

Snow

Shooting of Sea Lions

Problem

Shooting of sea lions on the Oregon coast takes place for two reasons: first, because sea lions compete with commercial and sports fishermen for salmon, and ² second, because they are a challenging target. The shooting is opposed on the basis of preservation of the animals, the problem of carcasses washed onto the beach, and the danger to human life that shooting over water presents. The subject of shooting sea lions is on the agenda because of the considerable public interest recently displayed.

Background

It is illegal to kill sea lions in Oregon at any time except where specified as being legal by the Fish Commission (O.R.S. 509.185). Oregon administrative rules 30-040 through 30-080 authorize the shooting of sea lions in the following streams:

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|--------|-------------|--------|----------------------|
| 30-040 | Coos Bay | 30-065 | Sixes River |
| 30-045 | Elk River | 30-070 | Tenmile Creek |
| 30-050 | Nehalem Bay | 30-075 | Tillamook Bay |
| 30-055 | Netarts Bay | 30-080 | Umpqua Bay and River |
| 30-060 | Rogue River | | |

The first law affecting sea lions was enacted in 1921 and authorized the extermination of sea lions in Oregon. ^{L. 1921, a mandate} The law was revised in 1931 to give the animal protection and made killing sea lions punishable by a fine. The existing regulation authorizing killing of sea lions to protect or preserve fish became law in 1941. Bounties were paid for sea lions from 1925 to 1933.

By authority of existing regulations many sea lions were shot in legal areas. This activity was discussed at a public hearing in February 1969. A staff recommendation to limit shooting of sea lions to Coos Bay and the Umpqua River was tabled.

An article in the April 6, 1970, issue of the Oregon Journal again called attention to the shooting of sea lions, arousing considerable public interest. Subsequently the Commission received 11 letters which protested the killing of sea lions.

Food of sea lions

The Fisheries Research Board of Canada in a comprehensive study of sea lion feeding habits off British Columbia examined stomach contents from 393 sea lions. They estimated that commercially valuable fish contributed 52.5% of the diet of the sea lions. Salmon made up 5.6% of the diet. Their use of salmon in Oregon and the effect on Oregon salmon stocks is unknown.

Status of herds

Sea lions migrate along the entire Oregon coast so the sea lion population size varies by season. Mr. Bruce Mate, University of Oregon Biology Department, has studied sea lions. He found that by October most of the sea lions that summer here have moved north to British Columbia and Alaska and are replaced by sea lions from California. The reverse migration occurs in April.

Vertz and Pearson of Oregon State University believe that the sea lion population must have been higher in 1925 than now because 1,387 sea lions were presented for bounty that year. Mate estimated that our present sea lion population ranges between 1,000-3,500 animals.

Mr. Don Houghton, owner of the Sea Lion Caves, said that where the caves area use to have a population of about 800-1,000 animals during peak periods, they now have a few dozen to a few hundred sea lions. He did not know if the population size at the caves reflected the abundance along the coast, but he knew the population trend at the caves was downward.

Early harvest

B.C. harvest

Effect of shooting on herd size

While shooting sea lions does eliminate individuals there is no information on its role in controlling average herd size. Further study of sea lion herd condition and mortality must be done before shooting can be said to be responsible for a decline in sea lion numbers.

Problem to fishermen

Because sea lions eat salmon, salmon may leave an area when sea lions are present. This possibility, and the stealing of fish by sea lions from nets or lines, troubles fishermen. Shooting of sea lions provides relief or at least satisfaction to the fishermen. The Commission received several letters about the time of the February 1969 hearing favoring killing sea lions.

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Danger to people

Shooting sea lions can be dangerous to humans. The Oregon State Police and Oregon Game Commission have reported problems in the Gold Beach area. People shoot from both jetties simultaneously and shoot towards the city. There is concern that someone will be killed.

Carcass disposal

The hearing on sea lions in February 1969 was held because of complaints received about carcass disposal problems. However, no disposal complaints were made to the Fish Commission since that time. The only mention of the subject was the previously cited Journal story which said that over 100 had to be disposed of this year by state employees.

Recommendation

Because it is not established that sea lions eat sufficient fish to impair the ultimate supply, the staff recommends the revoking regulations which permit the killing of sea lions.

Research Division
Fish Commission of Oregon
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*Comm. will weigh evidence on
both sides and make decision*