

WATER AND RECREATION

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The quantity of water for recreation has always been a major problem in New Mexico and it is expected that there always will be a problem. Competition of water uses are keener now than at any time in the past, and when one thinks of using water for recreation it brings a shudder to those who use water for other purposes. Water, for recreation, generally is used and not consumed. The losses in recreational use can be attributed to evaporation and perhaps some seepage. At any rate, the quantity of water used for recreation from an already oversubscribed basin, brings cries of anguish from other water users.

Admittedly, the bulk of water-based recreation is a secondary use or a fringe benefit derived from waters manipulated for another use. Lakes developed by both federal and state agencies over the past 50 years has perhaps tripled the fishing potential and just about entirely established other water-type recreation. In some instances reservoirs have been developed with acquired water rights and designed specifically for recreation. We have several small lakes developed by the Department of Game and Fish such as Lake Roberts, Fenton Lake, Charette Lakes, Lake Wall and more. Large lakes that have water for recreation are Conchas, Ute, Navajo, and in the future, we look to Cochiti and Heron with perhaps more to come.

As a side light on the national scene the Department of Interior announced that we now have 13 million acres of lakes and an expected 10 million more to be added in the next 35 years. Such lakes provide about one-third of the fresh-water fishing in the United States, exclusive of the Great Lakes.

Water is a vehicle for many forms of outdoor recreation, such as camping, picnicking, skiing, swimming, fishing, boating, and as an added bonus to designated scenic areas. All of these activities are becoming more in demand as the population increases and as more leisure time becomes available. Better roads and improved transportation contribute tremendously to the demand.

An example is the demand for one form of recreation, fishing. In 1950, the state had a population of 684,000 and 45,566 (6.6 percent of the population) bought resident fishing licenses. In 1964, with a population of 1,032,000 there were 105,595 (10.2 percent of the population) resident fishing licenses sold. This shows not only an increase in demand by virtue of population, but also an

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increase in interest.

In 1960, the Department of Game and Fish concluded a five-year study about Conchas Lake and the recreation area. The survey showed that in 1960, there were 736,000 visitors at the lake. There were 425,000 fishermen, 146,000 boaters, 64,000 skiers, 40,000 picnickers, and 6,000 swimmers. Last year, the second year of use, Navajo Reservoir drew 194,000 visitors of which 63,000 were fishermen.

Many years ago, some of you may remember, there was a slogan of one of the presidential candidates, "two cars in every garage and chicken every Sunday." The candidate didn't make it, but we have gone beyond his slogan; we now have two cars and a boat in every garage and chicken every Sunday (because it is cheaper than hamburgers).

So far, little has been said of stream fishing, but it is interesting to note that Taos County leads as the area most fished with 14.80 percent of the state total. Taos County has very little lake fishing. However, San Miguel County is a close second with 14.49 percent where there is both lake and stream fishing. It is assumed that San Miguel may lead if all types of water-based recreation were considered.

At present it is estimated that the state has 2,700 miles of fishing stream and 121,339 acres (189.5 sq. mi.) of fishing lakes (when the lakes are full). The stream mileage can be increased but very little; however, they can and are being improved to carry more fish. Lake acres are continually being added.

Economically, water for recreation stands second to industrial and domestic use and is considered $5\frac{1}{2}$ times more valuable for recreation than for agriculture. This does not mean that its use be converted to the highest economic yield, but rather to maintain a balance in relation to the demand.

In a recent survey of the economics of hunting and fishing in New Mexico, it was revealed that fishing alone is worth 32 million dollars annually to the state, (hunting is in for 21 million dollars). If all forms of water-based recreation are to be included we could assume a much larger figure.

The quality of water for water-based recreation is a problem in this state as it is in all states, but not to the same degree. Fortunately, from this standpoint, we are not a state of heavy industry and population; therefore, we do not have the critical volume of industrial and domestic waste. We have, however, lost fish because of polluted water. The one form of pollution that causes us trouble from time to time is excessive terrestrial run-off and erosion. When the water gets too thick to drink and too thin to plow it is rough on fish. Better use of the watersheds is eliminating a lot of these problems.

I cannot pass the item of water quality without mentioning the good work and splendid cooperation of personnel of the State Health Department. At all times they are vigilant for water quality problems that might affect our fisheries and this applies to the use of water for other recreation purposes.

If we look into the future to 1975, we can expect to see the fishing pressure double (260,000 fishermen). The rest of the water-based recreation will double also. In my estimation, the quantity of water for water-based recreation is woefully short at present and it will get worse unless a good-sized, long range program is started without delay.

REFERENCES

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