FISHING IN THE NATIONAL FORESTS

A discussion by Wallace Kadderly, Chief of the Radio Service, and Elizabeth Pitt, Forest Service, broadcast Friday, May 5, 1939, in the Department of Agriculture portion of the National Farm and Home Program by 104 stations associated with the National Broadcasting Company.

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KADDERLY:

There's an old saying that when the dogwood blooms, the fish are biting . . . well, there's a lot of dogwood in bloom in the National Forest these days, and I am going to see if I can find out from Elizabeth Pitt of the Forest Service if the fish are biting . . . how about it, Betsy, are the fish biting in the National Forests?

PITT:

They should be, Wallace . . . there are enough of them out there . . . the Forest Service and the Bureau of Fisheries planted about twice as many fish last year as they have in previous years . . . 330 million, to be exact.

KADDERLY:

Three hundred and thirty million . . . well, after all, I suppose the National Forests provide extensive fishing grounds for the public . . .

PITT:

Not only extensive but much of the most favorable fishing grounds . . . forests have a profound effect on fish life in a great many ways.

KADDERLY:

Temperature is important, isn't it . . . trout for instance need cold water, and streams and lakes in the forests are much cooler than those in more exposed locations.

PITT:

Yes . . . and another good forest influence is the effect on food . . . fallen trees in the bed of a stream or along the shores of a lake furnish support for insects and other organisms which fish like to eat. They also provide shelter . . . every fisherman knows that there isn't any better place to find a trout or bass than under an old log or a mass of submerged tree branches.

KADDERLY:

How about regulating the run-off of water? That has a good influence on fish life, doesn't it? Fish do best in streams and lakes where there are no great or sudden fluctuations in the water level. You are much more likely to find these conditions in forested areas than in nonforested regions.

PITT:

That's right. It isn't so much that floods injure the fish themselves, but they destroy the insects and organisms that the fish use for food.

KADDERLY:

And I suppose the erosion that goes hand in hand with floods doesn't help matters any.

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PITT:

In most cases it doesn't. . . catfish and carp don't seem to mind silt, but trout, bass, and other game fish thrive best in water that has only a little silt in it.

KADDERLY:

Let's go back to those 330 million fish you were talking about . . . the ones you said they planted in National Forest waters last year . . .

PITT:

I thought a good fisherman like you, Wallace, would want to know some more about those fish . . . well, some of them are pretty close by in the Virginia and Pennsylvania streams. . .

KADDERLY:

That's good news . . .

PITT:

I thought it would be . . . Our fish planting was pretty well scattered throughout the entire United States but the largest activities went on in the Lake States.

KADDERLY:

That's not surprising . . . the Lake States have been pretty well fished out . . . and the fish crop is important in a section like that where so much of the land is under water.

PITT:

Yes . . . and they really had a fish planting program in the Minnesota National Forests last year . . . they put in 188 million . . . mostly pike and muskellunge.

KADDERLY:

Just hazarding a guess -- I'd say Michigan and Wisconsin came in for a large share?

PITT:

Wisconsin got about 32 million and Michigan 22 million . . .

KADDERLY:

Now, jumping from the Lake states to the Pacific Coast. How about Oregon?

PITT:

I expected that question . . . and I looked it up . . . Oregon got 18,809,300.

KADDERLY:

Not 302 . . . just 300.

PITT:

Three hundred, sir . . . and I suppose you want to know what kind they were . . . I looked that up too . . . they were mostly rainbow, cutthroat, and steelhand. Also, I know you'll be glad to hear that Oregon leads all the Far Western States in this fish-planting program.

KADDERLY:

Well, that's fine - - - - Now let's get down to practical details about this fishing in the National Forests. I know that anybody can fish there . . . but there are no special permits or things like that?

PITT:

Oh, no . . . all you have to do is comply with the fishing-license requirements of the State in which the National Forest is located . . . the object of our fish-management program is to provide opportunities for the public to enjoy fishing, with as little difficulty as possible.

KADDERLY:

Not so many years ago fishing was a sort of inalienable right . . . you could fish anywhere you could find fish . . . but all that's changed a lot in the last quarter of a century . . .

PITT:

Yes . . . private ownership has had a tendency to force the casual fisherman into the background . . . especially in densely populated sections of the East. Connecticut, for example, has been forced to lease private streams or private fishing rights in order to provide places for persons of limited income to fish.

KADDERLY:

That puts an added emphasis on the social and economic values of the fishing grounds in the National Forests.

PITT:

It certainly does . . . the Forest Service, and the Bureau of Fisheries and the State conservation agencies, which cooperate in this work realize the importance of the extensive and favorable fishing waters found in the 158 National Forests, and they are doing all they can to meet the responsibility that this implies.

KADDERLY:

Thanks, Elizabeth Pitt, for this information.

Farm and Home Friends, there are 70,000 miles of fishing streams in the National Forest and thousands of acres of lakes. Not only do these Forests provide a favorable home for valuable game fish as Mrs. Pitt has explained -- but they also provide a home during early life for important commercial fish like salmon and shad, which live for the most part in salt water but must have fresh water for breeding grounds. It's hard to find out exactly what recreational fishing contributes to business in dollars and cents, but one of our trade associations has estimated that the fishing tackle alone sold annually in the United States is worth 25 million dollars. The sale of fishing tackle is a small part of the return that the sport brings to local communities and business generally, but this estimate gives at least an indication of the economic value to the Nation of the ancient sport of fishing.