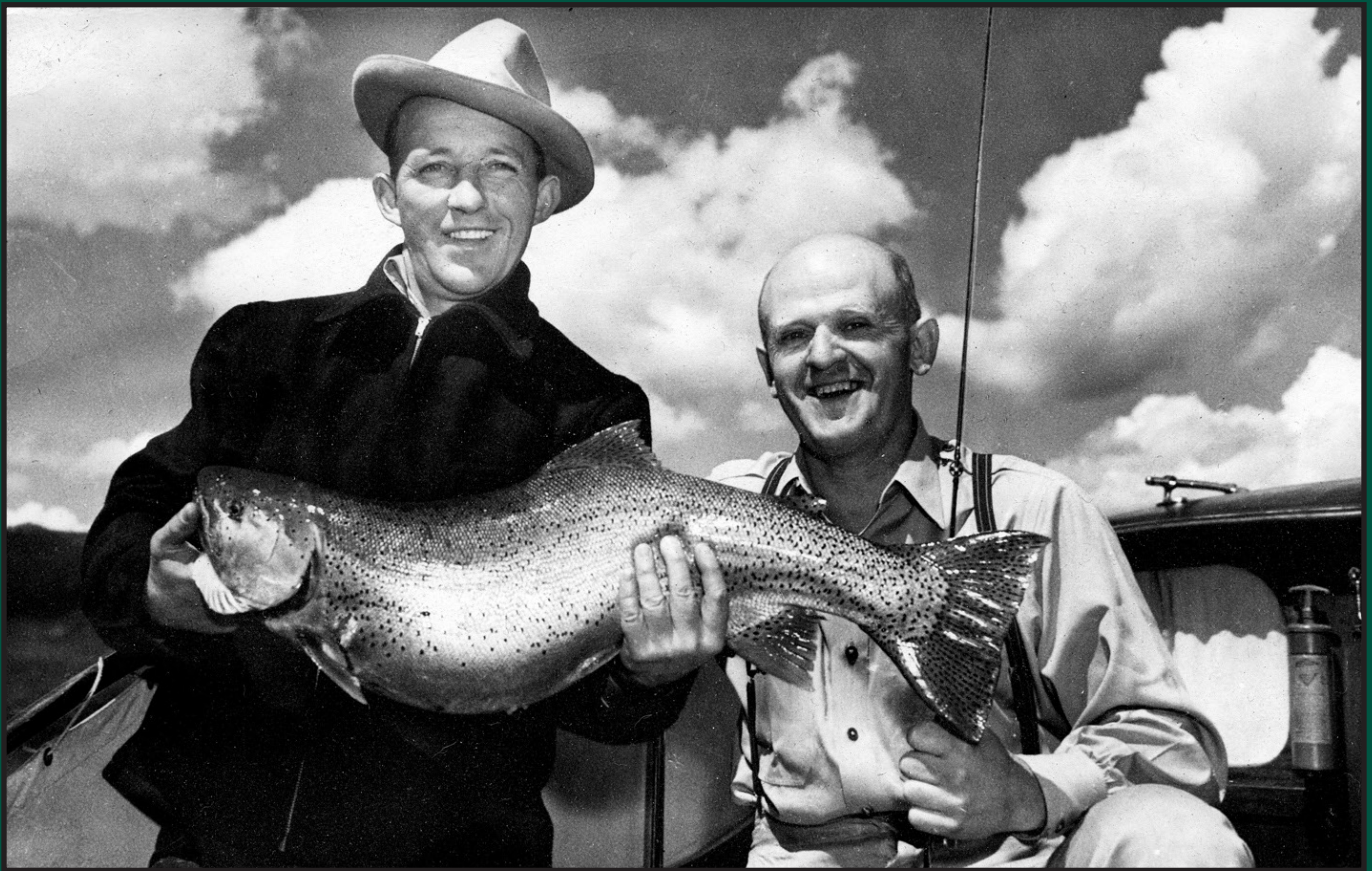


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- How commercial and recreational fishing in the 20th century shaped a northern Idaho lake
- The impact of the B-29 bomber on Seattle and Tokyo during World War Two
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A Trade, Not a Pastime

Commercial Fishing in North Idaho, 1900-1973

JAMES W. MARTIN

At dawn on a cold November day in 1908, the deputy state game warden M. H. Harbaugh, rifle in hand, moved in on two men working where Pack River empties into Lake Pend Oreille, a few miles east of Sandpoint, Idaho. The men had placed a net across the tributary at the height of the mountain whitefish and bull trout spawning runs, and were in the process of removing a haul of about seven hundred pounds of fish when Harbaugh emerged from the shadows and arrested them for netting and shipping fish. The warden took the men into custody after two weeks of focused investigation and surveillance, likely having been tipped off by shipments of fish through nearby Ponderay, a settlement between Sandpoint and Pack River along the Great Northern Railway. The two men worked with an accomplice who hauled their massive catches to the railroad siding in a launch at night and organized shipment to Spokane.¹ Hoping to end the traffic in netted fish, a local magistrate levied heavy fines, and the warden ordered all sales of fish from the lake stopped “to get at the illegal fishing which for a long period has been going on at this and other points on Lake Pend d’Oreille.”² The certainty of this declaration belied the shifting boundary of legality surrounding fishing practices and the way fish could be commodified.

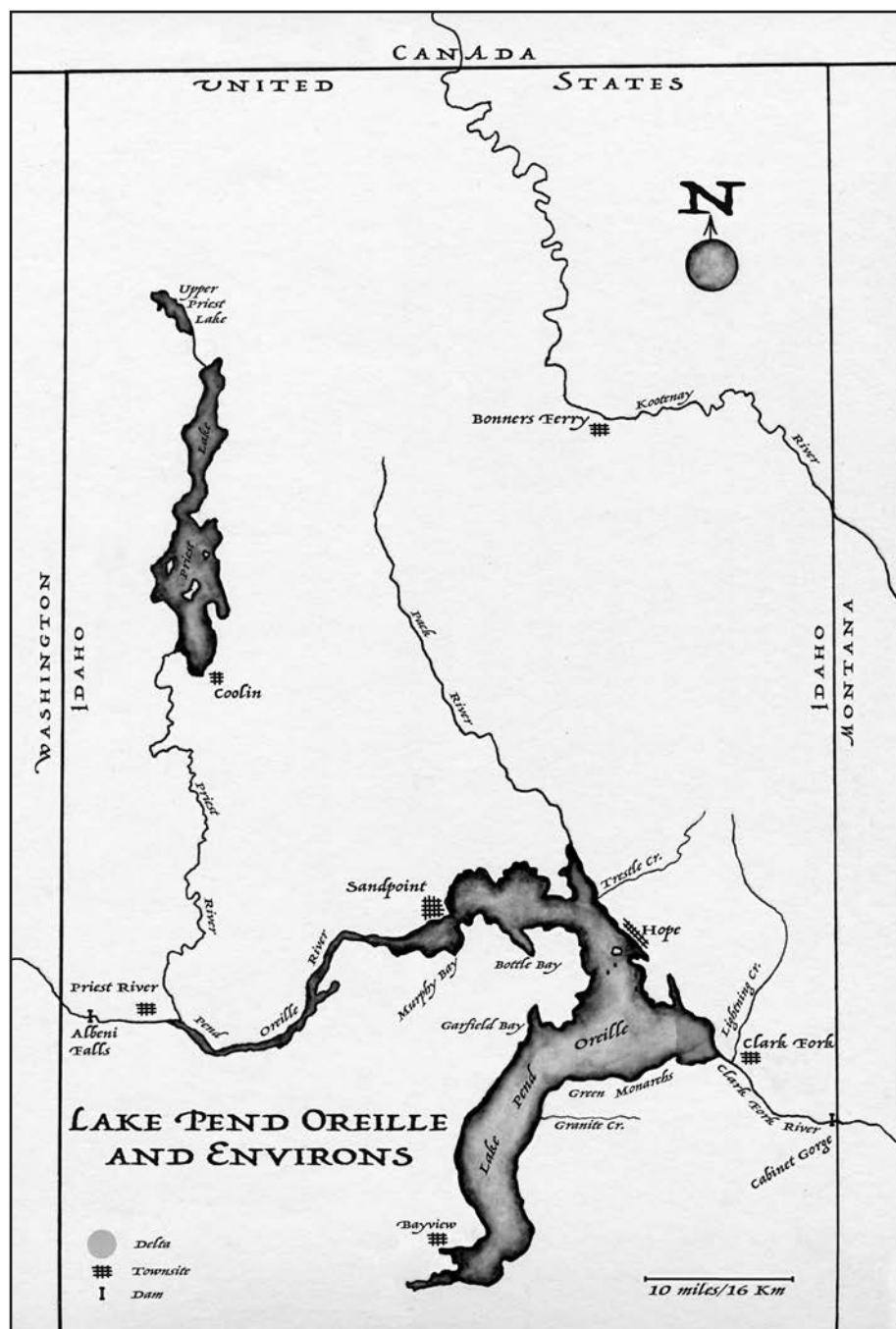
The Pack River poachers, in fact, had rather suddenly found themselves on the wrong side of the law. The state’s first fish law of 1893 had prohibited the netting and shipping of all fish ex-

cept salmon, salmon trout (steelhead), and sturgeon—none of which were present in Idaho’s northern lakes.³ In 1903 the state legislature expanded this net-fishing provision to include whitefish and what they called char (what we would now call bull trout), species native to northern lakes and long favored as food.⁴ In 1907, just a year before Harbaugh’s arrests, the state legislature turned about and ended net fishing altogether. That year’s fish law also outlawed ice fishing, a popular practice in North Idaho and the heart of the whitefish fishery.⁵ These restrictions must have hit net fishers hard. At least some demonstrated their discontent by continuing their work—and they were successful, if the robust illicit fish traffic from Lake Pend Oreille to more distant markets is any measure.⁶ Harbaugh justified the closure of commercial fishing by claiming that net-fishing poachers were sidestepping the law in two ways: by billing their fish as hook-and-line catches and by shipping them on the railroad.⁷ The warden had no idea of the far-reaching implications of that morning’s arrests. The case resulted in the establishment of a legally sanctioned commercial fishery that sustained hundreds of working-class families for decades. Commercial fishing shaped class relations in area communities, exerted a profound influence on the local aquatic ecosystem, and left an imprint on management priorities to this day.

In one sense, this story centers on the perseverance, organizational capacity, and political acuity of two vibrant fishing cultures—a conservation-minded

sporting community based in the area’s middle and upper classes and working-class commercial and subsistence fishers. As sportsmen steadily consolidated their control over fish and game resources around the United States in the 20th century, those of like mind in North Idaho contended and occasionally cooperated with well-organized commercial fishers—some of them unrepentant poachers—until the mid-1970s.⁸ The occasional blurring of lines between these communities through political alliances and fishing practices throughout the century complicates this narrative.

Commercial fishing also reveals the intersection of imperatives related to making the most productive and efficient use of nature. Fishing communities and managers argued, sometimes bitterly, about the shape the fishery was to take, but ultimately they agreed on the utilitarian goal of maximum productivity for the public good. The mid-20th century also saw the upper Columbia River subjected to a water-use regime bent on harnessing the river’s waters for hydroelectric development and flood control. The two imperatives shared deep roots, but their intersection in North Idaho produced profound ecological flux and played a key role in the end of commercial fishing. The questions raised by Harbaugh’s arrests in 1908, then, rippled through the decades: Who would have access to these resources, and what were acceptable ways of exploiting them? How would the meanings humans imposed on the species and spaces around them circumscribe



Commercial fishing shaped class relations in the communities surrounding Lake Pend Oreille, exerting a profound influence on the local aquatic ecosystem and leaving an imprint on management priorities to this day. (Map by author)

their usage? Whose knowledge and authority would hold ultimate sway in such decisions? What and who were these waters for, in the end?⁹

An abundance of water, rather than aridity, forms the overriding ecologi-

cal backdrop for this inland Northwest story. Ample precipitation makes the North Idaho swath of the upper Columbia lushly wooded, with serpentine lakes and fertile intermontane valleys laced with year-round streams and small rivers. Cycles of

glaciation, most recently the Wisconsinan (ending about 10,000 years ago), carved those deep valleys. Over the millennia, several ice-dam collapses near Lake Pend Oreille's northern shore—the terminus of the last glaciers—drained Glacial Lake Missoula and brought massive floods that shaped the region's topography, including Lake Pend Oreille's great depth. The lake's main tributary, the Clark Fork River, tracks the path of these cataclysmic floods from their source in present-day Montana. The Pend Oreille River forms the lake's outlet, flowing more than one hundred miles through Washington before joining the main stem of the Columbia near the Canadian border.

The region's dramatic geological history structured its aquatic ecology. Many species of fish from the Pacific Ocean colonized these inland waters as the last glaciers retreated. Thus mountain whitefish (*Prosopium williamsoni*), a tiny-mouthed planktivore (plankton eater), came to share the Pend Oreille drainage with cutthroat trout (*Onchorhynchus clarkii*), bull trout (*Salvelinus confluentus*, a species of char), northern pikeminnow or squawfish (*Ptychocheilus oregonensis*), largescale sucker (*Catostomus macrocheilus*), and others. In other drainages of the upper Columbia, in particular the Kootenay to the north, some salmonids made their way to deep glacial lakes after the Ice Age, only to remain confined to those waters by the same geological accidents that eventually kept their anadromous kin downstream. A couple of these species—in particular kokanee, most often called bluebacks in North Idaho (*Oncorhynchus nerka*, landlocked sockeye salmon), and Kamloops (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*, the Gerrard variant of rainbow trout)—adapted well to inland waters and evolved distinct populations.¹⁰ A range of copepods, tiny crustaceans, also adapted to these waters. Feeding on algae, they play a critical role in transforming the sun's energy into fish forage.

This biological abundance has long provided sacred meaning and sustenance to the area's aboriginal peoples, in particular the Kalispels.¹¹ Compelling research that melds archaeology, ethnography, and archival work has firmly established the importance of fishing to the people who spent most of their time in this region beyond the reach of anadromous salmon. Kalispel bands seasonally harvested fish, particularly bull trout and mountain whitefish, at highly productive places such as the mouths of tributaries emptying into lakes like Pend Oreille or Priest. They also made incidental use of several species of fish throughout the year and adeptly employed a range of technologies to feed themselves from the waters: weirs (sometimes quite large in scale), seines, spears, and hook-and-line rigs. Aboriginal methods provided an abundance of fish even where salmon did not range.

White settlement in the late 19th century initiated ecological destabilization and dispossession, which worked together to break the Kalispels' long relationship with these waters and lands.¹² Railroad dikes, white homesteading, and various forms of resource extraction furthered this process of enclosing and profoundly reshaping aboriginal territory before 1950, and dam construction in the 1950s effectively brought it to a conclusion, immersing important travel conduits, living sites, and sacred places in the Pend Oreille drainage. As they tried to maintain their seasonal rounds after the onset of white settlement, Kalispels and neighboring tribes sold fish and huckleberries to railroad companies and settlers on occasion.¹³ But without treaty rights along the Pend Oreille corridor in North Idaho, Indigenous people found themselves subject to the same fish and game laws as settler society.¹⁴ With the Kalispels and other Indians confined to distant reservations in Washington and Montana and squeezed out of their usual places and methods of harvest, the 20th-cen-

tury commercial fishery in North Idaho became the province of white settlers.

As on many frontiers of settler colonialism in North America, the exploitation of fish for economic gain in North Idaho went hand in hand with the arrival of Euro-American settlers. Market fishing might have built on aboriginal practices, but the economic rationale that governed it transformed the lake from the center of a seasonal round of food gathering to a space governed by capitalist extractive enterprise.¹⁵ The new arrivals picked up Indigenous techniques (especially the use of fish traps and nets in tributaries during spawning runs), blended them with methods developed elsewhere, and applied them with a new intensity and little restraint. The netting operation Warden Harbaugh broke up at Pack River suggests that the newcomers gained valuable knowledge from observing Kalispel methods and harvest sites. Restrictions in the new state's first fish law, passed in 1893, reveal the sort of practices and equipment common in these early years of white settlement and ongoing aboriginal fishing: seines, setlines, poisons, and explosives. These prohibitions surely targeted both white and Indigenous fishers but had an especially dire impact on people whose lives had revolved around harvesting fish in certain places for many years. With no state funds for enforcement, however, such methods remained commonplace for quite some time.

In this climate, the state established the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) in 1899. From the department's inception, state wardens railed against a culture of profligate poaching. Charles H. Arbuckle, Idaho's first warden, wrote in his first public report in 1900, "Public sentiment seemed largely against the punishment of offenders, and convictions were almost impossible even for the most flagrant violations."¹⁶ Poorly

funded and sparsely manned, the department could do little in the remote north, where some netted and sold all the fish they could to timber towns hungry for cheap protein.

Abundant local sympathy made prosecution difficult, but a growing community of sport anglers vigorously protested what they considered outrageous illegal fishing practices.¹⁷ In the early 20th century, sport fishers' anger at those recently codified as "poachers" poured out in appeals to the state. "It is impossible under the present condition of affairs," editorialized one Sandpoint newspaper, "to keep the fish hogs from following their nefarious occupation."¹⁸ This wicked business had grave biological consequences. According to some, it disrupted species balance, a malleable notion that has run through every fishing debate from the 19th century to the present day, serving the interest of just about any angling constituency. Sportsmen argued that the by-catch of trout was giving the much-reviled squawfish—now officially known as northern pikeminnow—a numerical advantage over trout. They "seem to be thriving and very surely driving out the trout of the lake," went the chorus in the winter of 1906. Anecdotes of that year's sport-fishing season told the tale: "There was no fishing to speak of in the lake all summer and the trout hogs with their nets were responsible for it."¹⁹ Emotions ran high, and threats of violence were in the air. In 1907 one enraged trout fisherman even threatened to take out a steamboat with a grappling hook and destroy all the nets he could find.²⁰ In North Idaho as elsewhere in the United States, sportsmen lobbied state legislators and fish and game authorities to cement their control over local fish resources. "What should be a fisherman's paradise," they declared, "is being woefully neglected, by the state, the government and the individual."²¹ They found receptive ears hundreds of miles south in the state legislature in Boise.

The sportsmen appealed for more ef-

fective game-law enforcement and fish propagation. Wily net fishers had revealed “a complete incapacity of fish wardens to enforce the law.”²² A locally stationed warden, many believed, could tackle the traffic in illegally taken fish.²³ Harbaugh’s investigation demonstrated the state’s commitment. Thereafter the network of state wardens gradually encompassed the panhandle, driven by local appeals and steadily growing license revenue. Sportsmen also lobbied for a “systematic and aggressive effort” to stock area lakes with trout.²⁴ State involvement in the fishery quickly moved from the piecemeal stocking of potential food species to increasingly profound interventions in the area’s aquatic ecosystems. Construction of a state hatchery began in 1908 at Murphy Bay south of Sandpoint on the Pend Oreille River. By 1910 the facility boasted a main building and dock, along with a new gasoline-powered launch and a barge for transporting containers of fry to railroad stations across the river. Soon it became an important source of species mobility in the region. In these early years, it hatched and distributed some three million cutthroat, rainbow, and brook trout, and in later years it produced an even wider range of game species.²⁵ Boise’s responsiveness to northern sportsmen signaled the ascendancy of sportfishing organizations in shaping both the fishery and local civic culture.

These efforts unfolded in the context of what can only be described as a wholesale biological invasion of exotic species into area waters. Soon after the completion of the Great Northern Railway in 1893, the Idaho Panhandle came under the gaze of the U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries. The primary purpose of the newly established commission was the propagation of food fishes, and its network of eastern and midwestern hatcheries—working in concert with the rapidly expanding railroads—were at the forefront of species mobility. The overriding utilitarian ethos of the commission held that hu-

man rationality should correct nature’s wastefulness and render underproductive waters more productive food sources for a rapidly growing white settler population. This mentality meshed well with that of settlers, who in this remote area formed the vanguard of an era of extractive enterprise. One million three hundred thousand Lake Superior whitefish (*Coregonus clupeaformis*) fingerlings were the first new arrivals in Lake Pend Oreille, planted from a Great Lakes hatchery in 1889.²⁶ In the mid-1910s, the first warm-water fish, “black bass” (a term fishery managers then used for both small- and largemouth bass), arrived in the Pend Oreille drainage, although they had been introduced into smaller area lakes in the mid-1890s by individual petition to the U.S. Commission of Fish and Fisheries (after 1903 the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries).²⁷ The first introductions into Pend Oreille were likely largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), but soon other warm-water cousins were widespread in the area. By the early 1910s, large- and smallmouth bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*) and yellow perch (*Perca flavescens*) inhabited Twin Lakes (between Sandpoint and Spokane) and Coeur d’Alene Lake and its ancillary waters, just a few miles south of Lake Pend Oreille, and soon both were present in the big lake.²⁸ The U.S. Bureau of Fisheries introduced lake trout, or mackinaw (*Salvelinus namaycush*), into Lake Pend Oreille in 1925, an action whose profound consequences became clear only decades later.²⁹

These introductions and others in many smaller lakes likely resulted from U.S. Bureau of Fisheries deliveries to private individuals and subsequent furtive plantings—a form of propagation known today as bucket biology. The fish invasion of the Pend Oreille drainage in these years reveals the multiple channels that enable species mobility. As it turned out, in the immediate term these newcomers lacked the capacity to produce trophic cascades, profound reorderings of aquatic food

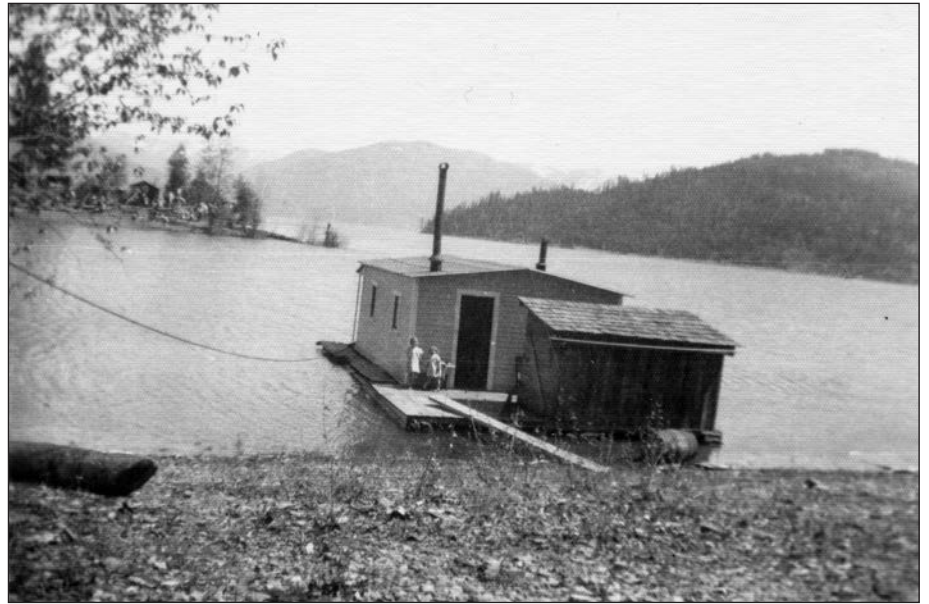
webs.

As Sandpoint sportsmen organized in the early 20th century, those trying to make a living off Pend Oreille’s fish staked their own claims. For subsistence fishers, a vital food source and cash income was at stake. As they would for decades to come, many of these people lived on the lake in houseboats, small scows bearing one- or two-room houses that could be moved along the shoreline seasonally and moored to trees. Masterful anglers, they brought in massive catches of mountain whitefish from the shallow waters near the lake’s westward-flowing outlet. For many families, fishing straddled the need for subsistence and small-scale commercial gain and provided an important seasonal supplement or alternative to employment in the area’s logging and lumber industries. In 1908, commercial anglers circulated a petition that offered a nod to elite sportsmen by limiting the taking of whitefish to a single hook and line. This concession situated their work within the parameters of fair chase so sacred to the sporting community and ensured that commercial fishing would remain the province of individual fishers, not larger business concerns. Species balance also played into their case. “The whitefish destroys the trout spawn,” they declared, “and is a menace to the gamier variety.”³⁰ The same went for what they called char (bull trout), considered by many to be “trout destroying fish” and less sporty prey than cutthroat trout.³¹ Subsistence fishers might not have shared their affluent neighbors’ sporting affinity for trout, but they knew how to exploit that sentiment in defense of their own livelihoods.

These community dynamics laid the groundwork for a pointed reaction to Harbaugh’s sudden closure of the fishery in late 1908. “Industry is paralyzed,” trumpeted a local paper on Christmas Day. The author, J. N. Robeson, a sport angler himself, followed this alarming

subhead with a fiery editorial demanding that the state recognize locals' "inal[i]enable right" to exploit the lake's fish. Robeson had spoken with subsistence anglers frustrated by the market closure, and his coverage of the issue in the *Pend Oreille Review* conveyed their interest in sympathetic terms. Those he spoke to out on the winter's thick ice tied their trade to the area's economic health and to the suppression of species that competed with beloved sport species.³² Commercial fishing, proponents argued, would leave Lake Pend Oreille "better off for trout propagation [*sic*] and real sport."³³ Denying local fish to markets, many worried, would siphon off local wealth and fill the gap with fish from the Washington coast.³⁴ The citizens' petition Robeson enclosed with a letter to Governor James Brady in January of the following year demonstrated widespread local support for Robeson's position.³⁵ These arguments reconciled the interests of the sport and commercial fishing communities, a sign of an emerging cross-class alliance based on sportsmen's desire to mold the lake to suit their predilections and commercial fishers' need to ensure their livelihood. In the end, the case for commercial angling for whitefish won the day in the state legislature's 1909 session.³⁶ Commercial fishing would move forward, but firmly circumscribed by sportsmen's definitions of species value, fair chase, and appropriate exploitation, notions adeptly deployed by commercial anglers themselves. The state also established its control over the buying and shipping of fish. Those who engaged in this part of the business would be required to pay a bond for their license, keep careful records, and collect a sales tax.

The nucleus of the commercial whitefish fishery in the 1910s lay in the lake's northern shallows near Sandpoint. There a distinctive fishing culture took shape. Commercial fishing remained the province of the lake-bound squatter population, seasonally employed mill workers, loggers, and

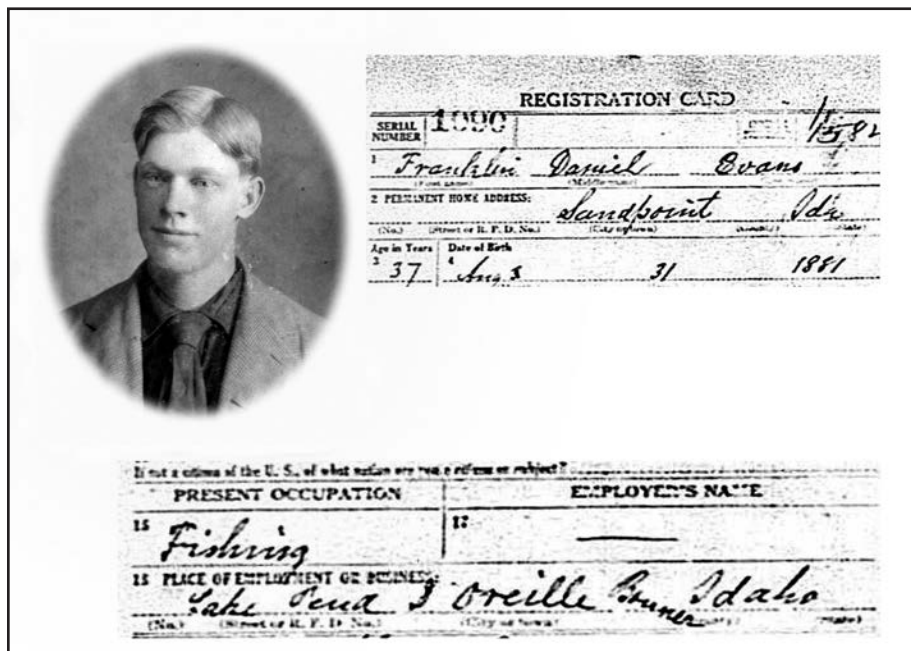


This image features the Miller family houseboat, moored in Lake Pend Oreille's Bottle Bay in the late 1930s. The Millers were longtime whitefish and blueback fishers. (All images are from author's collection, unless otherwise noted.)

farmers waiting out the area's heavy winters. When not on the ice, anglers fished from tiny wood skiffs—sometimes known as five-plank boats—about 12 feet long and 3 feet wide at the beam, heavily loaded with gear, and with a little storage space and usually a wood stove.³⁷ Many fishermen crafted their own boats in a vernacular style, while others probably relied on more-skilled builders. They were one-person affairs propelled by oars. The gunwales rested but a few inches off the surface, making for easy handling (a technique in which the fishing line is held in the hands) but dicey going in choppy water. Whether fishing through the ice or by boat, anglers handlined with "hooks baited with white grub worms," most likely maggots. Bait gathering itself was already "quite an industry," bringing \$1 per hundred grubs in the 1910s. In winter, fishermen pulled cabins on sleds that could be moved about on the ice to find schools of fish.³⁸ In 1910, one observer reported on "a new village" on the ice at Bottle Bay, and estimated that two tons of fish a day were hauled onto the ice and sold in town or smoked and shipped west by rail to Spokane or east

to mining centers at Libby and Butte, Montana.³⁹ One local fish buyer made a daily crossing from Sandpoint on the steamer *Queen* to buy catches from fishermen. In 1911, about 150 fishermen earned their livelihood this way, the most successful bringing in \$15 a day. About 30,000 pounds of whitefish went from the lake to market monthly in these years, amounting to around \$25,000.⁴⁰ In 1912 a report had one hundred men averaging about \$3.50 a day fishing these waters, and many had banded together to guarantee a purchase price of seven cents a pound. "Several women make a good living from their catches of whitefish," noted a visiting Spokane reporter, three of whom "catch as many whitefish each day as do the men."⁴¹ In the warm months, some fishermen worked in the Humbird Lumber Company mill, the economic engine of the area, but when the mill shut down from late fall through spring, they were left out to dry. The legalized commercial fishery thus became a vital adjunct to North Idaho's timber-dominated economy.

The first decade of legal commercial fishing was fraught with struggles over



Frank Evans, whose career spanned decades of legal and bootleg market fishing, noted his career on his World War I draft card.

prices and the claims of the state over fishery resources. “Whitefish wars” flared during the annual fishing season because Sandpoint market owners tried to depress the price they paid the anglers for whitefish as much as possible.⁴² Eventually independent anglers consolidated their power by appointing the Sandpoint dock owner Emil Kraege the sole buyer of their fish. Kraege made an ideal candidate because of his experience in the industry, the trust he enjoyed among market fishers, his house near the lake’s northern shore and the railroad, and his personal telephone line for taking orders.⁴³ Kraege soon became the only whitefish buyer in town not involved in the price-fixing scheme.⁴⁴ Whether this arrangement stabilized market conditions is uncertain, for distant world events soon rendered the question moot. The exigencies of the wartime domestic economy soon cast their shadow over North Idaho’s waters. After U.S. entry into World War I, Governor Moses Alexander began opening the state’s lakes to more intense exploitation. In early 1918, Alexander issued a far-reaching proclamation to dra-

matically boost the state’s food production. “There are now millions of fish going to waste,” he declared, “which according to National and State Food Administrators will make excellent food for mankind.”⁴⁵ He then authorized the state game warden, Roy C. Jones, to issue permits allowing the seining of whitefish and perch in the northern lakes. Trout and any other game fish were to be released alive.⁴⁶ Catches from this wartime fishery were to be marketed within Idaho, at a price not to exceed 15 cents a pound—a state intervention in the economy meant to stabilize a skittish food market prone to price spikes.⁴⁷

As the nation returned to peacetime, poor fishing brought to the fore latent tensions between sportsmen and commercial fishers, with profound implications for those making their living on the lake’s fish. As the first peacetime summer wore on, the Sandpoint Commercial Club acted on its perception of the lake’s scarcity—a situation we can assume resulted from overfishing before and during the war. Why did a commercial

club oppose an important economic activity? Many members were dedicated anglers and felt that market fishing posed a serious threat to their favored fishery, a feeling that outweighed their goal of growing the local economy. A sense of stewardship over fish resources and how they should be exploited drove their arguments. Some claimed that commercial anglers skirted the law by illegally harvesting trout and char and clandestinely shipping them in falsely labeled boxes.⁴⁸ In 1919, club members proposed a three-year embargo on the commercial fishing of whitefish on Lake Pend Oreille. The club’s president, Fred Wendle, forwarded the recommendation to the current state warden, Otto M. Jones. Wendle placed the blame for Pend Oreille’s decline squarely on hook-and-line commercial fishers, sidestepping the impact of wartime seining and its high potential for by-catch. The “supply of whitefish and lake trout has so appreciably decreased,” claimed Wendle, “that good fishing is no longer in the lake.”⁴⁹

The Sandpoint sportsmen’s rapport with state game officials produced the sportsmen’s desired response in October 1919, when Warden Jones abruptly closed the lake to market fishing.⁵⁰ Jones’s action reordered the fishing commons for the next decade and a half, effectively codifying a reallocation of the resource from one fishing community to another.⁵¹ The closure of 1919 heralded the consolidation of local sportsmen’s alliance with state authority. A year and a half later, Jones admitted as much: “The whitefishing would again be opened up when the sportsmen and not the commercial fishermen should ask it.”⁵² Those who had invested their livelihoods in commercial fishing refused to abandon their claim on the area’s waters. These anglers had bought boats and fishing gear and had structured their lives around the harvest of whitefish, and the state’s sudden, unilateral action hit them hard. In the press, commercial an-

glers decried the closure as an assault on the “proletarian fisherman.” A \$30,000 industry made up of small-scale, working-class anglers stood to suffer fatal damage at the hands of the Sandpoint Commercial Club—an irony, they argued, given its mission to “nurse sources of wealth.”⁵³ Warden Jones and others assured commercial anglers that the fishery would reopen pending local consensus that whitefish numbers had increased. Anecdotal local knowledge about what was happening under the lake’s waters brought about the fishery’s closure, and that murky terrain became the canvas for competing designs on the area’s fish resources. Until the depths of the Depression more than a decade later, the sportsmen’s alliance with the state suppressed legal market fishing on Lake Pend Oreille.

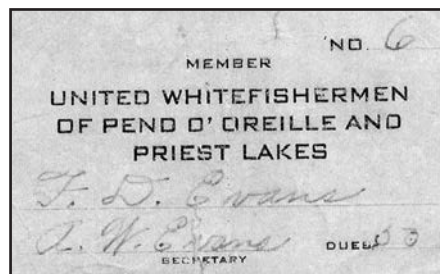
Despite their ascendancy, sportsmen and state authorities failed to halt a robust culture of bootleg fishing. Like subsistence hunters and fishermen facing similar situations in other parts of the country, many people were willing to risk the legal consequences of such work.⁵⁴ The standard daily limit of 50 whitefish remained in effect on a regular fishing license, so it is little wonder that some illegally marketed their excess catch. Wardens arrested men for netting, trapping, and even dynamiting fish during these years. The colorful career of Frank D. Evans, a fisherman and commercial smoker in Sandpoint since the 1910s, offers insight into this period. Looking back on his long fishing career in 1949, Evans did not even mention the lake’s closure—he flatly stated that Evans Fisheries had been in continuous operation since 1917.⁵⁵ Family lore reveals why he could construe the past that way, for poaching formed an important part of the Evans identity—at once an expression of autonomy and a testament to the family’s resourcefulness and cleverness. One tale from the 1920s has Frank Evans enlisting his many young sons to interlock arms and drive all manner of fish down trib-

utary creeks into his waiting nets. Evans’s fish bootlegging dovetailed with his moonshining career. His lakeside stills are something of a family legend, their ruins visible on Pend Oreille’s shores years later. Moving illegal fish and booze likely made up an important part of this large family’s income during these concurrent prohibitions.⁵⁶ William Warren, who grew up in a homesteading family on nearby Priest Lake in the 1920s, declared that seining and other violations were rampant and sometimes overlooked by the wardens. Overly zealous wardens met with uncooperative local judges, and some wardens simply looked the other way as people went about “living off the land,” in Warren’s words.⁵⁷ As economic conditions worsened in the 1930s, reports percolated in the local press that some officials were “winking” at laws against the sale of fish and allowed bootleggers to conduct their business more or less in the open.⁵⁸

The Depression hit North Idaho hard, and brought the closure of the immense Humbird Lumber Company mill and eventually of all its attendant operations in the panhandle.⁵⁹ In this climate, debate over opening area lakes renewed. In the midst of economic decline and the incipient New Deal, those who depended on fishing for their livelihood took advantage of the moment. In 1934, they created their own organization, the United Whitefishermen of Pend d’Oreille and Priest Lakes.⁶⁰ Wardell Evans (Frank’s

son) served as secretary, and Adolph Llanto, a frequent spokesman, acted as president. Fay Williford, William Zinter, C. P. Murphy, Bert Stevenson, Frank Evans, and Harold Miller, longtime whitefish fishermen, were also active in the cause. As public debate opened in late 1934, the group claimed that reopening commercial whitefish fishing “would legalize an industry which exists anyway and would permit those persons who catch whitefish for the market to get a fair price for their fish.”⁶¹ Speaking for his friends and fellow fishermen, Llanto made the case in the local press and at public meetings in the winter of 1934-35. He claimed that the commercial take would be far less than the present number of fry released by the state and that a tax of two cents a pound would be more than adequate to fund whitefish propagation at the nearby state hatchery. Llanto also proposed a location where fishers could sell fish free from the price wars that troubled the commercial fishery of the 1910s and where the state could be assured of tax collection.⁶² But the new era of commercial fishing would not rest on a reopening of a wild commons; all agreed that any such fishery must rest on the put-and-take system then coming to dominate hatchery management around the nation. Fish that spawned in hatcheries and then were released into the lake promised to augment those that continued to spawn in the wild. An unprecedented level of human intervention defined the management and improvement of this rearticulated fishing commons.

The more-moneyed class in Sandpoint was divided over the question. Many businessmen, anxious about the depressed economy, signed petitions in favor. “Build up a natural industry,” they argued, to compensate in some way for the loss of “our community payroll”—the Humbird Lumber Company.⁶³ Others in the Bonner County Sportsmen’s Association mounted a vigorous opposition. One chilly January evening in Sandpoint, at a meeting



In 1934, those who depended on fishing for their livelihood created the United Whitefishermen of Pend d’Oreille and Priest Lakes to advocate for the reopening of commercial whitefish fishing.

described as “a regular three-ring circus,” they opposed the reopening, going back and forth with opponents for two hours. Whitefish fishers, they claimed, routinely took and sold large numbers of trout by-catch. They were, in a word, unreliable, unscrupulous stewards of the lake’s fish resources. Emotions ran high. “The argument got very warm at times,” a witness recalled, “and occasionally there were exchanges of a personal nature.”⁶⁴ Such exchanges hinged on the question of how to most

appropriately exploit the lake’s resources, and opinions on the matter usually depended on one’s class. As clear as those fault lines could be, they blurred when it came to whitefish, favored as food fish by all. The local angler Floyd Sawyer registered his protest, adding that legalization would “do away with the faint pretense of restraint of lawlessness and allow openly the decimation of our trout and whitefish.” Most market fishers, he declared, would prove unable to make a real liv-

ing fishing, and even those who could “would not technically be employed” and their names “would remain on the relief rolls.”⁶⁵

Soon after this meeting, a disgusted Frank Evans wrote to a local paper, contesting claims about overfishing on the grounds that whitefish were a difficult catch, a prey amateurs would be hard pressed to overfish. “Any fisherman knows that no amateur can land any 100 fish in any one day,” he remarked, establishing his own claim to authoritative knowledge of the lake’s conditions. Sawyer’s derisive remarks about the working poor also raised Evans’s hackles. “No fisherman would bother his head at all with the relief question,” he argued, “if this lake were open to commercial fishing.” To the fiercely independent Evans, who had crossed Montana in a wagon and raised a large brood with his hard-working wife, Nora, being looked down on as a lazy indigent sat poorly. His response to Sawyer and his allies revealed something about his politics and about his sense of himself as a male provider. “I believe there is no real man, when he is forced to go to the relief office for aid to support his family,” he declared, “but what is so humiliated the English language can not express it.”⁶⁶ Those who plied the lake’s waters for a living were far from dilettante sport anglers or trout hogs. “It is not merely getting a line with a hook on it and putting it in to the water,” he declared, “nor is it a game of luck. It is really a trade. It takes a lifetime of study to equalize a catch for all kinds of days and all kinds of weather.” He estimated that only about one hundred local men possessed the skill to make a profit fishing, even though more might try. Those with ability, he claimed, “could be making an independent living were they permitted to place this wholesome food upon the market legally.”⁶⁷



The fishermen Adolph Llanto (top) and Wardell Evans (bottom) take to the water on the opening day of legal commercial fishing on Lake Pend Oreille in February 1935. Llanto was one of the main spokesmen advocating for reopening the lake. Note the vernacular five-plank construction of Evans’s boat, as well as its wood stove.

Like commercial fishers on the Great Lakes, the United Whitefishermen pressed for management rooted in a

fusion of “enduring communal sentiment with uncompromising economic necessity.”⁶⁸ Well-organized, articulate, and facing divided opposition, the commercial fishers prevailed. On February 21, 1935, the state legislature passed a bill legalizing commercial fishing, and the Democratic governor, C. Ben Ross, quickly signed it into law. The law implemented special license fees for fishermen and fish sellers, and restricted licenses to Idaho residents.⁶⁹ “Jubilant” whitefish anglers celebrated the end of bootlegging and the potential for consistently higher fish prices.⁷⁰ For its part, the state augmented the whitefish propagation program and issued permits statewide for seining of “trash fish”—“carp, suckers, squawfish and chubs”—destined to be processed as feed for the favored species being raised in hatcheries, where they would supplement the main food source, horse meat and offal.⁷¹ The Depression-era mobilization of North Idaho’s fishing commons thus created a machine manipulating massive flows of animal protein in the service of national recovery, while positioning the state as arbiter of local class tensions. The Kalispel fishers who for so long had lived off North Idaho’s fish were notably absent from these debates about what had become a white fishing commons. Those Kalispels who recall their people’s relationship with the lake in this period date their exclusion from these resources to the late 1930s, when heavier state enforcement of regulations closed off their favored places and methods of harvest.⁷²

Around Sandpoint, commercial anglers prepared their gear and anticipated a more secure economic future in the midst of bad times. On a calm, chilly February morning in 1935—just after the reopening of Lake Pend Oreille—Adolph Llanto and Wardell Evans set out onto Lake Pend Oreille from the city docks in Sandpoint. The men rowed their homemade skiffs out over the sandy shoals, stoked their small wood stoves, and jigged just



The fisherman and mechanic Harold Miller poses with his first daughter, Ila, in 1935. This boat he built inside the family home over the winter served as the family’s commercial boat until the purchase of an aluminum Crestliner in 1950.

off the bottom with maggot-baited handlines. In the background of their snapshots, Sandpoint’s fishing fleet appears to be out in force hoping to scrape a living from the lake. At some point, Evans snapped a picture of Llanto, then rowed close and carefully handed off the camera so Llanto could do the same. Perhaps these former bootleg fishermen felt a sense of history, having worked hard to organize their peers and lobby for the fishery’s opening. They most certainly understood the lake’s economic potential. Within two years, the owner of the Bonner Meat Company reported that he had purchased almost 18,000 pounds of fish in the space of three months. He paid a total of \$3,192 for these fish, and paid the state \$530 in taxes. Demand was greater than supply, he added.⁷³ While his wife, Martha Miller, was occupied with their infant daughters, Harold Miller worked this fishery in a boat he built in the family’s tiny uninsulated house over the winter of 1935-36. An assiduous record keeper, he kept a sheaf of fish receipts paid by his brother-in-law, Wardell Evans, who worked Evans Fisheries with his father,

Frank. These records reveal that Miller earned \$176 in that little boat from mid-December 1937 until mid-February 1938—a little over \$3,000 in today’s dollars, a significant take for a young working-class family in a collapsed timber town.⁷⁴ And for frugal consumers, fresh whitefish could be had at 13 cents a pound—the cheapest source of protein in North Idaho markets.⁷⁵ The following season, a boosterish sense of pride motivated Wardell Evans to send a shipment of his smoked whitefish to Franklin D. Roosevelt’s White House kitchen.⁷⁶

As heady as these times must have felt for the commercial fishing community, no one on the lake could know of the momentous changes underway below the water’s surface—nor did they comprehend that they were already well immersed in the ecological flux characteristic of this period of industrial expansion. Over the following decade and a half, Lake Pend Oreille’s fishers found their beloved native food species eclipsed by newcomers. First came the kokanee, known more commonly in North Idaho as bluebacks.



People fish for kokanee at Heron Rapids, a few miles up the Clark Fork River from Lake Pend Oreille, on October 15, 1939, as part of a short-lived effort to suppress the newly arrived landlocked salmon.

advocated for more extreme methods of harvest, including unlimited spear-
ing, snagging, and trapping in the
Clark Fork River, where the fish were
known to spawn.⁸² Fishermen keen on
a bonanza descended on Heron Rap-
ids, not far from the lake, from 1939
through the early 1940s when the fall
spawning run picked up.⁸³ By the late
1940s, the bluebacks' "spectacular"
growth translated into tons taken by all
manner of angler as whitefish catches
declined.⁸⁴ The presence of a major
new food species and new clouds of
war moved state authorities to legalize
the commercial harvest of bluebacks in
1941 under the existing provisions of
whitefish harvest.⁸⁵

Along with kokanee came a new
trout species, Kamloops, a strain
of rainbow trout native to some British
Columbia lakes. Their introduction in
the early 1940s brought cultural and
ecological ramifications as profound
as those brought by kokanee. Whereas
kokanee brought themselves into Lake
Pend Oreille from Montana—an inev-
itable but unintended consequence of
Montana's fishery policies—Kamloops
represented the culmination of decades
of human advocacy. For some years, a
coterie of North Idaho sportsmen had
journeyed into British Columbia seek-
ing ever-bigger trophy fish. In Kooten-
ay Lake, about 100 miles north of
Sandpoint, they found them: power-
ful, deep-bellied rainbow variants
grown fat on their preferred forage,
native kokanee. Sandpoint sportsmen
and boosters, chief among them Jim
Weaver, Laurin Pietsch, and Ross Hall,
drove the introduction program. The
particular talents and sensibilities of
these friends lent themselves to the
project at hand. Weaver, a dedicated
angler, pioneered the fishing trips
north and soon got his friends to come
along. Pietsch, who had grown up in
Spokane and moved to Sandpoint in
1924, was a prominent local newspa-
perman.⁸⁶ The Texas-born photogra-
pher Ross Hall, who had lived in Sand-
point since the early 1930s, had already

According to most accounts, these
landlocked sockeye salmon, native to
some deep glacial lakes in Canada,
washed downstream in a great flood in
1934 from Flathead Lake, where Mon-
tana fish and game authorities had in-
troduced them as a food fish in 1920.⁷⁷
In fact, the Montana introduction was
an accident. As the Montana Depart-
ment of Fish and Game attempted to
establish Chinook salmon (*Oncorhyn-
chus tshawytscha*) and coho salmon
(*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) into the Flat-
head drainage in the mid-1910s, they
unknowingly received a mislabeled
shipment of eggs from Oregon. By the
end of that decade, Montana managers
hailed this "Blue-Back Salmon Sur-
prise" as a stunning success—the sud-
den presence of naturally spawning
salmon in the lakes around Kalispell.⁷⁸
Of their own devices, bluebacks then
journeyed from their accidental home
in Montana hundreds of miles down-
river to North Idaho.

Under Lake Pend Oreille's deep waters,
kokanee's arrival brought a profound
reordering of the food web. It is diffi-
cult to piece together with precision

the ecological turmoil, but it is possi-
ble that the irruption of a new plank-
tivore into a nutrient-scarce (oligotro-
phic) lake disrupted existing trophic
relationships. By the late 1930s, white-
fish anglers noticed a marked die-off
of the native species.⁷⁹ Ecological
change forced some working fishers to
adapt. The commercial angler Martha
Miller linked the whitefish die-off to
her and Harold's decision to sell their
houseboat and move into Sandpoint in
the late 1930s. "The whitefish all died
off right before we left," she recalled
years later, "so we sold our house out
there [Bottle Bay] and just stayed in
town."⁸⁰ Moved to collaborate by a
chorus of concerned voices from North
Idaho and their elected representa-
tives, officials from the local state fish
hatchery, the federal Bureau of Fisher-
ies, and the U.S. Forest Service regional
headquarters in Missoula mobilized to
assess the situation. They ultimately
concluded that the most likely culprit
was "the lack of balance in species liv-
ing in the waters."⁸¹ Perceiving state
support for an all-out war on the in-
terloping—and coincidentally delecta-
ble—bluebacks, some North Idahoans

made a name for himself with his renowned landscape photographs.⁸⁷ The men engineered an agreement between fisheries managers in British Columbia and Idaho and raised funds through their organization, the Bonner County Sportsmen's Association. They justified the introduction on the grounds that it would stimulate tourism, restore species balance by suppressing kokanee numbers, and "add to the piscatorial pleasure of anglers in years to come."⁸⁸ The apparently balanced Kamloops and kokanee fishery of Kootenay Lake, they surmised, could easily be re-created in Pend Oreille. The newly introduced species quickly prospered as it burst into its new habitat, tearing into kokanee schools and reaching world-record sizes by the mid-1940s.⁸⁹ An improved nature, it appeared, had finally produced a bounty worthy of the human passion invested in the lake.

As World War II drew to a close, trophy fishing quickly became the cornerstone of the lake's identity and public image.⁹⁰ Jim Parsons, fresh out of the U.S. Marine Corps after the war, applied his skills in public relations to the Kamloops introduction effort. Operating at the intersection of the chamber of commerce, the Bonner County Sportsmen's Association, and the Lake Pend Oreille Idaho Club, he spearheaded a publicity campaign that invited a slew of prominent personalities and magazine editors for trophy-fishing jaunts, junkets that brought nationwide publicity.⁹¹ Celebrities, the Spokane-born radio and film star Bing Crosby chief among them, plied the lake's waters in the 1940s and 1950s.⁹² At the same time, the lake's organisms made boosterish journeys of their own. Gifts of massive refrigerated trout reached luminaries around the country to be served at distant banquets as culinary publicity.⁹³ Sandpoint had come into its own as the "undisputed world's rainbow capital," trumpeted Parsons in 1946.⁹⁴ A particular concatenation of human and biological factors conspired to vault the Kamloops and the

lake to mythic status. On a local and regional level, aggressive advocacy, a culture of interagency collaboration, a robust fish-propagation apparatus, and the accidental presence of kokanee played primary roles in creating this fishery. More broadly, the success of Kamloops rested on national economic recovery, the expansion of transportation networks, burgeoning tourism, and population growth.⁹⁵ The rapid increase in both new species between the mid-1930s and the mid-1940s underwrote the era of "K & K" (Kamloops and Kokanee)—the moniker that Sandpoint sportsmen and chamber of commerce boosters soon chose to redefine Lake Pend Oreille's public face for a new era.⁹⁶ Many sport anglers sought kokanee as a food and sport fish, but the immense Kamloops was the main reason for the area's fishing fame.

Alongside the Kamloops fanfare a robust working-class market fishery continued to thrive. By 1950, Frank Evans was shipping smoked bluebacks to "nearly every city in the Pacific northwest," a form of culinary boosterism for Pend Oreille's fishery.⁹⁷ Several family members became contributors

to this enterprise. Evans's granddaughters hammered together the wood boxes used to ship smoked fish, and helped out with their father Harold Miller's bait business. In a local newspaper ad, Evans claimed that blueback fishing had reached its peak in the lake, resulting in a veritable "diamond mine" for both sport and commercial fishing.⁹⁸ Ecological factors beyond human control were among the reasons for this peak. Despite the explosive growth of Kamloops in Lake Pend Oreille and their heavy predation on kokanee (which typically ranged between 9 and 14 inches), the forage species thrived, likely enjoying its own newly found ecological niche. State intervention, underwritten by large infusions of federal aid, also helped bolster kokanee populations.⁹⁹ Kamloops introduction and kokanee propagation worked toward the same purpose, noted the state fisheries manager in 1944.¹⁰⁰ The same postwar growth of transportation infrastructure and technology that fueled the K & K boom had significant implications for the lives of market anglers. Harold Miller had toiled since the 1920s on area lakes and in logging camps, but the postwar



The nexus of sport fishing, boosterism, and ecological change is captured in this June 1948 photo, portraying the entertainer Bing Crosby posing with his catch alongside Pike Moon, Sandpoint's mayor. (Photograph by Ross Hall, courtesy of Dann Hall)



Yes-- Bluebacks Are So Delicious!

And these fine food fish are at their peak in Lake Pend Oreille right now. As a matter of fact any fisherman acquainted with the lake can catch his limit daily.

BUT we want to remind you that regardless of how good these fish are when they come from the cold waters of deep Pend Oreille, when they are improperly handled and cured for much of their delicious flavor is lost. Here is why fresh or smoked bluebacks or Kohass from Evans Fisheries stand out.

1. Fish caught by our fishermen are immediately placed in ice in clean containers so they may be kept fresh. We have no "quarryback" fish and none of our fish is one-baited.
2. Evans Fisheries' bluebacks are carefully handled so that the scales are on the fish just as they came from the waters of Pend Oreille in all their silvery beauty.
3. Our bluebacks are cleaned within a few hours after they are caught and ALL blood is removed from the body cavity along the backbone. This is vitally important if fish are to retain their delicious flavor and color.
4. Our smoked bluebacks are given uniform brine treatment using a formula we have developed by years of experience, and then carefully smoked to give them just the right flavor and color—that delicious flavor that only Lake Pend Oreille bluebacks have!

We have an excellent crew of professional fishermen, and they care for the fish according to our exacting standards. Because they are careful fishermen who value the reputation we have built up for bluebacks from Evans Fisheries, we make sure that they receive a fair price for their fish. Bluebacks are a superior food fish, commanding a fair market price that will give the fisherman a fair wage for his arduous work.

Right now we can use several additional local fishermen. If you want to fish for Evans Fisheries, then come to 1116 Pine St. and we'll explain to you just how we want our fish handled, so we can maintain the high quality of Pend Oreille bluebacks that has built our reputation.

We invite the public, state sanitary inspectors and officials of the Idaho Fish and Game Department to visit Evans Fisheries at 1116 Pine St. and see for yourself how we prepare Lake Pend Oreille bluebacks for your table.

Our place of business is open 7 days a week. Our work day begins about 9 a.m. because when you smoke fish they have to be turned just right and carefully watched. We try to close at 5 p.m. daily, so we shall appreciate it if you will not call for fish after that hour.

A DIAMOND MINE---

Lake Pend Oreille is one of the greatest assets this part of North Idaho has. It is a great producing fishery and will continue to supply countless fishermen with plentiful sport and also will give this area a fine commercial food fish. If it is properly managed and protected we all should guard this tremendous asset carefully and continue to use it wisely!

EVANS FISHERIES

1116 PINE ST. SANDPOINT, IDAHO

At left: In these photos taken by Ross Hall in the late 1940s, Wayne and Claud Evans prepare whitefish for the smokehouse at Evans Fisheries on Pine Street in Sandpoint and Frank Evans displays smoked fish packed and ready for sale. (Photos courtesy of Dann Hall) Above: Evans Fisheries fielded orders from around the nation. Frank Evans penned this Evans Fisheries ad. (*Sandpoint News-Bulletin*, May 19, 1953)

boom enabled him and his wife Martha to raise four daughters in relative working-class comfort. After the war, his newly opened auto mechanic shop in Sandpoint, a bait business, and Martha's commercial fishing underwrote the family's well-being. The year 1950 can be taken as a marker of the

family's success, for that was when the Millers purchased a new GMC pickup truck, a 12-foot aluminum Crestliner fishing boat, and even a new radio-phonograph set from Sears—unthinkable purchases just a few years before for a family on the wrong side of the tracks.¹⁰¹

Many commercial fishers had trouble appreciating the culture of sport fishing. They related to nature through work, not leisure, and the extractive logic and economic necessity of that work stood at odds with the fundamental premises and practices of sport fishing. While trophy anglers homed in

on keen contests of will with individual fish, market fishers reveled in unlocking the secrets to getting more pounds of meat in the boat. This imperative sometimes led to rapacious exploitation of bluebacks and whitefish, but also involved an intimate relationship with the lake's ecosystem. That relationship started with bait—housefly maggots—which some even collected from decaying roadkill. Others made a business of propagating maggots on a large scale and sparing other anglers that “gruesome task.”¹⁰² Harold Miller started collecting “bugs” by taking cow heads from local butchers and harvesting the larvae at his home in Sandpoint proper; inevitable gripes from neighbors led him to purchase 40 acres south of town to dedicate to the putrid but lucrative enterprise. His young daughters had their first jobs counting bugs before packing them in metal pill tins. So great was his bug harvest that his wife Martha—the best fisherman in the family by all accounts—used the prime bait as illegal chum. Miller raised and packed his bugs in “seawash,” organic detritus that washed up along the lake's shores.¹⁰³

For some time, historians have explored the ways working people knew nature through work, and commercial fishing offers a case in point.¹⁰⁴ Commercial fishers' intimacy with nature—an “everyday ecological consciousness”—extended to the craft and day-to-day experience of fishing itself. That knowledge translated into more meat in the boat. Decades of working experience magnified by community ties resulted in fishers who were dramatically more productive than their sporting counterparts, according to a state creel census in the mid-1950s—and that census did not account for poaching.¹⁰⁵ The commercial fleet occasionally found large schools of bluebacks and harvested them en masse for days on end, but others plotted their own course. Martha Miller knew how to find schools feeding off organic matter in what she called the “drift

line,” which scientists know as Langmuir rotations, upwelling currents, often far from shore, where floating masses of organic detritus form.¹⁰⁶ Closer to the lake's precipitous shoreline, one might tie a stern line to a tree and run a deep anchor off the bow, a task made easier by the bow-mounted homemade winches some crafted from small repurposed gas engines. During a typical day of work on the lake, dozens or even hundreds of fish passed through one's hands. Each one came over the low gunwales on a heavy monofilament handline (silk line before World War II), jigged on conventional tackle altered for the purpose—red yarn was glued at home around small steel hooks, then weighted with lead sinkers painted red and made into lures with attractors from disassembled trout spinners. Such a rig would be lowered vertically into the water column and worked with short jerks to attract schooling fish. In the Millers' boat, handlines would be gathered onto Harold's hand-carved wooden reels, which dated to the mid-1930s.

Most working the lake quickly embraced technological advances afforded by the burgeoning market in boats and fishing gear. The handmade wooden skiffs of earlier years gave way to riveted aluminum boats, more durable and easier to maintain. If two manned such a boat, one might pilot to port while the other gutted the catch with a tiny pocketknife—a daily immersion in blood and guts. Getting the bounty home on the notoriously restive Lake Pend Oreille was another matter, and reading its weather was vital vernacular knowledge—including watching for the “blackline” on the lake's distant surface, a line created by banks of compressed air that often produce dangerous swells for tiny commercial boats. But most working days lacked such drama. In the early 1960s, Martha's daughter Jean enjoyed peaceful spells fishing with her mother, reading her books out loud (Boris Pasternak's *Doctor Zhivago* being a favor-



Martha Miller cleans bluebacks on Lake Pend Oreille in the early 1960s.

ite), interrupted only by the occasional sportfishing boat. “While we were anchored quietly,” she recalls, “they didn't realize how their voices carried across the water because they had to talk above their trolling motors.”¹⁰⁷

Just as it had in the darkest years of the Depression, commercial fishing fulfilled an important economic role in the lives of the area's working people after the war. In the 1950s, anywhere from 150 to 400 people held commercial licenses.¹⁰⁸ Creel censuses reported that commercial anglers were responsible for about 10 percent of the total number of angler fishing trips on Lake Pend Oreille.¹⁰⁹ According to the commercial fisherman William Zinter, in the 1950s the fleet was manned by a variety of people who would have needed extra income, among them “retired woods workers, small ranchers, [and] seasonal workers.” In some families like the Millers and Evanses, fishing, bait production, and fish processing assumed an outsized role. Some men might have solid jobs with the forest service or the railroads, or as mechanics, but gave what time they could to the family's fish enterprise. Those with more independence, such as the auto mechanic Harold Miller, dropped their shop work if the fish were biting well. The fishing economy also broke down gender barriers. Zinter noted in the mid-1950s that “a

surprising number of women” worked the lake’s commercial fleet.¹¹⁰ For the women who remember these times, there was nothing surprising about this fact—several in the working-class part of town were well-regarded market fishers.¹¹¹ Martha Miller started fishing in earnest when the responsibilities of raising four daughters eased in the late 1940s. An adept angler and fearless boat pilot, she shouldered the bulk of domestic duties while earning vital income during the fishing season. Once grown, some of her daughters, and their husbands, joined her when they needed money. As a young divorced mother, Jean started fishing with her in the early 1960s. Their records show earnings of between \$800 and \$1,100 over the course of three-month seasons, around \$7,000 to \$8,000 today.¹¹² Masters of their craft, these female fishers forged a sense of equality, respect, and self-possession on the water.¹¹³

As the K & K fishery entered the halcyon days of the 1940s and 1950s, a wider imperative to harness the pro-

ductive capacity of the Columbia River basin with hydroelectric dams engulfed the inland Northwest. These dams profoundly altered Lake Pend Oreille’s ecosystem. Federal engineers considered dam construction vital for “storage, flood control, and power development” and proposed a series of projects that directly affected the Pend Oreille drainage.¹¹⁴ The first was completed in 1951 at Cabinet Gorge, a few miles up the Clark Fork River from Lake Pend Oreille; the second came online in 1955 about 30 miles downstream from Sandpoint at Albeni Falls, and both became the primary means of controlling the lake’s water level. Although Albeni Falls had been proposed in the early 1940s, it was built under the provisions of the Flood Control Act of 1950, a measure enacted in response to massive flooding during the heavy winter of 1947–48. That calamitous year dampened local resistance to the dam, a sentiment that had once hinged on the potentially negative effects of raising the lake’s level enough to flood some low-lying shorelands during part of the year and drawing it

down enough to create massive mud flats during others—a possible disaster for the nascent resort industry.¹¹⁵ Resistance to dams in North Idaho could be pointed, but ultimately debate was framed by how—not whether—the region’s waters should be harnessed to the imperative of “total use for greater wealth” governing water management in the U.S. West.¹¹⁶ Those with a stake in these upper Columbia basin fisheries remained understandably ignorant of the potential impact of the proposed dams on the species they loved and depended on, and so fishing did not figure much in the public debate. Years later, Harold Miller recalled that before the dams were built Lake Pend Oreille’s shores “were much more like they were supposed to be—in the summertime and the fall of the year there was beach all around the lake. Now, at high water, there’s no beach at all”—telling hindsight from a man whose lifetime acquaintance with the lake straddled the dam construction of the 1950s.¹¹⁷

Indeed, hydroelectric development and flood control affected the lake’s fishery, something fishery managers anticipated from the start. In 1951, Idaho’s Fish and Game Department organized a series of creel census studies with the collaboration of the dams’ builder-operators, the Washington Water Power Company (Cabinet Gorge) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Albeni Falls).¹¹⁸ Concern grew that Cabinet Gorge had closed off kokanee spawning grounds upriver and produced unhealthy flow fluctuations downriver; likewise, winter drawdown of the lake exposed the kokanee redds (spawning grounds). For a time, hours of painstaking dockside interviews through the 1950s conducted by the Fish and Game Department reassured the public that anglers continued to land massive numbers of kokanee and stable numbers of Kamloops rainbows, numbers sustained by human propagation and natural reproduction. The censuses also showed that the delectable kokanee had become



Jean Martin (née Miller) and Martha Miller pose for a photo on the shore of Lake Pend Oreille near the mouth of the Clark Fork River in the early 1960s. By this time, homemade wood skiffs had given way to aluminum boats like this 1950 Crestliner. Note the vernacular addition of an anchor winch, crafted from a Briggs and Stratton washing-machine motor.

Pend Oreille's main attraction for sport and commercial anglers alike. A quality food fish, it appears, eclipsed even the vaunted Kamloops as preferred prey. Despite these sunny creel counts, in the late 1950s local fishers began to notice alarming signs that the dams were harming the health of the fishery. Occasional die-offs of both species concerned anglers and spurred state authorities and dam operators to organize what would eventually be called mitigation funds—resources dedicated to offsetting the negative effects of dams on the lake with propagation, rough fish eradication, and habitat improvement.¹¹⁹

As anxieties about dams percolated in North Idaho and as kokanee assumed the role of preferred prey of sport anglers, Lake Pend Oreille's fishing communities began to compete for the same resource. Old tensions about appropriate use and fishing cultures resurfaced. The creel surveys revealed that commercial anglers caught fish at a rate far above that of their sporting counterparts, a figure probably distorted by widespread disregard for limits among this community.¹²⁰ Once-powerful economic arguments turned against commercial fishing in the mid-1950s. As creel censuses and much anecdotal evidence indicated, kokanee numbers and spawning habitat notably decreased after 1951. Sport anglers spent far more per fish taken than commercial fishers, so the Sandpoint booster Jim Parsons concluded that "Pend Oreille, both from an economic and the general public good standpoint, should be managed for game fishing rather than as a commercial fishery."¹²¹ Other sportfishing advocates couched their opposition to market angling in terms of fishing methods, culture, and attitude. Laurin Pietsch, Sandpoint newspaperman and a prime mover behind Kamloops introduction years before, spoke out at a public meeting in 1954. Encounters between sport and commercial anglers on the lake had gotten ugly, he noted.

Perhaps unpleasant language had been exchanged over the lake's waters, mixed with the powerful odor of fresh fish guts a few commercial anglers burned in their wood stoves to discourage encroachment on blueback schools.¹²² Widespread illegal chumming from commercial boats, usually with cans of corn, also struck sportsmen as unfair chase. "You have established very poor public relations with sport fishermen," Pietsch charged.¹²³ Commercial fishers countered by painting sport anglers as "transient fishermen" who did not depend on fishing for a living, a position that still held much sway in the area's business community and with the public at large.¹²⁴ Sport anglers trolled so close that they regularly hooked into commercial anchor and fishing lines, situations likely at the root of the friction described by Pietsch. The noise of sport cruisers also proved a point of contention. "The commercial fishermen would appreciate it," they wrote, if sportsmen would not "roar their motors over the fishermen's grounds as this drives the fish to deep water and it is hours before fish can be caught again."¹²⁵ Despite this chronic friction, steady fish harvests into the early 1960s safeguarded market fishing.

But as the decade wore on, the big lake's game fish populations were entering a period of decline, contrary to the assurances of IDFG biologists. The dams had taken a toll on spawning redds in the lake and its tributaries. Intensive propagation, environmental engineering of spawning areas, and reduced limits could not keep pace with fishing pressure and flagging natural reproduction.¹²⁶ The glorious postwar years, when burgeoning Kamloops and kokanee populations wowed anglers far and wide, were on the wane, and native cutthroat and bull trout (then termed Dolly Varden) were faring poorly, likely because of introduced predators, the blockage of spawning areas behind Cabinet Gorge Dam, and the decline of kokanee, a keystone forage species.¹²⁷ Again looking to prom-

ising ecological manipulations in similar lakes north of the border, managers identified a possible solution. In the late 1940s, Canadian managers had introduced *Mysis relicta*—also known as mysis or opossum shrimp, native to some Alberta lakes—into Kootenay Lake, the origin of the Kamloops planted in Pend Oreille earlier.¹²⁸ Idaho's sportsmen and managers alike heard tell of enormous kokanee regularly topping three pounds. Among many others, the Sandpoint booster Jim Parsons embraced the potential of opossum shrimp, given their phenomenal effect in Canada. "They should do equally well in the generally similar waters of north Idaho's big lakes," he guessed, after mysis shrimp introduction was underway in 1967. Introduction into several Idaho lakes was initiated in 1965 with a series of truck and air shipments of the tiny crustaceans packed in Styrofoam coolers. The IDFG planted millions in Pend Oreille and Priest Lakes between 1965 and 1969.¹²⁹ "We hope they will produce an important link in the food chain," wrote the state fish and game commission after four years of shrimp introduction in northern lakes.¹³⁰ Many Idaho anglers had fished for kokanee in Canada and anticipated similar results at home. "The lake is like a pasture," wrote one optimistic reporter in 1969. "If there is limited food, the crop of fish will be smaller and so will the size."¹³¹ A kokanee stomach survey that same year likely caused some puzzlement among biologists: of 10 sample fish taken on Lake Pend Oreille, not one had opossum shrimp in its gut. The promising feed was not reaching the right pasture.¹³²

Only hindsight can reconstruct the flux under the surface of Idaho's largest lake after mysis shrimp introduction. The shrimp's success in Kootenay Lake resulted from specific upwelling currents that placed them alongside kokanee in the water column at feeding times. Lake Pend Oreille's currents were timed differently, so mysis shrimp spent daylight

hours at lower depths than the kokanee, only to surface at night to feed on the yet smaller crustaceans that formed the basis of kokanee forage. The intended forage species and kokanee passed each other like ships in the night. What is more, the lake had hosted an introduced population of lake trout since the 1920s, which had lived on the margins of the food web, often being confused with native bull trout. Unlike kokanee, juvenile lake trout did find mysis shrimp in the water column. They grew quickly on those shrimp and once grown became devastating new predators of kokanee.¹³³

In the midst of declining kokanee catches, the IDFG closed the commercial kokanee fishery in 1973, based on the conclusion that “the kokanee fishery on the lake is in trouble.”¹³⁴ At public meetings and in the press in 1973 and 1974, old barbs flew. While universally decrying the impact of dams, some trophy anglers railed against illegal practices common in the commercial fishing community, especially chumming.¹³⁵ Commercial fishing advocates countered with accounts of sports anglers’ own violations, especially the taking of multiple limits in a day.¹³⁶ The fishery remained closed and the issue remained alive into the mid-1970s. At public meetings of the state fish and game commission, Emma Lou Hook, a leading commercial fishing advocate, pointedly argued that the closure had resulted in an overabundance of kokanee, evidenced by their much reduced size in recent years. More likely, lake trout predation of kokanee and opossum shrimp predation of the crustaceans that were the primary kokanee forage were then working to keep many kokanee from reaching maturity, a reality that none could then see. Despite these passionate exchanges, the IDFG biologist Bill Goodnight refused to concede. “My job is to protect the Kokanee resource,” he stated. “I feel there is some doubt and I cannot rationalize a commercial season”—even though he supported it

in principle.¹³⁷ Local opinion about area waters had once exerted decisive sway over their regulation, but the institutional and scientific authority of the state had grown in the meantime. Since then, kokanee’s recovery in North Idaho has been premised solely on the species’ critical role as a forage fish for trophy trout and as a favored eating fish for sport anglers.

Ultimately, the collapse of North Idaho’s commercial fishery grew out of two clashing imperatives of resource management in the century following Euro-American settlement: the maximization of the fishery’s productivity and the development of the Columbia River system’s hydroelectric potential. As a result of the first imperative, which was driven by local and external energies, commercial and sport fishing prospered. Both fishing practices formed important intersections with the regional and national economies well before the decline of the timber economy in the 1930s. While working fishers built and defended a vital supplement to work in the woods or the mills, sporting boosters engineered North Idaho’s decades-long transition to a tourist economy. Not surprisingly, various points of conflict emerged around appropriate use and revealed fault lines between conservation-minded sportsmen and market fishers. The contrast between fishing cultures thus offers eloquent testimony to the ways both work and pleasure shaped North Idaho waters. Both communities also found receptive ears among state officials and fishery managers, who sometimes paid heed to divergent local interests and perspectives. The tenuous alliances and fleeting solidarities that formed between different fishing communities show that these class-driven boundaries could blur, a dynamic that echoed other freshwater market fisheries of the time.¹³⁸ Indeed, the very structure of commercial fishing in North Idaho owed much to those blurred lines. When commercial fishers petitioned for legal commercial

fishing in 1908, they confined their harvest to hook-and-line fishing, assuaging the anger of the sporting community and ensuring that their business would remain the province of small-scale operators, not highly capitalized outfits. The second imperative shaping these waters—hydroelectric development—has become part of a wider narrative in the area linking negative changes to what is seen as high-handed, clumsy governmental action, despite begrudging acknowledgment of the dams’ benefits—flood control and electricity.¹³⁹ All of these profound interventions in the waters of the upper Columbia basin since Euro-American settlement produced a legacy of constant ecological flux, one demanding a constantly greater managerial intervention in its fishery.

The vaunted Kamloops and kokanee fishery of the postwar years casts a long shadow over North Idaho’s waters and drives managerial imperatives to this day. Small-scale commercial fishing has returned as a management tool for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, but licenses are very few and these days permit only the harvest of nonnative species (lake whitefish, lake trout, and walleye) that potentially affect favored sport species.¹⁴⁰ Fishery managers have worked hard under the aegis of the Lake Pend Oreille Fishery Recovery Project to restore the prominence of K & K after its collapse in the late 20th century.¹⁴¹ Besides mitigating the effects of dams and decades-old species introductions, today the project addresses the serious threat from invasive species, some of which have attracted their own deeply invested human constituencies. This story reminds us that such passionate, contentious relationships have long played a central role in the area’s aquatic ecosystems, and that those passions are subject to dramatic change over time. For their part, most commercial fishers might not have waxed poetic about their own hardscrabble existence on these waters, but there is a

profound eloquence in the lives many built around these waters. A palpable sense of loss formed among those whose lives faded along with their beloved fishery in the 1970s and 1980s. In the late 1960s, the commercial fisher Martha Miller painted loving panoramas of the lake where she had spent her working life, and she won blue ribbons at the Bonner County Fair for her landscape photography, including images of the lake.¹⁴² She swam across the lake regularly, and freely drank from

whatever body of water happened to be near. Her husband Harold continued his bait business into the 1980s, selling to sport anglers but still immersed in the area's cycles of life and death. It is difficult to imagine lives more tangibly and poetically intertwined with their environment. Reflecting on her many years laboring on the lake a year before her death in 1976, Martha jovially remarked of her time fishing that "you made your own job," an understated testimony to her fami-

ly's vital relationship with these waters and acknowledgment that a way of life had passed.¹⁴³

James W. Martin is an associate professor in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Montana State University in Bozeman. He is the author of *Banana Cowboys: The United Fruit Company and the Culture of Corporate Colonialism* (2018). Part of this story rests on the author's family history.

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