State. I am doing this through a lens of sportfishing, seeing how anglers changed and impacted their surrounding environments, following how attitudes of commodification and industrialization shift towards a need for preservation and commodification. I want to understand *why* regulations on sportfishing were established within this time frame-and specifically-uncover *whose* opportunities to use their environment were preserved and why.

By the late 1800s, America had already begun to rapidly industrialize. Nearly all of the east and New England had been carved out into meticulous grids of production, and the rest of

⁷ Steinberg, *Down to Earth*.

the nation's resources would soon be chopped up and priced into commodities as well. The nation needed labor and resources from across the country to continue such a rapid transformation and propel such ultra-capitalism. By 1869, Americans consumed nearly 12.8 billion board feet of lumber, and much of that lumber came from the Great Lakes.⁸ Eastern American cities in particular needed lumber; Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan provided much of that wood, and would have an explosive population growth from 1850 to 1890 as local industry quickly gobbled up the resources in the area. For the time being, the Midwest was the new frontier- stuffed with never ending forests and herds of game. During those same 40 years, Minnesota's population grew from a meager 16,077 to 1,310,283 people.⁹ Minnesota's government and titans of industry were eager to industrialize, and to share the natural resources and material wealth of the landscape with more aspiring entrepreneurs. Especially in the early years, the state did not act purely as a bureaucratic or regulatory tool, but also as an important source for the marketing, tourism, and immigration of Minnesota. Promotional documents during the time published-often by the state themselves-boast of great resources and business opportunity between advertisements for contractors, hotels, and other local businesses.

A book dedicated "To the Immigrant, Invalid, Tourist, Capitalist, Businessman, or any other man who buys this book," remarks that nearly every county in Minnesota has reported, "fish inexhaustible," and "fish by the wagon load."¹⁰ Published in 1870 by Minnesotan writer J.W. McClung, *MINNESOTA AS IT IS: Its General Resources and Attractions* attempts to "spread upon the canvas a faithful portrait of Minnesota," as both a historical reference for the

⁸ Theodore Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*. New York, NY, USA: Oxford University Press, 2002, pg. 51

⁹ State of Minnesota Census Data, United States Census 1850-1940, pg. 535

¹⁰ McClung, J. W. (John W.). *Minnesota as It Is in 1870*. pg. 181

state, and an opportunity to promote industrial expansion within the state.¹¹ McClung is eager to tell his viewers about the abundance of fishing opportunities in the state; offering an incredibly detailed report of both the landscape and “general prospect of material wealth.” Both a promotional document and a government sponsored survey, “landscapes of indescribable beauty” flesh out between government data and personal essays. There were 95 species of bird and 727 plant species, “38 species of ferns alone.” Opportunity was so great that one could still “make their living as hunters,” on the frontier - and many did. The entire state is even referred to as “an immense forest; of timber unequalled in quality and quantity.” Industry was expanding as well, supplemented by resources of the state. By January 1st, 1870, 743 miles of railroad line were in operation across the state. Most importantly, the book reports 29 species of fish (all being native species), and the book notes that trout are most numerous in the tributaries of the Mississippi River.¹²

Minnesota began its tenure as a state during the end of the 19th century-the decade of the industrial revolution-through this industrial-capitalist mindset of constant consumption. Aggressive production and the rationalization of resources as commodities set the foundation for the state of Minnesota, its towns, and its people. However, in the process of chopping down lumber and modifying the landscape, Minnesotans – and Americans all over- “lost their binding ties with their place of origin and the human and natural processes responsible for their existence.”¹³ In such a system, it becomes nearly impossible for one to understand the landscape outside of capitalist production schedules, machines, or commodities. Commodifying the landscape equalized everyone and everything into a price- there was little intrinsic of unique

¹¹ Ibid., 35

¹² J. W. McClung, *Minnesota as It Is in 1870*. pgs. 87, 181, 218, 279 181

¹³ Theodore Steinberg, *Down to Earth: Nature's Role in American History*, pg. 58

qualities to such resources anymore- they were only seen as products that could be produced, bought, and sold. By rationalizing the earth and its resources into commodities, they become foreign and unnatural items-vastly separated from the raw materials they are sourced from. Andrew Denning, and environmental historian notes, “technological manipulation of the environment have led many to speak of the alienation of human from nature.”¹⁴ Perhaps the same could be said of vacations and experiences, which can also become commodified and separated from their place among nature. Wilderness vacations ‘commodify’ the landscape and can be advertised and purchased at the same rate as natural resources. This attitude has continued to permeate the American view of the landscape, allowing consumers to readily ignore the work, science, and raw materials that we start with, only knowing a finished product. In the case of Minnesota, this mindset allowed for “efficient” and productive views of the landscape, not understanding the specific systems and cycle but only the product and the benefit. Historian Steven Hoffbeck remarks upon this attitude of resource commodification present in late 1800s Minnesota, stating, that soon “game and fish were to be consumed just as white pine would be cut until no more could be harvested economically.”¹⁵ Even though game and fish weren’t directed consumed for industry-they were not caught in mass or sold to the public-they were still being rapidly consumed by anglers and hunters with no respect to the biotic community or replacement of species.

Rapid resource extraction fueled by an eager consumerist attitude, specifically booming lumber industry, provided businessmen with precious capital that could be reinvested in new industries and economic development. From 1839 to 1870 more than 200 lumber mills began

¹⁴ Andrew Denning, *Skiing into Modernity*, (Berkeley, Univ. of California Press) 2014, 3

¹⁵ Steven Hoffbeck, “Without Careful Consideration: Why Carp Swim in Minnesota Waters,” *Minnesota Historical Society*, Spring 200, pg. 306

operation.¹⁶ New extractive industries, funded by big names such as the flour mill tycoon Charles Alfred Pillsbury, sought to expand the railroad system, and thus their access to material wealth. The development of railroads needed men, and therefore offered employment and incentive to move across the state. Constant resource commodification slowly but surely populated northern Minnesota with hungry laborers, most often lumberjacks and railroad workers, looking a place to stay and drink at. Minor towns began to develop around lumber mills and railroad projects, entrepreneurs were ready to serve the needs of these laborers, and as a result hotels and saloons became the most popular enterprises for eager businessmen.

One such town was Walker, whose population grew by 4,000 shortly after the establishment of the area's first lumber mill in the 1890s.¹⁷ The town's popularity grew substantially, and with the later establishment of a separate railroad spur, built to increase visitors and to allow resource tycoons to travel to Walker with great ease, the population to exploded. A local entrepreneur who is referred to as the "true founder and developer of Walker," for his contribution to bringing the town to the national stage, Patrick H. McGarry, sought to expand his hometown's economy and utilize the expansion of railroads that had transformed the land around him. McGarry noticed not only noticed the ease of transportation via railroad, but the lush landscape and plentiful game and fish populations that sat alongside the railway.¹⁸ Both these factors were the perfect opportunity for a successful lakeside tourism economy, one that exploited its gorgeous views and outdoor opportunities for any guests that sought a comfortable weekend *and* wilderness. McGarry quickly established luxury hotels to offer a relaxing stay near the romantic wilderness and an opportunity to fish and hunt to their hearts content. Tourism

¹⁶ John Finnegan, and Cara A. Finnegan, "Birth of a Resort: The Chase Hotel and the of Lakeside Tourism," *Minnesota History* 61, no. 6 (2009): pg. 275

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 275

¹⁸ Finnegan and Finnegan, "Birth of a Resort: The Chase Hotel and the of Lakeside Tourism." pg. 276

allowed local businessmen to profit off the environment whilst not directly exploiting and consuming its resources. Forests were not only fields of lumber, but a scenic landscape for city-slickers to vacation in. Trees, lush fields, and clean rivers became farther out of reach for most urbanites due to urban sprawl and industrialization. As the Twin Cities further south became sterile industrial centers, more and more residents sought a reprieve near nature. *Near* is a key word, as vacationers were by no means roughing it in the wilderness, but at luxurious resorts that overlooked lakes and offered many of the amenities the city elites expected. Lakeside tourism allowed Americans to revive their connection to the environment, whilst still maintaining a comfortable boundary with leisure and accessibility and safeties of industrial society. Furthermore, resorts served as social spaces for many of America's elite and offered a chance for the rich to show off and publicly indulge.



The four-story Chase Hotel in 1905¹⁹

McGarry's most famous hotel, the Pameda Hotel, first opened its doors in 1897 and quickly became a "major player in the tourist game." However, the hotel would not reach historical relevance until it was taken over by the Chase family in 1901, who renamed the hotel

¹⁹ Chase Hotel, *Walker Pilot*, May 1905

and brought it into its golden years.²⁰ Advertised as the “best-equipped hotel in this section of the country,” the Chase Hotel was subject to frequent renovations and changes in order to keep up with the demands of southern socialite tourists and trends in hospitality.²¹ As the hotel became more established and even nationally known through its marketing, more Americans sought to reconnect with nature as rapid industrialization had isolated much from the outdoor pioneer life of finding your own food and building your life by your bare hands that previous generations had told of. For many men, the greatest draw of a vacation up north was the possibility of hunting and fishing. For the early stages of the tourism industry, men primarily came on their own seeking an escape from a demasculated urban life and family pressures. However, once hotels became more popular than rugged trips, entire families would come along. Women however, primarily stayed in the hotel, participating in social events.²² Unlike the underclass Americans who still relied on hunting and fishing to supplement their diet, many tourists would attend hunting and fishing guides provided by hotels for sport and trophy alone.

As an established location for Minnesota tourism, Walker eventually received its own railroad spur in 1897, the Park Rapids and Leech Lake railroad spur, granting visitors easier access to luxury- however, this was not the first-time railroad companies had the state’s tourism and fishing economies.²³ Working alongside U.S. Fish Commission, the St. Paul, Minneapolis, and Manitoba Railways provided car space to transport salmon and other fish fry across Minnesota. Managers of eight different railways provided “free transportation and innumerable kindness,” to fish commissioners in Minnesota, and even offered free railway passes to employees of the State Fish and Game Commission. A partnership soon began amongst state

²⁰ Finnegan and Finnegan, “Birth of a Resort: The Chase Hotel and the of Lakeside Tourism,” pg. 275

²¹ Ibid., 276

²² Frederick Johnson, *The Big Water: Lake Minnetonka in its Place in History*. (Deep Haven Books, 2012)

²³ Finnegan and Finnegan, 276

agencies and Minnesota's major railways, who both sought to "improve fishing to benefit would-be tourists who enjoyed lakes and angling."²⁴ Both the railroads and the state found a common goal in bolstering local economies through fishing and lakeside tourism revenues.

The tourism and hotel industry in Minnesota was incredibly racialized, with white patrons and primarily black staff. W. E. B. DuBois, a prolific black writer, activist, and socialist worked at Lake Minnetonka at the Hotel Lafayette during the summer of 1888. A review of his employment at the lake written by DuBois has been mentioned frequently within my research but has proved incredibly difficult to find. However, many state that he offered a scathing review of the racism and treatment he endured while working at the lake.²⁵ I have not read anything about 'enforced' segregation and exclusion within lakeside tourism, but one can assume a certain "de facto" segregation endemic to the North. This attitude of separation must have been present within the black staff and white patrons, especially as tourism can invite humans to show their greedy side. Landscapes of ultra-capitalism allow the patron to become somewhat of a miniature lord, who can control the staff and circumstances to their liking. At the hotels, one was able to become his own 'king' and consume as much labor and resources as they please. This attitude is further exacerbated by the fact that tourists are removed from their homes and native landscapes, and therefore do not have to bear the consequences of their pollution or over-consumption. Distant wilderness now accessible by railroads had become a consequence-free play-place for America's elite.

Outdoor tourism not only enabled the consumer beyond their control of resources and staff at their waiting but grants a sort of 'mental reprieve' as well. America has always held a

²⁴ Hoffbeck, 308

²⁵ I was informed of the letter upon a visit to the Mound West Tonka Historical Society, and the summary I received from historian Liz Vandam was that "he had a lot to say about working at the lake, and none of it was good." I have not been able to find any direct images or citations online, only vague mentions.

complicated mythos when it comes to the environment, perhaps these ideas began during the Romantic or Transcendentalist movements of the early 19th century. Images idealizing the landscape as a place for reflection are common within art of the era, specifically the paintings of the Hudson River School. Such ideology believes that nature may “hold the potential for soothing overtaxed, minds, bodies, and souls,” and can take us away from a corrupted modern world.²⁶ However, nothing truly immerses one in their surrounding environment such as outdoor sport and recreation. To play and exist and enjoy the great outdoors is a national past time anywhere. No matter the era, it seems that humans always seek of impossibly docile *and* virgin landscape to play in, idealizing nature as an uncorrupted paradise-playground. However, in the same breath these our capitalist societies are often prone to framing nature and even sport itself as a commodity that can be rationalized, managed, exploited, and marketed.²⁷ Due to this dualistic attitude, sportfishing becomes an activity that allows one to get away from urban life and reconnect with the earth. However, it is both dependent on nature whilst bringing its own pressures and challenges to nature.²⁸

The rapid industrialization of Minnesota and America during the 19th century proved to be a double-edged sword for Minnesota’s outdoor tourism industry. The railroads and electric lines that connected visitors to where “good fishing could be found”²⁹ had oversaturated the waters with anglers. The local waters were not only burdened by a rise in sportsmen, but by the environmental impact of industrialization as well. Fish populations, extremely sensitive to climatic and habitat changes and far more sensitive “than organisms that live in the air”³⁰ began

²⁶ Andrew Denning, *Skiing into Modernity: A Cultural and Environmental History*, “Introduction,” pg. 4

²⁷ Denning, 5. Much of the analysis within this paragraph draws upon the scholarship that Denning produces within his book, however, his focus is on Alpine skiing, rather than fishing. This analysis has greatly helped me from my analysis on outdoor recreation as an exploitable resource, despite the differences in sport and location.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4

²⁹ *Minnesota, Her Fishing and Hunting.*

³⁰ McEvoy, *The Fisherman’s Problem.*

to reflect the consequences of the water-source dependent lumber industry and an aggressive tourist economy. Lakes were becoming overfished, and aggressive forestry brought with it soil erosion and polluted waters.

In his book *The Late, Great Lakes* environmental historian William Ashworth writes, “lakes have long been treated as ‘infinite,’ their waters, their fishes... their woods- all at various times have thought to be in such a large supply to be undamageable, and all have ultimately proven very damageable indeed.”³¹ By the late 1800s this damage began to show, popular attitudes surrounding fish and game reflected sport hunter’s concerns over such environmental decay. Conservationist movements were beginning to gain traction among wilderness enthusiasts as their luck and yields began to decline. What had once seemed an unrenewable resource was starting to dry up, and fish were recognized as “finite resource in need of some protection.”³² Though some fishermen turned away from familiar waters in hopes of better yields in Northern Minnesota, it became obvious that “human beings and their industries are no less a part of the ecosystems in which they work than are the plants and animals they harvest.”³³

The First Annual Report of the State Fish Commissioners of Minnesota was held in 1875 does not begin by addressing the needs of sportfisherman, but of “food fishes,” stating that “what we most need is plenty of fish, easily accessible, abundant in market, at cheap prices, and used as daily food for all classes of our people.”³⁴ It is clear in this report that the state is concerned with the impacts of overfishing, and worried over the maintenance of local fish populations. Their answer, however, was not to restrict fishing- but to attempt to scientifically increase the fish

³¹ William Ashworth, *The Late, Great Lakes*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1987), pg. 12

³² Tom Dickson, “Many Current Fishing Bag Limits Over 50 Years Old.” State of Minnesota, DNR, n.d.

³³ Arthur McEvoy, *The Fisherman’s Problem.*, 9

³⁴ “First Annual Report of State Fish Commissioners of Minnesota,” pg. 10

populations through propagation. The report continues to detail both the health and economic benefits of plentiful fish stocks, estimating that fish cultivation revenues could yield \$6,488,465 annually.³⁵ Such a profit could be possible by investing in fish cultivation, which is the process of breeding and depositing fish eggs in a lack in attempts to “stock them.” Detailed reasonings on why certain fish- including freshwater salmon- should be stocked, and others should be destroyed follow in the report. Despite little to no scientific evidence, the report assures the state that there is “no doubt [non-native] fish will acclimate to our waters.”³⁶ Bass, for example, have “intrinsic value beyond their reputation, not to mention the sport which their capture affords,” and should be thoroughly stocked.³⁷ Pickerel on the other hand, are regarded as a “calamity” and “occupies the room of a better fish... the sooner he vacates [Minnesota] waters the better,” due to its cannibalistic nature.³⁸ Though little evidence, “unbridled consumption of natural resources, faith in the power of science,” was enough to convince the state.³⁹ During its inception, the State Game and Fish Commission operated with the philosophy that it was smart to “stock any promising species of fish in any accessible body of water,”⁴⁰ with very little consideration to the fish or the environment. Rather than look inward or restrict consumption, the State sought an outside and technological solution instead. This attitude is still present today (think geo-engineering) and fails to address the root causes of an issue and only looks at the symptoms. Turning to technology allows humans to avoid their own faults, and their own negative cultures that may perpetuate environmental damage. This attitude also believes that humans can always engineer a solution, can always dominate and prove stronger than nature.

³⁵ Ibid., 12

³⁶ Ibid., 17

³⁷ Ibid., 20

³⁸ “First Annual Report of State Fish Commissioners of Minnesota”

³⁹ Hoffbeck, “Without Careful Consideration,” pg. 305

⁴⁰ “First Annual Report of State Fish Commissioners of Minnesota,”

This report is quite different in purpose than those of the future Minnesota Fish and Game Commission, as it is entirely focused on *production* rather than regulation or preservation. Rather than a living thing or a member of the ecosystem, fish are viewed as a product-further isolated from their role in nature as a commodity. Furthermore, this report emphasizes fishes as a food source as well as an economic resource, whereas future commission focused nearly entirely on sportfishing and the lakeside tourism industry. Lakeside tourism is emphasized, noting that “many are attracted [to Minnesota] by the fishing in to be had in our lakes,” however, this is no more than a plea to gain the support of the hotel industry.⁴¹ There are no limits in this report, no limit to production, no limit to yield. Furthermore, the goal of this report is to perfectly manage the efficiency of Minnesota’s waters as if it were a fish factory. Great scientific optimism at the time believed that it was possible to manage local ecosystems like a factory. It was believed that one could always keep the customer satisfied with overconsumption, if the State Fish and Game Commission overproduced fish in their hatcheries and ‘expertly’ managed the populations. Ecological niches and systems are ignored for the sake of production, no case of that is more obvious than the pickerel, which has been essentially deemed “inefficient.” With hindsight, it is easier for us to understand the danger of invasive species and interfering with biotic communities, however, there is no regard for the environment within this report. The driving force of government managed waters in 1875 was for the purpose of economic control. The establishment of the State Fish and Game Commission came with it the inherent rationalization of state waters, and “for good or for ill, Minnesota’s outdoors [became] another resource, like taconite, to be managed by the state government.”⁴²

⁴¹ Ibid.,

⁴² Hoffbeck, 318

The state eventually began to regulate the actions of its sporthunters in 1891 as “an act for the preservation, propagation, and protection of the game and fish of the state” established the new Minnesota Fish and Game Commission.⁴³ Inspired by regulation on a federal level, the board sought not only to continue the fish propagation of both native and nonnative fish species from the earlier State Fish Commission, but manage the water through proper seasons, game wardens, and regulating the method of catch. A precursor to today’s Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the board was entirely focused on the interests of sporthunters and fishing tourism rather than industrial fisheries. Within their first piece of legislation, the board was quick to layout extensive seasonal, method of catch (i.e., the use of nets, spears and most common-hook and line), and species-specific regulations all with a set fine and punishment. For example, explosives such as fish berries and dynamite were outlawed, and certain water sources prohibited the use of nets or spearfishing.⁴⁴ Fees associated with noncompliance were often strict, the lowest fine of \$5.00 being \$152.00 in today’s money. \$15,000 in fines was collected in both 1893 and 1894, and these fees were used to fund the commission and enforcement of regulations.⁴⁵ Regulation was primarily used to limit overfishing, but specifically to curb *waste*. Much of the early regulations had limits that specifically referenced waste and catching beyond ones means; this is reflective of the conservation ideology of the time, specifically in the American West.

Guided tours for tourists eager to hunt and fish soon became the primary draw for urban tourists, specifically businessmen looking to escape the city for masculine recreation outside.

⁴³ Minnesota Commission of Fisheries and Game and Fish Commission of Minnesota. “Annual Report of the Game and Fish Commission of Minnesota.,” 1892-1891, 2

⁴⁴ “Annual Report of the Game and Fish Commission of Minnesota.,” 1892-1891,

⁴⁵ Skwira, “The Game and Fish Fund: History and Current Status.”

Many resorts specifically catered to the needs of fisherman, expanding into a market that served both the elites and middle-class Americans who simply yearned for the outdoors. As America entered the 20th century, the pioneer's life of hard labor, hunting, and farming that had closely connected humans with the outdoors became a distant memory. More and more Americans were moving into cities, buying fish from grocery stores rather than finding it nearby, working in offices rather than working the land. A bulletin for the Minnesota Game and Fish Commission in 1915 reads, "For a man tied down to office work... We know of no better tonic, no better preparation for a year's work, than a few weeks with a canoe and a rod."⁴⁶ Despite the economic optimism of urban migration, many middle-class Americans worried about becoming 'soft' and *too* distanced from nature. Men frequently sought to return to masculine displays of an outdoor lifestyle. Furthermore, both the Gilded Age economy and the mechanization of many jobs allowed for more leisure time for most Americans.⁴⁷ Not only could one go out and enjoy the beautiful fishing of Minnesota Lakes, but you could reap the fruits of your labor as well. Many hotels offered programs where hotel patrons could bring the kitchen the fish, they caught that day and eat it for dinner.

In a pamphlet promoting Minnesota's hunting and fishing, an essay on fishing reflects that the development of the sport can be attributed to the State Fish and Game commission, stating many of the rivers in southern Minnesota were in a "primitive state" until the commission began to stock "with marked success."⁴⁸ The same tourism pamphlet reported that "successful propagation of fish in our state hatcheries foretells the fact that Minnesota will never be destitute

⁴⁶ "Fins, Feathers and Fur.," 1915, no. 3, pg. 1

⁴⁷ Johnson, *The Big Water* 108

⁴⁸ *Minnesota, Her Fishing and Hunting*, pg. 18

of fish."⁴⁹ The commission's efforts, though stern, were more often than not respected by the anglers within nearly every essay. Though limited in their ecological knowledge of fish habitats, the Game and Fish commission understood that "a self-preserving fishing industry would respect the biological limits of its resource's productivity, limiting its seasonal take to some safe minimum."⁵⁰ The State Fish and Game Commission held immense power over the entire sportfishing operation, game wardens managed local areas through patrol and issuing licenses; these licenses alongside fines provided a majority of the funding for the commission. Seizures of "unlawful possession" of game, fishing poles, and guns were common; and the total number of seizures by the commission were published yearly in the bulletin *Fins, Feathers, and Fur*. The commission also lists all the names of those prosecuted for cases against the commission alongside the town and the total fine. The reason, "cases involving game and fish out of season," were listed as well, publicly shaming those who disregarded the regulations of the State Game and Fish Commission.⁵¹ The State very much prioritized the development and economic growth of Minnesota in all of its forms, but also understood that such rapid development would strain the landscapes beyond recovery—once the lakes were permanently fished out the market would be gone for good. The State therefore had to carefully balance its consumption and the desirability of the landscape.

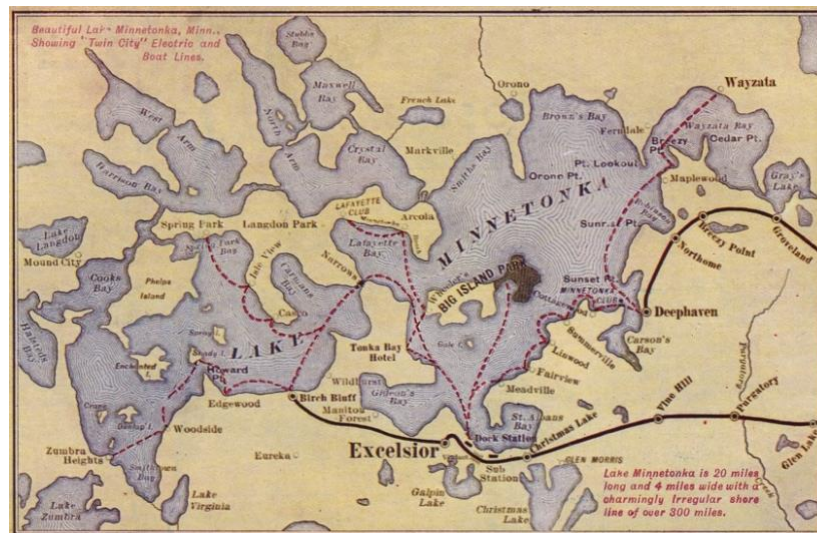
By the 1900s, sporadic luxury retreats fell out of style for luxury homes, as railroad lines enabled Minneapolis business men to live on the lake year-round and just commute to the city for work. Due to this major shift and loss of the socialite consumer, the lakeside tourist industry began to extend its customer base towards middle-class Americans when Wayzata, a booming

⁴⁹ Ibid.,

⁵⁰ McEvoy, *The Fisherman's Problem*.

⁵¹ *Fins, Feathers, and Fur*, 1915, no.1, pg. 15

resort location on Lake Minnetonka that had been pioneered by industrialist James J. Hill and local fisherman, had lost much of its international appeal as a vacation spot, and became more of a “summer home location”.⁵² Built in 1904, The Minneapolis and St. Paul Suburban Railroad line connected Wayzata to the cities; allowing for families to move out to the lake while the breadwinner husband could take the train into Minneapolis during the week to attend work.⁵³ Hotels momentarily fell out of fashion, and lake cottages for the wealthy and upper middle class soon took over. Furthermore, the train gave many working-class families from the city the opportunity to take the train to the lake for a picnic. However, this rush of new visitors gave the train and the station a reputation for being filthy, crowded, and full of smoke.⁵⁴ Many major hotel investors turned elsewhere; believing tourism industry was entering a ‘bust’ era. Prestigious Hotels, were renamed and sold to new investors, including Minneapolis real-estate magnate Thomas Lowry who purchased the Lake Park Hotel and renamed it the Tonka Bay Hotel.



1907 Map of TCRT electric street car lines (black) and steamboat routes (red dashes)

⁵² James W. Ogland, “Picturing Lake Minnetonka,” *Minnesota History* 57, no. 6 (2001): pg. 297

⁵³ Frederick Johnson, *The Big Water: Lake Minnetonka in its Place in History*. (Deep Haven Books, 2012)

⁵⁴ Johnson, *The Big Water* 170

Thomas Lowry of the Twin Cities Rapid Transit Company (TCRT) saw the railroad as a new market that could take the urbanites of Minneapolis to the lakes just outside of their reach, rather than a hinderance. In 1905, a 14-mile streetcar line from Minneapolis to Lake Minnetonka was built, offering an affordable and direct transportation line to lake recreation for the middle class in just 46 minutes.⁵⁵ Rather than having to plan a long railway trip and a hotel stay, city dwellers could now take a day trip into wilderness and escape the urban jungle. The first car of the day left as early as 4:03 in the morning, called the “early bird,” and many of its passengers were eager fishermen trying to start their day before the sun rose.⁵⁶ Not to mention the fact that alongside his new hotel, Thomas Lowry had just purchased land on the largest island on the lake, Big Island, and was determined to make his investment a worthwhile purchase.

Though he died shortly after in 1909, Lowry’s initiative to open up lakeside tourism to middleclass day trippers utterly transformed his side of the lake, developing Excelsior into a town of its own. Transportation rapidly expanded beyond the trolley line, and steamboat lines were soon added to both ship tourists to different destinations around the lake and provide a leisurely boat ride to enjoy. Big Island too had been transformed into a 65-acre entertainment paradise, complete with a casino, aviary, aquarium, and its famous amusement park.⁵⁷ Lowry’s company, TCRT extended the Excelsior streetcar line, and by 1907 you could arrive at the Tonka Bay Hotel via steamboat or streetcar. In 1906, the ever so popular fleet of “streetcar boats” had four main routes, with 23 public and private stops; and in good weather up to 60 streetcar boats were running at a time.⁵⁸ Visitors at the time remarked, “Not like the Eastern summer resorts

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Big Water*, 174

⁵⁶ Ogland, “Picturing Lake Minnetonka,” pg. 299

⁵⁷ Johnson, *The Big Water* pg. 146

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 152

where the wealthier class can be admitted... Lake Minnetonka is within reach of everybody. It costs no more to reside here during the summer months than it does in the city of Minneapolis.”⁵⁹ By expanding the outdoor tourism and sportfishing market into the working class, Lowry had completely reinvigorated the Lake Minnetonka tourism industry, and helped to create a more class inclusive landscape for outdoor recreation. Compared to older lake towns, even today Lowry’s section of Lake Minnetonka is much cozier and casual. Not to mention, the minor ‘back-to-nature’ movement at the time brought Americans back outdoors and eager to reconnect with nature. Efforts across the nation were made to give children a more ‘outdoor’ childhood, and to get out of factories and business offices. Tourism was beginning to open, not to nonwhites, but just to working class whites.



Fishing postcard, Lake Minnetonka, circa 1910

However, hotels often had a hook to them to draw in customers, such as the Hotel Buena Vista on Lake Minnetonka that claimed itself to be the best fishing spot on the lake with the best guide- Captain Jack Hart.⁶⁰ Guided tours during the summer and ice fishing in the winter remained a popular attraction for most hotel-goers, Lake Minnetonka visitors remarked “we can

⁵⁹ Ibid., 175

⁶⁰ Lake Minnetonka Postcard, circa 1910, from the West Tonka Historical Society, Mound, MN

bring in as many fish as we wish... bass by the barrel if we could.”⁶¹ One six hour fishing trip yielded 120 crappies, 12 bass, and 12 pikes- totaling around 135 pounds of fish.⁶² Guided tours most often ended with photos of the days yield, postcards show men standing in front of rows of hanging fish, similar to a modern-day trophy hunting photo. Tourists were eager to display their dominance and control over nature. In town, local boys ran minor bait operations, selling worms and frogs to eager fisherman. Visitors and hotel owners alike agreed that “the supply seemed inexhaustible.”⁶³ However, by 1915 local fisherman had already begun minor conservation efforts, many of whom joined preservation clubs that would promote their own requests or legislation. The State Game and Fish Commission received so many requests to the point that they were “unable to fill numerous requests for game law pamphlets since the first of [1915].”⁶⁴ The first ever Minnesota State Conference of Sportsmen and Preservationists was held on August 27th at the Radisson Hotel, with about 200 conservationists and sportsmen attending. Such a combination of “Sportsmen and Preservationists” implies that those who were truly passionate about their sport, were passionate about its preservation and continuation. They had learned to love their landscapes while they participated in them.

As transportation revolutionized once again with the automobile, lakeside tourism became available to even more people. In 1917 it was remarked that “the growth of pleasure travel will develop by leaps and bounds as we develop our trunk automobile highways... during the coming season twenty thousand people will visit Minnesota by means of automobiles.”⁶⁵ Though railways would be more affordable than cars, highways greatly democratized and

⁶¹ Johnson, *The Big Water*, 76

⁶² *Ibid.*, 76

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 78

⁶⁴ *Fins Feather Fur*, 1914, no.1, pg.15

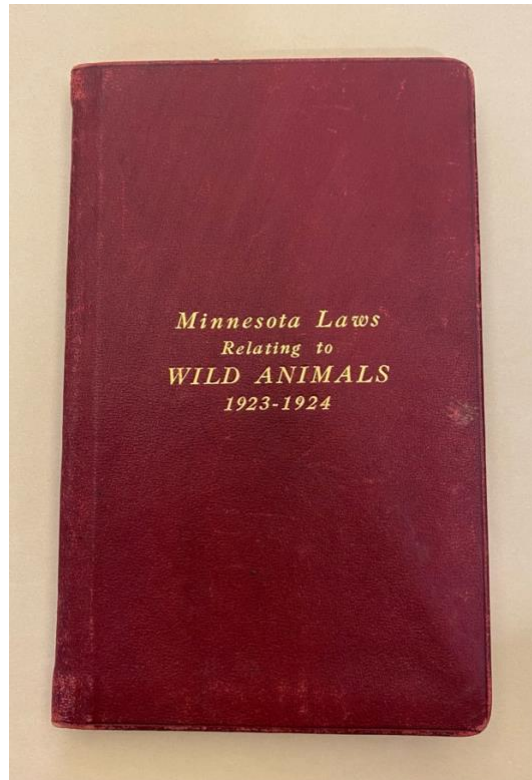
⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1915, no. 3, 143

inspired travel. Cars evoked greater freedom, you were not set to the location and timing of a train schedule. Cars were also exciting, riders could look out the window to see the view, and feel the country wide in their hair. Furthermore, those of the upper and middleclass frequently commented on the congested and dirty nature of Lake Minnetonka's train stations and would prefer to opt for their own private method of travel.⁶⁶ More and more visitors began to visit the hotels, and good fishing was in incredibly high demand. The "Fins, Feathers, and Furs," bulletin estimated that, "There are five hundred and sixty summer hotels and tourist resorts in Minnesota now and the number will exceed six hundred the coming summer. A wonderful future is in store for our state as a summer vacation ground."⁶⁷ The bulletin also provided lists of Minnesota's summer resorts, especially those "located on lakes that furnish bass, crappie, pike, pickerel, perch, sunfish, and other common varieties."⁶⁸ One list, separated by county, offers 564 summer resorts, with both the proprietor and the town listed as well. As a direct bulletin of the *State's* Fish and Game Commission, one can see that the success of the lakeside tourism industry in Minnesota was an official matter. Through tourism promotion and fish propagation, the state was working hard to increase its number of fish and number of fishermen.

⁶⁶ Johnson, *The Big Water*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*,

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1915, xxix



Fisherman's pocketbook 1923-1924⁶⁹

The State's influence in sportfishing was prolific, and even sat in the pockets of nearly all regular anglers. In the early 1900s, most sport fishers would carry around a small pocketbook on "Minnesota Laws Relating to WILD ANIMALS" for that calendar year, a sport fisher's almanac of sorts. About six inches tall and four inches wide and produced State Game and Fish Commission, the booklet contained all the relevant laws, as well as a nifty chart that displays the open dates and closing dates for hunting and fishing seasons; later booklets would provide a sunrise and sunset schedule. Violation of any regulations, including "abandonment or waste of the edible part of fish or game" would nullify all game licenses and ban the offender for a year; and as mentioned earlier, the public listing of your name. The pocket booklets, which later became pamphlets, also featured information licenses, which changed both in price and in age

⁶⁹ Minnesota Laws Relating to Wild Animals, 1923-24, Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

requirement over time. However, nearly every iteration states different pricing in resident versus non-resident licenses, with a non-resident tourist license costing one to two dollars more. In 1905, bag limits were introduced- limiting the number of certain fish, birds, or animals one could take home per day. These regulations came in effort to curb excessive wasting and ensure rational efficiency; for example, bass was limited to six per day, and pickerel to 10. Bag limits were soon included within the pamphlets as well. In a testament to a bygone era of conservation, later booklets offered \$15.00 bounties for adult wolves.⁷⁰

Open and Close Fishing Season In Minnesota for 1932 WHITE- Open Season
BLACK- Close Season

Resident fishing license \$60 for individual; \$1.00 for family license; \$3.00 non-resident fishing license.

	JAN.	FEB.	MAR.	APR.	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUG.	SEPT.	OCT.	NOV.	DEC.
Wall-eyed Pike, Sand Pike (or Stingers), Pickerel, Great Northern Pike, Yellow Perch, Muskellunge: May 15 to Feb. 1.												
Crappie: May 20 to Feb. 1, Southern Zone. June 21 to Feb. 1, Northern Zone.												
Bass, (striped, gray, yellow, black, silver, rock)—May 29 to Dec. 1, Southern Zone. June 21 to Dec. 1, Northern Zone.												
Sunfish—May 29 to Dec. 1, Southern Zone. June 21 to Dec. 1, Northern Zone (except Goodhue County—May 29 to Feb. 1).												
Bullheads, Garfish, Whitefish not less than 16 inches, Carp, Dogfish, Redhorse, Sheepshead, Catfish, Suckers, Walpole, Buffalo not less than 16 inches—May 1 to March 1.												
TROUT (any variety except lake trout)—May 1 to Sept. 1. Except Lake, St. Louis, Itasca, Koochiching, Carlton and Cook Counties, May 15 to Sept. 1.												
Lake Trout and Salmon—Nov. 15 to Sept. 15.												
Netting Whitefish, Tullibee (domestic use only—not for sale, license \$1.00)—Nov. 1 to Dec. 10.												
Inland Herring (license \$1.00, domestic use only—not for sale)—Nov. 1 to Jan. 10.												
Spearing fish through the ice, or angling or spearing in fish houses. See under "Spearing Fish" and "Fish Houses."												

All game fish, regardless of size, may be retained and counted. All trout (except lake trout) must be retained in possession and crested. No crested trout except lake trout may be taken from 9 P.M. until one hour before sunrise.

Open and Close Fishing Season in Minnesota for 1932⁷¹

Alongside changing regulations and licenses, the State Fish and Game Commission continued to manage the expansive fish propagation which was started in 1874.⁷² The seasonal bulletin for the State Fish and Game Commission, “Fins, Feathers, and Furs” not only tracks the development and changing goals of the commission from 1915 to 1928 but can provide concrete numbers on propagation efforts. In 1915, “a larger numbers of eggs were collected and a greater number of fry placed in the lakes of the state than in any one previous year.”⁷³ The total revenues

⁷⁰ Geo. W. McCullough, *Minnesota Laws Relating to Wild Animals, 1932-33*, State of Minnesota Department of Conservation, 1934

⁷¹ Open and Close Fish and Game Season Pamphlet, 1932, Courtesy of the Minnesota Historical Society

⁷² “Fins, Feathers and Fur.,” 1915, no. 3, 140

⁷³ Fins, Feathers, and Fur, 1915, no. 3, 135

for all pike hatcheries in the state amounted to \$183,277,500.⁷⁴ By 1917 Minnesota invested “\$230,000 in fish hatcheries including grounds, damns, and ponds, buildings, and equipment for propagating and distributing fish 608 men employed were employed by the State Fish and Game Commission; and 4,169,368 lbs. of carp were reportedly caught in MN in 1917. The primary goal of the State Fish and Game Department at the time was to maintain sportfishing, rather than to maintain the fish populations and ecosystems. The State rationalized fish as both a commodity to be consumed, but also to be produced and ‘manufactured.’ This not only disrupted the physical environment but changed the mental environment surrounding fish—which were now seen as something that could be consumed and replaced like any other commodity. This “overproduction” is especially clear in the local bulletin which reports these numbers and reads “As the years pass and additional streams are stocked demand for fry increases. There are many excellent trout streams in Minnesota which never knew trout until artificially stocked and this work of developing new streams is constantly going on.”⁷⁵

Despite such later emphasis on restricting impact on the landscape, early propagation efforts cared little for the general ecosystem and were solely motivated by maintaining sportfishing opportunities. There was hardly an *idea* of what a ‘complex eco-system’ would look like, niches and biotic communities weren’t common phrases as they are now. This attitude is reflective of the great scientific optimism that held the nation during the 19th century. Science had improved transportation with railroads, improved sanitation, and public health through sewer systems. Foreign plant and animal species, such as the Holstein cow, had reached marked success in America. By the 1880s, there was little doubt that “scientists could surely augment

⁷⁴ \$5,101,792,333.66 in 2022 USD

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, no. 1, 9

natural fish stocks with imported species to provide for even better fishing.”⁷⁶ The State Fish and Game Commission looked for their own cash cow in a variety of species and were most eager about the propagation of a new ‘freshwater salmon.’ However, despite four years of attempts the fish never made its homes within Minnesota waters. The propagation of certain fish species, the carp, would ultimately prove disastrous for Minnesota waters.

German Carp was introduced to Minnesota rivers in 1880 by the State Fish and Game Commission in hopes to improve local angling. However, by 1900 the fish were branded as “unwelcome intruders,” and fisherman demanded that the local government eradicate the nuisance, however it was too late.⁷⁷ Optimistically introduced as an inexpensive protein source and ‘all the rage’ in the world of fish propagation, carp propagation began in 1882. By 1884, a total of 9,000 carp from the U. S. Fish Commission in Washington D.C. was sent to 90 different rivers and lakes across Minnesota. The fish proved exceptionally adaptable to the local waters, and propagation efforts stopped in 1890 as the fish needed no more assistance in securing their numbers.⁷⁸ It seemed as if the carp had taken a bit too well and was frequently blamed for crowding out other fish species, taking food stock from other “desirable” fishes, and even the depletion of aquatic vegetation. By 1910 the carp was declared a “deadly enemy” to the state.⁷⁹

The State of Minnesota turned within the commission to tackle the problem and issued special winter licenses in 1909 alongside contracts for men who would engage in “rough fish removal,” specifically carp from high trafficked lakes and rivers.⁸⁰ Unlike a typical fishing licenses that restricted the number of ones catch and prohibited sales, contractors were allowed

⁷⁶ Hoffbeck, “Without Careful Consideration” 306

⁷⁷ Hoffbeck, “Without Careful Consideration” 305

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 311

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 314

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*,

to catch fish beyond any limits and sell their catches as well to domestic markets in eastern cities such as Chicago.⁸¹ This would be completely illegal during the standard season; however, the commission would receive a cut from the sales which further funded removal efforts. Eventually, “Minnesota settled for controlling the number of carp in the state much as a farmer controls weeds,” essentially managing the numbers whilst knowing eradication is impossible.⁸² To this day, the introduction of is often regarded by anglers as “one of the worst mistakes ever made [by a fish commission],”⁸³ and offers a warning any future commissions looking to irrationally introduce nonnative species.

After seeing both the failures and successes of the state’s attempts to manage wildlife and fishing opportunity, more anglers became invested in conserving their sport. In 1928, the State Auditor and a member of the Minnesota Conservation Commission began his address to the Izaak Walton League Convention by stating, “Affairs in Minnesota for some years past have not been as prosperous as the state of the people would like,” before detailing the benefits and goals of a conservation movement.⁸⁴ The address still promotes the industry and economic wealth of Minnesota, however, pivoting towards conservation rather than the ignorant consumption endorsed above. His address is concluded by stating “conservation does not mean that a great natural resource shall not be utilized at all but that it should be wisely used, properly replaced, and so far, as possible, be handed onto prosperity.”⁸⁵ For the Izaak Walton League, this meant eradicating pollution from *all* waters, preserving specific game and fish refuges, and “increased propagation and wider distribution of fish and game.”⁸⁶ The Izaak Walton League both endorsed

⁸¹ Hoffbeck, “Without Careful Consideration” 309

⁸² *Ibid.*, 317

⁸³ *Ibid.*,

⁸⁴ “Fins, Feathers, and Fur,” 1928, no.1, pg. 66

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 76

⁸⁶ Will H. Dilg, ed., “Outdoor America, Defender of Woods, Waters, and Wild Life,” *Izaak Walton League*, 9

the efforts of the State Fish and Game Commission, whilst simultaneously asking for more environmental measures that existed outside of sportfishing regulation. Education and awareness were a major focus of the League too, as many of their conferences had an outdoor education focus.

The goal of the commission was to preserve sportfishing and food fishes, rather than the ecosystems in which the fish were supported. Appropriation of fishes “in excess of the number of quantities thereof [sic] which he can immediately use for food,” would be fined \$10,⁸⁷ and “the wanton destruction or the wasting... is hereby prohibited and declared a misdemeanor.”⁸⁸ The criminalization of fish waste is a direct manifestation of typical conservation utilitarian ideologies, often referred to as ‘the gospel of efficiency,’ as is present in the framework for nearly environmental regulations across America at the time. Furthermore, the commission believed consumption could be maintained through careful replacement, and even believed they could create new opportunities with new fish species. The State Game and Fish Commission saw the species of fish in Minnesota waters as something that could be Taylor-made and turned into a factor.

Whether the State Fish and Game Commission was not moving with an eye towards ecology, but with an eye for efficiency. By careful regulating the consumption of sportfishing, the State created a system of nature that favored some and excluded others. In his book *Down to Earth*, Ted Steinberg writes, “what was being conserved was not so much the natural world, but a sociological order that produced monumental material gain at the expense of some vulnerable

⁸⁷ \$304.11 in 2022 USD

⁸⁸ “Annual Report of the Game and Fish Commission of Minnesota.,” 1892-1891.

wildlife and people.”⁸⁹ Land set away either to house a game refuge or a massive hotel, barred many of the people that relied on that land for subsistence access. More often than not, conservation efforts greatly hurt Indigenous peoples who were pushed off their native lands, and poor whites who depended on the land for fish and game. Indigenous fishing practices such as spear or net fishing were often attacked by the Game and Fish commission. In Chippewa County, “It shall be unlawful for any person or persons, to catch, capture, kill [any fish] except by hook and line.”⁹⁰ Even wilderness connoisseur John Muir had supported “Uncle Sam’s Soldiers,” forest police who were set on criminalized sustenance hunting and fishing.⁹¹ Conservation and its enforcers quickly became “a form of social control that further divorced the common people from direct interactions with the earth.”⁹²

Though early documents may have fought for substance fisherman and those who made their careers as market fishers, later regulations make it nearly impossible for one to start their own operation selling fish. In many counties and for many species, fishing with a net is illegal, and mass catches become impossible. Bag limits introduced in 1910 further restricted anyone from taking home large quantities of fish to sell. Even hotels were not allowed to sell caught fish in later years. As stated earlier, the bulletin for the State Fish and Game commission lists all the persecutions, fines, and offenders, however, in later years the prosecution reports were specifically listed out. For example, “Roy Lutz, Medicine Lake, black bass in possession in close season... \$16.49⁹³ fine.”⁹⁴ Public shaming like this was designed to keep local fisherman in accordance with the regulations of the State Game and Fish Commission. Any fish caught either

⁸⁹ Steinberg, *Down to Earth*.

⁹⁰ Annual Report of the Game and Fish Commission of Minnesota.,” 1892-1891, pg. 3

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5

⁹² *Ibid.*, 8

⁹³ \$254.80 in 2021 USD

⁹⁴ “Fins, Feathers and Fur,” 1915, no. 3, 438

out of season or not in line with regulations would be seized by wardens, in 1921, 516 pounds of fish seized from the state commission⁹⁵ For some fisherman, getting your catch seized could greatly jeopardize your chance of eating for the night. In some regards, the State was a strict and oppressive force when it came to managing the local waters.

The establishment and expansion of regulatory sportfishing agencies in Minnesota signified a major shift in both land usage and land rights. A shift from propagation to propagation *and* regulation was at its time revolutionary and inspired a ‘conservationist’ mindset in many outdoor enthusiasts. Conservation is not without consumption however but is rather a restricting of consumption in attempts to reorganize resources around efficiency. Such conservation-minded consumption defines the methods and goals and the State Game and Fish Commission. The State was able to commodify sportfishing as an experience, and then regulate, advertise, and sell this commodity to those they deemed fit- elite tourists. The State Fish and Game Commission was established to maintain the opportunities for outdoor recreation as well as food fishing, however, developed into something entirely focused on sportfishing and lakeside tourism. The State Fish and Game Commission sought not only to preserve sportfishing opportunities for the elites, but to also restrict the economic opportunities of underclass Americans.

⁹⁵ Ibid.,

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