9/16/77

FYI: J. A. Alley
R. C. Isham
L. A. Miller
E. T. Mollica
R. A. Stohr
D. Wood

FROM: G. F. Barton

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL, Thursday, Sept. 15, 1977

Revival Is Spawned For Lake Michigan As Sport Fish Return

Restocking Program Enables Anglers to Show and Tell Whoppers Once Again

By CHRISTOPHER A. EVANS
Staff Reporter of THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

ON LAKE MICHIGAN — The ecstatic cries of the fishermen go up in unison as Jerry Tuttle reels in a 12-pound rainbow trout from the waters north of Chicago: "Hey, it's a big one." . . . "It's Orca." . . . "What a monster."

Mr. Tuttle, a contractor from Franklin Park, Ill., and five friends are on a $150, half-day excursion on the K-G II, a 40-foot charter-fishing boat. And they all agree that they would far rather be here than fishing for marlin off the coast of Florida.

"There's no other place in the world where you can go within a 50-mile radius of eight million people and catch coho and chinook salmon, rainbow trout, lake trout, tiger trout, golden trout, brown trout and Atlantic salmon," declares Ken Ralph, captain of the K-G II. "We have the finest fresh-water fishery in the world."

Fishermen, of course, do tend to resort to hyperbole. But in the case of Lake Michigan, it doesn't seem an exaggeration because the fish would delight any angler: They are feisty and plentiful and come in a wide variety. In fact, fishing here is so good that 75% of all the fish caught in the five Great Lakes come from Michigan.

The Fish Invasion

In only a decade, a $350-million-a-year sport-fishing industry has grown up around Lake Michigan as the result of an ambitious program to restock the waters. Only 11 years ago the lake's original trout population had been wiped out in a chain reaction that began with the invasion of other ocean fish. "What the sea destroyed, the sea restored," observes Patrick Manion, an Interior Department biologist.

The elimination of Lake Michigan trout, which had long been the staple of sport fishing in the region, began as far back as 1932 when the Welland Canal was opened between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario near Buffalo, N.Y. This linked Lake Michigan to the Atlantic, and it provided a route into the lake for ocean fish, particularly the herring-like alewife and the lamprey eel.

This mixture of intruders set off a reaction that upset the lake's ecological balance. Normally the trout would feed off the small, silvery alewives. But the eels, with their suction-cup mouths and their raspy teeth, attacked the trout.

As the trout population dwindled, the alewives began to take over. Finally, they gained control of the lake, preventing the growth of other fish populations and littering the beaches with their remains. In the late 1950s, a federal program was begun to poison the young lamprey eels in the streams that feed into the lake. This removed the killers of the trout, but, there being no more trout in the lake, a new enemy had to be found for the hordes of alewives.

A Fish With Fight

Howard Tanner, head of the Michigan Department of Natural Resources, came up with the idea of stocking the lake with coho salmon, ocean fish that readily adapt to fresh water. The coho matures more quickly than do other sport fish, it is known for its fighting spirit and, most important, it has a fondness for anchovies, which happen to taste like alewives.

The first young salmon were introduced into the lake in 1966. Because of the abundance of alewives, the salmon grew to prodigious sizes. In Lake Superior the coho generally averages between three and four pounds. In Lake Michigan it averages 6½ pounds.

Other sport fish have been introduced into the lake, and they, too, have prospered. The coho's cousin—the chinook, or king salmon—averages eight pounds in Lake Superior. But in Lake Michigan it weighs in at 10 pounds. Occasionally, a chinook weighing as much as 40 pounds is landed in Lake Michigan.

It isn't surprising that the lake now is an angler's paradise. Since 1966 the four states surrounding Lake Michigan—Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and Indiana—have stocked the waters with 100 million fish. Michigan alone, which has the longest waterfront, has spent $22.3 million on the program. The result has been an economic revival for the sport-fishing business in lake cities such as Racine, Wis., and Michigan City, Ind., where bait-and-tackle shops, hotels, motels and taxidermists (who mount the biggest catches) are all thriving.

Only one problem threatens sport fishing on Lake Michigan: pollution. Fish in the lake have been found to contain industrial chemicals called PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls), which are suspected of causing cancer. The chemicals get into the lake not only through industrial leakage but also from landfills, sewage-treatment plants and incinerators.

However, stricter environmental controls are reducing the flow of PCBs into the lake. Michigan officials say that last year the levels dropped by 10% to 20% from the year before.

Certainly the publicity that the PCBs have received hasn't in the least discouraged fishermen. "I'm not worried about PCBs, but I'm not a chemist either," says Lou Pagano, one of Mr. Tuttle's companions on board the K-G II. The other members of the fishing party agree that a day on the lake with a fishing line and a case of beer is the perfect escape "from what's happening on shore."

In turn, the fishermen are benefiting the owners of the charter boats, most of whom have other jobs on shore. Bill Zerin, for example, is a dentist from suburban Skokie, Ill., who takes out fishing parties on his boat in his spare time. "It's basically a labor of love, but I still make money," he says. The Waukegan, Ill., Charter Boat Association, which represents 30 boat owners, estimates that most of the captains gross between $7,000 and $11,000 a summer.

And even on those rare days when fishermen don't catch very much, there are few regrets. As Matt Ryan, another member of the K-G II fishing party explains, "If we don't catch enough, we'll buy some at the pier and tell our wives we caught them."

MONS 000915