PORT WASHINGTON, WIS.
OZAUKEE PRESS
W. 5,900

JAN 1 5 1976

the great outdoors

By Al Wilke



During the past few years we have heard much about the commercial fishing business. Much of it was adverse publicity. Some of it was justified but most was not if all the facts were known and considered. There were some who violated the law by selling trout illegally and some arrests were made for other violations.

Let us examine a few of the facts and realize what a desperate situation the commercial fishing business finds itself in at this time. If conditions continue, within a few years at the most, the commercial fishing business as we knew it in the past will be something to read about in the history books. Those that are operating today are doing the best they can, hoping for some improvement soon.

At this time, outside of several commercial fisherman operating in northern Door County and catching whitefish, the business is at a standstill.

Let us review some of the troubles and problems that have plagued the industry in the past years. Commercial lake trout fishing has been a dead issue for over two decades. By intensive stocking by all states and the federal government all around the Great Lakes, the trout population is now quite large. But the commercial fisherman is forbidden by law to take them. The good trout populations have caused an explosion in the sport fishing activities which have become quite successful. Thousands now engage in hook and line fishing for lake trout which is permitted all year. These people are against permitting any kind of commercial fishing for trout. They number in the thousands and are now engaged in a campaign to stop all gill net fishing of any kind. What chance has a handful of commercial fishermen against the great numbers of sport fishermen?

Most of the commercial fishermen who had been in the trout fishing business many years ago have converted their equipment over to chub fishing. This allowed them to be able to continue to operate during the past few years but now the chub population has literally been almost depleted. The DNR has placed a closed season on the fishing of chubs until Jan. 15 when it will open for two weeks and then possibly close again for three months. This will be up to the department of natural resources which it seems cannot quite make up its mind just what to do. Years ago some income was derived from perch fishing but that source has also been reduced to the point of no profit.

Many industries get financial and other aid from the state and local governments but not the commercial fishing business. It seems odd to me that, for example, millions of tax dollars can be spent on the promotion of the tourist industry through state agencies and chamber of commerce bodies. What is done for the struggling commercial fishing industry?

Now almost all of the fish caught are declared dangerous for human consumption due to the content of PCB, about which we read and hear so much. Restrictions galore are placed upon the commercial fishing business but just how much is being done about big business dumping all the poisons into our environment? Little.

In review, the big and almost unsurmountable problems of the commercial fishing business today are inflation and high prices for equipment and labor, DNR regulations, sportsmen opposition, very poor production of legal fish, government agencies declaring fish unsafe and little or no help of any kind from any source.

The men in the industry find themselves in a very dark period. It is their life work and their life's earnings are invested in many thousands of dollars worth of useless equipment. So we can see that there is little hope for the business as it has been known for centuries unless something develops very soon to help the industry.

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