

NYACK, N.Y.
JOURNAL NEWS
(NEW YORK CITY MARKET AREA)
D. 25,000

MAR 14 1976

One Man's Rockland

Picking the bones

By Grant Jobson

IT TAKES a crisis every now and then to draw attention once more to the abused fishing potential of the Hudson.

No one ever seems to believe, except the commercial fishermen themselves and a clutch of customers, that the river can produce delectable eating, particularly a specialty called the shad.

There is, moreover, a tendency to be snobbish about the Hudson's finfish, yet their edibility (given the assurance of a reasonable environment) will rank with lable-grace catches taken from a comparable body of water anywhere. But, alas, how many Rockland County restaurants can you count that have put the shad on the menu when the species runs in these waters?

THE SHAD has never been promoted except as some bony bloke that has a deposit of roe fit only for Tabby, and even in the most knowledgeable of fishermen's councils I have heard the buck shad described as a piece of driftwood that would be shunned by a shark coming off a fast.

For shame. Unless we in the Hudson environs begin to protect our finfish, and hold at least one course at Rockland Community College on them, the river may be resolutely dismissed as fit for nothing except gambling boats out of Albany and 40 Luna Parks from Sneden's Landing to Athens.

Commercial fishermen, now outraged by the fishing ban imposed because of the PCBs emanating from G.E.'s toaster-manufacturing plants further upriver, have been excised from the shad industry for these many years. And neither the old

state Department of Conservation nor the Department of Commerce wet a sein to do anything about it.

I TAKE note in Search, the quarterly publication of the State University of New York, that the annual catch of finfish in this state declined from 52 million pounds in 1939 — the record year — to 17 million today. While four million pounds of shad were caught in 1945 — the year I was introduced to this wonderful fish off Cap'n Tug Wilson's dock in Haverstraw — Search reports flatly that "the shad fishery in the Hudson is all but dead, unable to revive."

But if I were a commercial fisherman I would be just as outraged by how our state's braintrust let the shad industry flounder as by the infusion of PCBs.

Search reports that the shad industry died not because of scarcity "but low prices brought on by new national transportation patterns and technology developed" during the post-war years when the Hudson's pollution thickened.

IN SOUTHERN rivers, Search notes, shad start to run as early as January and thus are able to get into New York markets all during the late winter. Our shad come too late, the seasonal demand has been satisfied, and there's no profit because prices, necessarily, have been lowered.

Tug Wilson, who loved shad, the companionship of independent rivermen and good corn distilled, never was an aggressive shad salesman. Perhaps he should have been because Hudson River shad has lost out to another version of the syndicate.