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News Notes

Southeastern Fishes Council

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News Notes

There is ample evidence provided by changing fish and mussel faunas to indicate that the Tennessee no longer exists as a river. The foremost aquatic biologists of the late 1930's could not have predicted the effects of impoundment on species such as *Hybognathus nuchalis*, *Notropis stramineus*, and *Hiodon alosoides*. The loss of the Tennessee River is an environmental tragedy of immense proportions, but equally tragic is our failure to be sufficiently impressed by the historical lessons to be learned. It is obvious that we are still unable to accurately assess the effects of habitat alteration on the faunas involved, and that any habitat alteration involving complex faunas is almost certain to adversely affect one or

more of the involved species. The overwhelming lesson is that habitat alteration will, often in ways we can not guess, result in continued species decimation. Although our knowledge of the biota is incomplete, we are sufficiently informed to say unequivocally that the environmental effects of any major water project will never be "insignificant".

Literature Cited

Gilbert, C. R. 1969. Systematics and distribution of the American cyprinid fishes *Notropis ariommus* and *Notropis telescopus*. Copeia 1969 (3):474-92.

News Notes . . .

RESOLUTION ON COLUMBIA DAM

At the annual meeting in Tuscaloosa SFC unanimously supported a resolution in opposition to Columbia Dam on the Duck River in Tennessee. Three points were stipulated in the resolution as follows:

1. A public hearing should be held to air all sides of the Columbia Dam issue prior to granting a 404 permit.
2. The hearing should be held outside the immediate project area (Columbia), preferably at Nashville.
3. The SFC goes on record as being directly opposed to completion of the Columbia Dam Project.

The Columbia Dam Project is economically infeasible. The TVA projected benefit-cost ratio below unity should have rendered the project legally non-fundable under pertinent laws governing appropriations. We ask that the Army Corps of Engineers employ its discretion most effectively by not condoning an economically wasteful project by another federal agency.

The Duck River contains one of the three most diverse riverine fish faunas in North America as well as remnants of a diverse freshwater mollusk fauna. Several threatened fish species are involved as well as threatened and/or endangered mollusks. Drastic alteration of the Duck River ecosystem by impoundment would constitute one of the greatest negative impacts possible to a large and important element of our native fish and mollusk faunas.

NO ON GRASS CARP

The following letter was sent to the Directors of the game and fish agencies in all southeastern states:

At its fourth annual meeting held in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, the Southeastern Fishes Council (SFC) unanimously supported a resolution recommending that the various state game and fish agencies intensively review projects involving introductions of non-native fishes into the waters of southeastern United States. The SFC generally opposes introduction of exotic species, including further introductions of the grass carp, *Ctenopharyngodon idella*, in states where it is not yet established. Critical evaluation of possible consequences of exotic fish introductions and their impact on native

fish species should be conducted before any further stockings are approved. The proven detrimental effect of non-native fish introductions on the southwestern U. S. fish fauna should be a lesson to us here in the southeast. The marginal to nonexistent benefits of introductions are hardly worth the risks of severe impacts on our native species.

The SFC greatly appreciates your time and consideration. Through its many experts and technical committees, we are eager to consult with you on the matter of exotic fish introductions or any other appropriate topic.

MS GOVERNOR SUPPORTS PROTECTION OF OKATOMA CREEK

Okatoma Creek, a tributary of the Pascagoula River in southeastern Mississippi, was earmarked for destruction by a Soil Conservation Service project which would construct 14 dams in the headwaters and channelize 53.7 miles of the main stream. The project was approved and funded (\$13 million) during the closing days of Congress. Because of the biological, scenic, and recreational assets of Okatoma Creek, the Mississippi Air and Water Pollution Control Commission and the state Game and Fish Commission officially opposed the planned project. In a strong letter to the SCS in November Governor Finch voiced his opposition to the plan as not being in the best overall interest of the citizens of Mississippi.

A bill has been introduced into the Mississippi Legislature to protect Okatoma Creek, Bogue Chitto River, Strong River, and Black Creek from channelization projects.

UNANIMOUS - NO EXEMPTION FOR TELlico

The review committee on endangered species conflicts voted 7-0 to bar completion of Tellico Dam on 23 January. Secretary Andrus called the project, "ill-conceived and uneconomic in the first place."

Southeastern Fishes Council
PROCEEDINGS
DRAWER Z, MISSISSIPPI STATE, MS 39762

DEDICATED TO THE PRESERVATION OF SOUTHEASTERN FISHES

WHAT GOOD IS TELlico DAM?

How many times during the past few months have you been asked, "What good is a little three-inch snail darter?" Headlines, editorials, and countless articles illustrated with the fish and an ever-present paper clip have flooded the media since the 6-3 majority decision by the Supreme Court to uphold the ruling to stop work on Tellico Dam. The little fish vs. big dam stories rarely mentioned the economic weaknesses of the project. In a report to the Congress the General Accounting Office found that "neither the current project nor alternatives are supported by current benefit-cost analyses." The report further recommended that the Congress "should not act on the proposed legislation to exempt the project from the Endangered Species Act until more current information is received."

Because the 1973 Endangered Species Act was expiring on 30 September, open season was declared on darters. Never mind the studies that showed that Tellico would flood 16,000 acres of prime farm land, displace 200 families, and inundate the last free-flowing 30 miles of the Little Tennessee River. Never mind the exaggerated claims of flood control and power production. Newly appointed Director of TVA, David Freeman, acknowledged that, "The real waste of the taxpayers' money may be in flooding the land". The mood in Washington was aptly described by journalist Ward Sinclair as "Pork Panic". In the closing hour of the 95th Congress the Endangered Species Act was extended for 18 months, but it was also amended with several new and important items.

On November 10th President Carter signed the act which included a provision to establish a cabinet-level review committee which had the authority to make special exemptions from the protective measures established in the 1973 legislation. The President urged that exemptions should be exercised "only in grave circumstances posing a clear and immediate threat to national security." He added, "Destruction of the life of an endangered or threatened species should never be undertaken lightly, no matter how insignificant the species may appear today."

The new act also specifically called for an exemption for Tellico Dam unless the newly formed committee ruled otherwise within a 90 day period. The new committee consists of seven members: the Secretary of the Interior, Secretary of Agriculture, Secretary of the Army, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisors, Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency, Administrator of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, and a representative of the State affected by the project. An exemption may be granted with a majority vote of five of the members. The deadline on Tellico is February 8.

While the Endangered Species Act is still basically intact following the congressional flurry over dams and darters, the weakening amendments will certainly slow down the listing process and open up loopholes for emotional conflicts. We trust that if exemptions are allowed that they are only granted in "grave circumstances" and not for a pet project of dubious merit. We should be certain that the answer is clear - what good is Tellico Dam?

REMEMBER

SFC will meet in Chattanooga, TN in conjunction with the ASB meetings 25-28 April. The details on time and place will be announced later.

Next Issue: New records of fishes from northern Georgia. Please send your news items and announcements.

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