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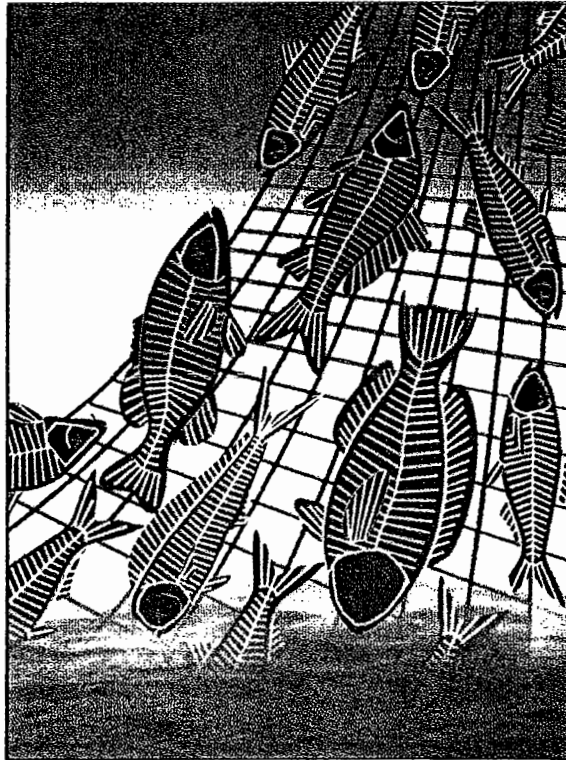
Why Are the Northern Pike Being Forced to Eat Their Young?

R. RANDY LEE, ESQ.

First, let's poison all the fish. Then, let's leave thousands of them to decompose in the lake, polluting the main water supply for area residents, damaging our major tourism industry and making property values dive south. Next, when we discover that the poison wasn't potent enough and some fish have survived, let's plan to do it again.

Incredibly, this seems to be the "thinking" behind the California Department of Fish and Game's 1997 decision to dump thousands of gallons of poison into Lake Davis in the High Sierras to kill northern pike. Although a fine food and sport fish that other lakes would be proud to call their own, the pike were seen as a threat to salmon swimming 150 miles south in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta. So, despite the tiny town of Portola's bitter protests under the banner, "People First! Pike Second! Poison Never!" — and the spectacle of the local planning commissioner tying herself to a buoy in the beautiful mountain lake and the hue and cry from county officials and the Natural Resources Defense Council — the pike pariahs were marked for mass execution at the hands of the sovereign state of California.

In October, the community proposed to simply allow unlimited pike fishing, but that went unheeded. Shortly thereafter, a SWAT team of two dozen gun-toting Sheriff's Department officers and California Highway Patrol officers arrived to hold the local citizenry at bay while Fish and Game



agents administered a lethal dose of a possibly carcinogenic poison to all lake dwellers, innocent trout and guilty pike alike.

When promises that the poison would abate by the end of the year didn't come true — lake water was not approved for drinking until the spring of 1999 — the state was forced to drill wells for drinking. After citizens and businesses in the area — 70 miles north of Lake Tahoe, where retirees and tourists came for clean water, air and good fishing — were harmed, California Fish and Game was forced to pay over \$9 million in damages to the City of Portola, Plumas County, local res-

idents and business owners.

Fast forward to 2000. Why does a fish story from 1997 have any relevance in the new millennium? Well, only a few months ago, California, unfamiliar with Santayana's observation that those who don't remember their mistakes are doomed to repeat them, sent thousands of trout to meet their maker in a quixotic crusade to save frogs near Big Pine in the Sierras. Not just any frogs, mind you, but the mountain yellow-legged frog — not yet listed on the Endangered Species list, but worthy of rescue by the animal saviors at Fish and Game. What about the poor unworthy trout?

Back to Lake Davis where Fish and Game, shocked when the feared northern pike reappeared from what was to have been their watery grave, is plotting extermination strategies anew. Noting that their efforts to achieve a final solution by poison have failed, other execution methods are being considered. Included are: electric shock treatment, explosives, biological weapons and chemicals.

Finally, a more environmentally friendly approach is agreed upon. A 600-foot net is placed in a corner of the lake to trap the pike as they spawn, hemming them in. Deprived of their favorite food sources, they eat their young, and when they are gone, starvation sets in. Reactions of area residents are best left undescribed.

"The incompetency of the state in dealing with this problem was already admitted and now they're jumping into it again. It's a real fish story that won't go away", said Ronald Zumbrun, a Sacramento attorney who represents some Portola residents.

In Montana, a massacre of fish at Cherry Creek, wilderness land owned by Ted Turner, is being considered by the state Fish and Game Department on behalf of the cutthroat trout and Arctic grayling. Local activists are drawing parallels to the bureaucratic bungling at Lake Davis.

A Christian Science Monitor article from last October noted, "treating waterways with chemical toxicants to eradicate unwanted or ecologically damaging fish is part of a growing trend in land restoration pursued by wildlife managers nationwide." An alarming trend, indeed, when simply allowing an unlimited fishing policy for unwanted species seems an eminently reasonable alternative.

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