

File 4

Lewiston Writer Takes Issue With Columnist On Dam Issue

(Editor's Note: Jack O'Connor of Lewiston, arms and ammunition editor for Outdoor Life Magazine, has long been associated with sportsmen's interests. Here, in a letter to the Tribune, he takes issue with John Corlett, Boise political writer, whose column anent proposed dams at Penny Cliffs and Bruce Eddy in the Clearwater drainage, appeared in the Tribune Jan. 15.)

By JACK O'CONNOR

An effort is being made by those who want dams built on the Clearwater drainage at Penny Cliffs and Bruce Eddy to paint members of the Idaho Wildlife as dogs in the manger. In the Jan. 15 issue of the Tribune one John Corlett, who, according to the Tribune, is a "well-known Idaho political writer," says the federation is against all dams. It is not. It said no such thing.

Why should Corlett say such a thing? Who is the guy? What is he well-known for? Who pays his wages? Why does he distort the truth? Why does his heart bleed for the mines and the Simplot interests? I have just consulted "Who's Who in America" to get some line on Mr. Corlett. He is not listed, so I presume his fame is not exactly earth-shaking.

The facts of the case are simply these:

The building of the two high dams as planned by the Army Engineers will have the following results:

1. It will flood the winter range used by one of the largest and

healthiest elk herds in the United States. Thousands of elk are taken annually from this herd. It affords splendid recreation for citizens of Idaho and for citizens of other states. It also furnishes several hundred thousands of dollars worth of meat a year and it is worth a lot of money to those who sell supplies and services to elk hunters.

There is plenty of summer range for the elk, but the winter range, which is necessary to their existence, is in the valleys of the tributaries of the Clearwater. If the dams are built 90 per cent of the elk will perish during the first severe winter because their winter range will be flooded. That is not my opinion of the opinion of the Idaho Wildlife Federation but the opinion of expert game biologists in Idaho and out.

2. If the dams are built as projected, the salmon and steelhead runs will be completely destroyed. According to fish biologists, the spawning fish can be got up over the dams by one means or another, but by no means known to man can the fingerlings returning to the sea be got down safely over dams of that height.

3. The building of the dams will destroy the present excellent trout fishing available in the upper Clearwater and its various tributaries. Selway Falls, for example, will be under many feet of water. Water will reach far back into the hills into country away from roads into which people now pack or hike to fish.

4. The building of the dams will

not furnish substitute fishing as Professor Corlett, the savant who shoots blindly from the hip, would have us believe. The southern Idaho lakes which furnish fishing are shallow lakes where the sunlight through relatively few feet of water can promote the growth of fish food. The lakes which result from the building of the projected dams on the Clearwater drainage would be deep, narrow, cold lakes. The rise and fall of the water level would keep plants palatable for fish from growing in the small areas of shallow water. Again, this is not my opinion, but the opinion of informed fish biologists.

Dams can be built in areas where they will do little damage to fish and to wildlife, but the dams as projected on the Clearwater can only result in the destruction of the great elk herd, the destruction of the steelhead and salmon runs, the ruin of the trout fishing. At a time when there is more leisure than ever before, when there is a greater demand for recreational facilities of all types, the construction of the dams would destroy much of the recreational value of an enormous stretch of country.

This is a very grave threat to those of us who live in this area, who love the purple spruce-clad hills, the sparkling trout streams, the sleek whitetail and the handsome elk. It is also a problem for the thousands of citizens of Idaho who do not wish to see the ruthless destruction of the recreation values and natural beauty of the state, to those other thousands who hunt and fish and vacation in the area.

It is likewise a problem to all Americans who want to see natural beauty and values preserved, who want to see natural resources utilized in economical and orderly manner.

In older and more thickly settled states millions of dollars are being spent on the demand of an outraged public to restore to some extent the natural beauty and value of streams which were ruined to save paltry thousands. Let us learn from their experience. Let us not destroy our fish and wildlife, foul our air, defile our water, and leave a filthy and corrupted state for our grandchildren to restore.