

Sent: Saturday, January 26, 2013 2:31 PM
Subject: Cowichan River History
From: Bob Kissinger.....

Last week I ran across a 1949 Fisheries Research Board of Canada report by a Ferris Neave called "Game Fish Populations of the Cowichan River".

This report was prompted by the concerns of the Duncan Chamber of Commerce and the Cowichan Fish and Game Association that the fish populations in the Cowichan river had been dropping for the past number of years.

Neave in this report noted the runs of native fish, the introduction of non-native fish and the production from the old hatchery that was located near the village of Lake Cowichan.

I found it quite facinating and thought that a summary may be of interest.

CHINOOK

In 1939 a return of over 12,000 was estimated at Skutz falls. As many did not travel that far up river it "seemed reasonable to assume that in many years the escapement to the total river exceeded 20,000 fish"

(In recent years,2005 to 07 inclusive, less than 5,000 chinooks were counted in the Cowichan.)

COHO

In 1939, 60,000 were observed passing Skutz falls.

(These large returns were recorded untill the 1980's. However starting in 2005 the coho return crashed to less than 4,000.)

STEELHEAD

The winter run was noted as starting in October "in the company of the main runs of the springs and coho" There was also a late run that started in late March and went untill at least the middle of May.

About 4% of the males and up to 12% of the females returned to spawn a second time.

Run size, depending upon the year, was estimated to be from 5,000 to 15,000 fish.

NON-NATIVE INTRODUCTIONS

KAMPLOOPS TROUT

Between 1922 to 1934, more that one and a half million eggs, fry, and fingerlings were planted in the Cowichan river.

Between 1938 to 1946, 135,000 fingerlings were released into Cowichan lake.

BROWN TROUT

From 1932 until 1935, 250,000 fry and fingerlings were released into the river. By 1937 reproduction was confirmed.

ATLANTIC SALMON

Between 1911 and 1934, 5.5 million fry and fingerlings were introduced to the river.

SPECKLED CHAR (Brook trout)

Between 1911 and 1931, 1,135,000 eggs, fry and fingerlings were planted in the river.

Some reproduction was observed in Oliver creel and tributaries of Robertson creek

LAKE TROUT

Between 1912 and 1916, 147,500 young lake trout were liberated into lake Cowichan.

HATCHERY

This hatchery operated from 1910 and 1934 and was located near the village of lake Cowichan. During that time it produced 19 million chinooks, 34 million coho, 2 million cutthroat, and 2 million steelhead. (I didn't get the impression that this production did much to increase the returns.)

Neave did suggest that the deforestation of the Cowichan watershed probably played a significant role in the decrease of the returns. He noted a decrease in the river's summer flow and a rise in the river temperature (up to 77°F)

Neave was an interesting man. At one time he lectured at the University of Manitoba. He was an avid mountain climber and during the 2nd world war he taught mountain climbing and mountain survival to the Canadian troops. He worked at the Biological Station in Nanaimo from 1939 to 1966. He died in 1986

Mount Ferris in the Waddington range is named after him.

Cheers, Basher