

Are Wildlife Objections Overstated?

Unless the state Fish and Game Department has some information which has not been aired publicly elsewhere, it would appear that departmental objections to a series of dams proposed on the Clearwater River have been somewhat overstated.

Ross Leonard, department director, declared Thursday at Boise that the dams probably would "annihilate the runs of salmon from the Clearwater drainage suitable for spawning purposes" and that the wintering ground of big game would be "definitely affected."

Meanwhile, Jim Parsons, Sandpoint outdoors writer, criticized the Army Corps of Engineers proposals for the dams as "plans that would help to turn North Idaho into a forest of concrete." He declared that "dams would definitely affect a major portion of the elk winter range by putting it under water."

It has proved impossible so far to obtain for publication from the Corps of Engineers the details of the tentative proposals it has advanced for construction of the dams, but those who have been given these details are convinced that the dams would not seriously affect the winter range of big game in the Clearwater basin.

As the dam proposals have been explained in public meetings at Lewiston and Orofino, the level of the water would be raised consid-

erably in the winter range for elk along the Lochsa and Selway rivers but not enough to inundate any essential grazing grounds and not enough to force elk into significantly higher elevations.

The effect of the dams upon fish has not been explained as fully as this by advocates of the dams. The Fish and Game Department reports that it has completed a study on potential fish damage in the area, and that report will be entered at a public hearing on the dams next Friday.

That report should be of considerable value in helping residents of this area judge the proposed projects, especially since Leonard appears to be speaking factually and moderately on the fish subject. There has been no hint so far in the department's pronouncements upon the projects of the kind of sweeping, unjustified and misleading attack which has been conducted, for example, by the Washington Department of Fisheries upon Ice Harbor dam.

The views of sportsmen should be given full consideration along with those of other interests which also have a stake in the future of the Pacific Northwest when the dam proposals are presented for public scrutiny at the Orofino hearing next week. Any overstatements of benefits or disadvantages should become rather apparent when all the facts are in.—B. J.