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# Altmar Hatchery Buried in Red Tape

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If every statement, prediction and evaluation of the proposed Altmar fish hatchery on the banks of the Salmon River was a brick, that hatchery not only would be built by now, it would be five stories high.

Known as the Great Lakes Salmonid Hatchery, the facility is designed to produce each year 5 million salmon and trout weighing about 100 tons. First production was scheduled for next year.

But today even the site isn't nailed down yet. In fact, some people are saying there won't ever be an Altmar hatchery.

Why? How come after nearly three years of planning, designing and testing we aren't that much closer to what was going to be the showcase hatchery of the East?

Especially since New York hasn't built a new hatchery since right after World War Two. Especially since Onondaga County has to rely on its own local hatchery to put trout in its waters. Especially since the biologists tell us that we have only scratched the surface of Lake Ontario's potential and that it should be stocked with millions and millions of fish. Fish which will pay back 16 dollars for every dollar invested.

You can't blame any one person or situation. The hatchery has simply fallen victim to a change in state administrations, a shortage of money and the fear of PCB pollution.

However, there is hope. We don't have to give up.

An early timetable for Altmar (a town well up the Salmon River and considered an excellent site to begin coho and chinook salmon reproduction) was ambitious.

It had site acquisition set for 1973; the plan, design, development and site preparation a year later, and construction beginning in the summer of 1974 with first production in 1976 and full production the next year.

The new governor and the new conservation commissioner didn't exactly sabotage that schedule but they certainly didn't get right behind it and push.

Money was short. Even though funds were "earmarked" for the project and the state's anglers accepted two license increases with the extra money supposedly going to such work as Altmar and a sister hatchery for trout in the upper Adirondacks, the climate wasn't just right in Albany.

So drillers lumbered in to sink trial wells and more tests and test tubes were accumulated than for a bride with her first morning sickness.

Delegations trooped in to inspect the sight on regular intervals, caravans pulled up and even helicopters brought dignitaries.

The announcement of the actual construction was expected momentarily; then the PCB bombshell hit. Polychlorinated biphenyl pollution, a hell-raising chemical contamination with the heaven-sent PCB abbreviation, was found in salmon returning from Lake Ontario.

## COMMENTARY

So the Altmar hatchery sits stillborn in a pile of schematics and sketches. Conservation Commissioner Ogden Reid says until he has final word on PCB he just can't tell people to eat salmon.

Well, why not switch the whole facility to trout? PCB and other contamination affects bigger fish worse than smaller species.

Carl Parker, the conservation department's top fish man, points out that this is not impossible but because trout have to be kept longer in the hatchery than salmon, some modifications would have to be made.

He said that the hatchery is in a go position but that the signal must come from the policy level. Deputy Commissioner Theodore Hullar is in charge of programs for the department. His office acknowledges that the whole situation is "under review."

Well, let's get it out of review. If we can't get a decision soon on PCB, let's make it a trout hatchery. Thousands of dollars have already been spent on the project thus far.

If it can be modified later on for salmon, fund that expense with a special salmon stamp.

Let's make Altmar a booming nursery, not a forlorn cemetery.

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