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News Notes

Southeastern Fishes Council

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News Notes

MEMBERSHIP

Present SFC membership now totals 167. Recent new members are:

Richard T. Bryant
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Leroy M. Koch
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Florence, AL 35630
John R. and Peggy W. Shute
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Austin, TX 28705
Ralph W. Holzenthal
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New Orleans, LA 70124
Gary L. Miller
Dept. of Biological Sciences
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Mississippi State, MS 39762

Correspondence addressed to the following members has been returned. Anyone knowing of their whereabouts should contact the secretary, Bob Cashner. Last known addresses are indicated.

Thomas H. Boyd
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Starkville, MS 39759
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Colby-Sawyer College
New London, NH 03257
Donald C. Taphorn
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Guanare, Portuguesa
VENEZUELA

NEWS NOTES

FISHES COUNCIL OUTGOING OFFICERS

Sincere thanks are extended to outgoing officers Dr. Franklin F. Snelson, past secretary-treasurer, and Glenn Clemmer, past editor, for jobs well done.

RARE AND ENDANGERED BIOTA OF FLORIDA

We would like to call the membership's attention to the recent series of publications entitled "Rare and Endangered Biota of Florida." So far, five of the anticipated seven volumes have appeared (mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles, fishes, and plants). Copies are available from the University Presses of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611, at a cost of \$5 each for volumes 1-4, and \$10 for volume 5 (plants).

1980 SFC MEETING

The next regularly scheduled meeting of the Southeastern Fishes Council will be held during the ASB meetings, to be held at the University of South Florida, in Tampa, from 26-29 March 1980. Exact time and place of the meetings will appear in a future number of the *Proceedings*.

COMMENTS ON RECENT EVENTS

Recent events have not been particularly encouraging. As you all know by now, Howard Baker and his cronies have, through behind-the-scenes maneuvering, revived the Tellico Dam project, this despite the fact that the Presidential commission charged with evaluating public works projects for possible exemption from the endangered species act had labelled Tellico as economically unsound, and also that TVA chairman Freeman had voiced opposition to the project in its original form. President Carter, despite his earlier stated commitment toward conservation, did not cast a veto, even though there was strong reason to believe such a veto would have been upheld in Congress! The main points raised by Baker, in justifying completion of the dam, were (a) the snail darter is "thriving" in the Hiwassee River (why wasn't it there to begin with?) and (b) it would cost more to dismantle Tellico than to fill it (why is it necessary to do either?).

One important point on which dam proponents have consistently misled the public pertains to the dam's lack of direct hydroelectric generating capacity. It's safe to say that many people believe that such capacity is involved, and that the project is therefore justified.

Hopefully the snail darter *will* continue to survive in the Hiwassee, and hopefully the publicity generated concerning the economic waste and boondoggling associated with Tellico will have some positive effect in the sense of making less likely similar wasteful and environmentally destructive projects in the future.

Meanwhile, the Tennessee-Tombigbee waterway (Tenn-Tom) also grinds on, despite a cost-benefit ratio that realistically is about thirty cents return for every dollar spent. The lessons to be learned from Tenn-Tom are (a) no matter how bad the project, any set of figures, if juggled long enough and expertly enough, can be made to yield a favorable cost-benefit ratio, and (b) the power of long-time Washington politicians, such as John Stennis, is awesome. A number of articles have been written on the project (see particularly James Nathan Miller's "Trickery on the Tenn-Tom" in *Reader's Digest*, September 1978). The CBS news program "60 Minutes" has been approached about covering this fiasco, but so far has shied away. Nevertheless, efforts should continue to induce this program or the other network counterparts (NBC's "20/20" or ABC's "Prime Time Sunday") to air the subject. Only by making the general public throughout the country aware of exactly how much of their tax money is going down the drain (this project will cost several *billion* dollars before it is done) will there be sufficient outcry to have reasonable hopes in this regard.

Other less-than-favorable news was reported in the most recent (August 1979) *Endangered Species Technical Bulletin* (Vol. 4, No. 8). This pertains to the proposal for establishment of Critical Habitat for two Alabama and one Tennessee species (the pygmy sculpin, *Cottus pygmaeus*; spring pygmy sunfish, *Elassoma* new species; and the Barrens topminnow, *Fundulus* new species), each of which is now apparently confined to a single spring and spring run. The notice reads as follows:

"Reproposal of Critical Habitat for three fishes in Alabama and Tennessee will be withdrawn by the Service because of procedural errors in the nature of the public meeting and the inadequate availability of information concerning economic considerations. The reproposal was published in the July 27, 1979, *Federal Register*, and the subsequent meetings were held August 28-30. The proposed listing for the spring pygmy sunfish (*Elassoma* sp.) and the pygmy sculpin (*Cottus pygmaeus*) will be automatically withdrawn on November 29, 1979, two years after its initial publication. The proposed listing for the Barrens topminnow (*Fundulus* sp.) will be withdrawn on December 30, 1979, also two years after publication. A new proposal will be made only if new information becomes available."

According to Jim Williams, the above resulted from the efforts of a group of lawyers, who had prepared for the hearings by conducting an intensive scare campaign among the local populace, and had succeeded in convincing them that the federal government was out to condemn their land and, in various other ways, threaten life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. As a result, a large group of mostly hostile citizens was on hand for the hearing. The lawyers succeeded in "proving" that insufficient prior notice had been given for the meetings, and also convinced the group that, inasmuch as two years had elapsed since the original proposal of Critical Habitat, the situation had probably changed, and therefore the opinion of "experts" would be necessary to establish that the setting aside of Critical Habitat was indeed required!

The main objection, so far as the pygmy sculpin was concerned, was inclusion of Dry and Coldwater creeks as Critical Habitat. Since the main sculpin population is located in Coldwater Spring itself (which is fenced), the fish would seem to be secure so long as no chemicals are applied or other types of habitat alteration occur. There seems to be some indication of local pride in having a unique fish in their midst, and as long as fish and human needs can exist in harmony here, the situation may be resolved to both sides satisfaction.

The situation regarding the other two species is less easily resolved, since there are no "safeguards" involved, such as at Coldwater Spring. Again, objection seemed to be concentrated on inclusion of the spring run as Critical Habitat, although subsequent discussions with the Moss Spring owners hopefully have assuaged some of their original fears and objections. Much of the objection concerning the Barrens topminnow CH involved the inclusion of areas where the species had once occurred, but where it has not recently been found. According to Jim, one of the localities where the species was recently known to occur has now been severely modified, with surrounding protective cover removed and resultant rise in water temperature. Chances that the fish will survive there are not good. Thus, it is possible that the Barrens topminnow may now survive only in one area, and even here human encroachment is a definite threat.

Inasmuch as the above three species are severely restricted in their distributions, and thus are very vulnerable to localized ecological catastrophe, efforts should be made to maintain captive, reproducing populations. Two Texas poeciliids, the Big Bend gambusia (*Gambusia gaigei*) and the Goodenough gambusia (*Gambusia amistadensis*) survive today only because of such efforts. The latter exists only as captive populations, and the former came, in 1957, within three individuals of extinction (two males, one female). Plans are moving ahead on the goal of acquiring a hatchery facility in the southeast, the primary function of which would be to maintain and propagate endangered and threatened species, as is currently being done at the federal facility at Dexter, New Mexico. As many of you are aware, Scott Mettee has successfully spawned *Elassoma* new species in aquaria at the University of Alabama. Since this species can live in a confined area, raising it in captivity should pose no great problem. Although the Barrens topminnow undoubtedly would require more living space than the spring pygmy sunfish, Mike Howell and Ann Black (Samford University) reportedly were successful in getting this *Fundulus* to spawn last summer, with about 300 young being produced.

The situation regarding other southeastern species remains about the same. No new localities for the watercress darter (*Etheostoma nuchale*) have been reported, and populations of the Maryland darter (*Etheostoma sellare*) remain about the same. Efforts are still being made to pump water from upstream areas of Deer Creek, which obviously would have an adverse effect on *E. sellare*. Apparently there has been no population explosion of Maryland