

COLUMBIA RIVER SEAL CONTROL PROGRAM

Director.....
Asst. Dir.....
Portland Sup.....
H. D. Sup.....
1970

Introduction

The Columbia River seal control program has been conducted under legislative authority provided by ORS 506.341. This statute states that the Fish Commission must pay a bounty to be set between \$5 and \$25 for each seal killed in the Columbia River. The statute also permits the commission to use funds from the seal account to control or take seals in the Columbia River. During the past 11 years seals have been controlled by hiring a hunter to kill seals in the Columbia River. Effective January 17, 1970, the bounty was reduced to \$5 per seal by Fish Commission action.

Revenues and Disbursements

ORS 508.290 provides that each Oregon gill-net fisherman pays an annual fee of \$2.50 and each canner pays \$50.00 yearly for seal control.

The seal hunter is paid \$40 per day plus gasoline for his boat and ammunition for his rifle.

The fund balance on July 1, 1970 was \$4,055.07. Receipts during fiscal 1970 from the sale of seal certificates were \$1,535.00 from the gill-net fishermen and \$350.00 from the cannery. The amount available for fiscal 1970 was \$6,066.02 (Table 1). This compares to a total of \$6,819.52 one year ago. This is the twelfth year in succession that the annual receipts have not been adequate to carry their present program and reserves were used to provide continued support. However, the fund reserves decreased less than in any previous year. This resulted from lowering bounty payments from \$25 to \$5 in 1970. In fiscal year 1970, \$235 was paid out for 19 seals certified under the bounty program.

Program Results

The bounty program has resulted in 3,493 claims during the 35-year period from 1936-70 (Table 2). In general, bounty claims have been fewer since 1962 than in earlier years. In 1942, 667 bounties were presented for claims. In 1970, only 19 bounties were claimed.

The program utilizing a seal hunter provides active harassment of seals during the time commercial fishing seasons are open. The hunter's activities tend to drive seals from the Columbia River and reduce the predation by seals on salmon held captive in the fishermen's nets. During calendar year 1970 we paid the seal hunter for 48 days during which he killed 51 seals and reported 21 possible kills or wounded animals (Table 3). Although the number of days hunted in 1970 (48) was less than average (56), the number of seals killed in 1970 (51) was exceeded only by the 54 killed in 1968.

We maintain no surveillance program of the seal herds in the Columbia River and it is not possible for us to evaluate the true effectiveness of this program. Limited contacts with fishermen in the past indicated they felt the program was beneficial and they wished to continue the practice of having a seal hunter.

We have received four letters in the last year, from the east coast and California. These have criticized our agency for hiring a seal hunter and paying bounties for seals killed.

Seal Questionnaire

In an effort to contact fishermen to secure their views about the program, a questionnaire was prepared and mailed to all licensed gill-net fishermen (456) and canners (7) in 1970. A total of 188 (41 percent) of those sent were returned. The following questions were asked and responses received:

1. Should the Fish Commission continue to hire a seal hunter on the Columbia River?

Yes - 103 (55%) No - 73 (39%) Did not answer - 10 (6%)

2. Would you support a trial period of one year without a seal hunter to evaluate the effectiveness of the program?

Yes - 99 (53%) No - 77 (41%) Did not answer - 10 (6%)

3. Would you support legislation to eliminate the bounty system, control program?

Yes - 47 (25%) No - 121 (65%) Did not answer - 18 (10%)

We also asked for comments on the program. Comments ranged from eliminating the program to expanding it. No clear trend was evident from the comments.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of the present seal control program is to harass the seals in the Columbia River and reduce their predation on salmon in the river, particularly those in fishermen's nets. The effectiveness of the seal hunter or bounty program cannot be effectively demonstrated. A questionnaire reflected fishermen's feelings that they wanted the program continued and they favored continuing the practice of hiring a seal hunter. Approximately 53 percent of those returning questionnaires indicated they would support a trial period of one year without a seal hunter to evaluate the program.

We recommend that no seal hunting contract be awarded for 1971 and that a questionnaire be distributed after the late fall commercial season to again get comments from the fishermen on any change in predatory activity of seals in 1971. We also recommend the bounty program be continued at the minimum rate of \$5 per animal.

FISH COMMISSION OF OREGON
February 22, 1971

STATEMENT OF RECEIPT AND DISBURSEMENTS
SEAL FUND ACCOUNT

Table 1.

July 1, 1957 to June 30, 1970

Fiscal Year	Fund Balance July 1	Receipts Seal Certificates		Less 10% to General Fund	Amount Available	Disbursements:		Unexpended Balance
		Gill Net	Canner			Bounties	Seal Hunter	
1958	\$25,467.74	\$1,562.50	\$350.00	\$191.25	\$27,188.99	\$2,550.00	\$	\$24,638.99
1959	24,638.99	1,612.50	400.00	201.25	26,450.24	975.00	1,849.67	23,625.57
1960	23,625.57	1,595.00	350.00	194.50	25,376.07	1,150.00	3,153.01	21,073.06
1961	21,073.06	1,535.00	350.00	188.50	22,769.56	1,100.00	3,331.05	18,338.51
1962	18,338.51	1,467.50	350.00	181.75	19,974.26	2,650.00	3,163.43	14,160.83
1963	14,160.83	1,470.00	400.00	187.00	15,843.83	825.00	2,131.50	12,887.33
1964	12,887.33	1,130.00	400.00	153.00	14,264.33	425.00	3,794.82	10,044.51
1965	10,044.51	1,015.00	300.00	131.50	11,228.01	650.00	1,759.99	8,818.02
1966	8,818.02	1,085.00	350.00	143.50	10,109.52	575.00	1,648.34	7,886.18
1967	7,886.18	1,105.00	350.00	145.50	9,195.68	350.00	2,022.59	6,823.09
1968	6,823.09	1,450.00	300.00	175.00	8,398.09	525.00	2,612.82	5,260.27
1969	5,260.27	1,382.50	350.00	173.25	6,819.52	800.00	1,650.00	4,369.52
1970	4,369.52	1,535.00	350.00	188.50	6,066.02	235.00	1,775.95	4,055.07

Table 2.

NUMBER OF BOUNTY CLAIMS AND AMOUNT OF PAYMENT
FROM THE SEAL FUND, 1936-1970 1/

<u>Year</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Rate 2/</u>	<u>Amount</u>
(Biennial Period Ending June 30)			
1936	63	5	\$ 315
1938	410	5	2,050
1940	534	10	5,340
1940 ³⁾	101	5	505
1942	667	10	6,670
1944	257	10	2,570
(Fiscal Year Ending June 30)			
1945	73	10	730
1946	114	10	1,140
1947	139	10	1,390
1948	77	10	770
1949	63	10	630
1950	58	10	580
1951	24	10	240
1952	25	10	250
1953	26	10	260
1954 ³⁾	47	15	705
1954 ³⁾	35	10	350
1955 ³⁾	97	25	2,425
1955 ³⁾	9	15	135
1956	82	25	2,050
1957	70	25	1,750
1958	102	25	2,550
1959	39	25	975
1960	46	25	1,150
1961	44	25	1,100
1962	106	25	2,650
1963	33	25	825
1964	17	25	425
1965	26	25	650
1966	23	25	575
1967	14	25	350
1968	21	25	525
1969	32	25	800
<u>3/</u> 1970 ³⁾	7	25	175
1970 ³⁾	12	5	60
Total	3,493		\$43,665

1/ The law creating the Seal Fund (applying only to the Columbia River) was enacted at the Special Legislative Assembly, November 1935.

2/ Commissions have altered the bounty rate several times, depending on availability of funds and need.

3/ Rate changed from a \$25 bounty payment to a \$5 bounty payment on January 17, 1970.

Table 3.

COLUMBIA RIVER SEAL CONTROL PROGRAM
12-YEAR PERIOD 1959-1970 INCLUSIVE

<u>Years</u>	<u>Days Hunted</u> ^{1/}	<u>Seals Killed</u>	<u>Possible Kills and Wounded</u>	<u>Total Seals</u>
1959 (Feb.-Sept.)	74	43	59	102
1960 (Feb.-Sept.)	78	27	47	74
1961 (2/18-9/24)	94	34	45	79
1962 (3/31-9/27)	48	31	36	67
1963 (2/18-9/24)	64	47	75	122
1964 (2/17-8/25)	40	29	38	67
1965 (2/15-8/18)	39	30	35	65
1966 (Feb.-Sept.)	40	47	44	91
1967 (Feb.-Sept.)	56	49	30	79
1968 (Feb.-Sept.)	53	54	37	91
1969 (Feb.-Sept.)	37	26	20	46
1970 (Feb.-Sept.)	<u>48</u>	<u>51</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>72</u>
Total	671	468	487	955

FISH COMMISSION OF OREGON

February 16, 1971

^{1/} Any portion of a day on which seal hunting took place is included as one hunting day.