

# **Kootenai River/Kootenay Lake Burbot Conservation Strategy**

## **Appendix 2: Historical Account of Kootenai River Burbot**

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## Executive Summary

As background to the Kootenai River/Kootenay Lake Burbot Conservation Strategy, this document provides transcribed interviews of eleven Boundary County (ID.) residents with life-long familiarity with Lower Kootenai River and past burbot fisheries. Information provided in these interviews predates that available from fisheries management agencies, in some cases by many decades. Although recognized as anecdotal evidence, information provided by these interviews indicates that Lower Kootenai burbot stocks may have experienced reductions in abundance as early as the 1930s.

Seven of 11 respondents independently indicated that significant burbot population decline followed drainage district formation and diking efforts that began during the 1920s in the Kootenai River floodplain. Perceived negative effects on burbot from loss of flooded habitat and habitat complexity, and from dikes and culverts were repeatedly mentioned by respondents. Three respondents suggested that Libby Dam had negative effects on burbot, due to habitat and population fragmentation and changes in river flow and elevation. Ten of the eleven respondents referred to unregulated harvest between the 1920s to the 1950s; many referred to harvest (with rod and reel, setlines, spears and pitchforks due to historically high fish density) as a major contributor to burbot population decline in the Basin, especially following the influx of Dust Bowl Immigrants to Boundary County. Ten of the eleven respondents referred specifically to burbot harvest with spears or pitchforks, indicative of their historically high densities and vulnerability under the ice in spawning tributaries.

Harvested burbot ranged in size from 18 to 42 inches, but were more commonly in the two to three foot range; some of the larger ones weighed ten or more pounds. Burbot were harvested mainly for food, and secondarily for sport and economic reasons. Several markets in the Bonners Ferry area bought and sold burbot during the early to mid-1900s. Burbot were harvested mainly between late November and March, mostly under the ice. Fisheries tended to concentrate on spawning aggregations often in tributary streams. Harvest was reported from many areas of the Kootenai River and its tributaries from Bonners Ferry downstream approximately 120 km to Porthill ID. at the international border with British Columbia.

Information provided in this document includes personal bias. Bias was introduced by inconsistent questions and answers among respondents, as well as their admitted inability to accurately remember details of events in the distant past. The age of the respondents and varying degrees of familiarity with issues among respondents also affected the information in this document. However, all respondents indicated that burbot populations declined during the 1900s, some suggested as early as the 1930s. The estimated timing of burbot population decline also depended to some degree on the age of the respondent. Finally, it is likely that perceived burbot abundance was reset across human generations, such that more burbot always existed when respondents were young than when they were old. Only the oldest respondents were able to recall the magnitude of additive burbot population decline across several generations of respondents.

## Background

Interviews took place between May 2003 and June 2004 in the Bonners Ferry area. Interviews are presented in chronological order, and alphabetically by last name of person interviewed when multiple interviews occurred on the same day.

## Transcription Notation

The transcription notation generally follows the method of notation employed by most linguists today (Duranti, 1997). Commas and periods indicate the normal pause associated with them as in standard English. A single dash indicates a short pause, which is frequently heard as a glottal stop. The question mark indicates question intonation. Although the syntactic form may be declarative, if question intonation occurs a question mark is inserted. On the other hand, if the syntactic form is a question and the intonation is that of a declarative, a period is used. An exclamation point marks an utterance which carries intonation signaling excitement. If one or more words in an utterance receive heavy stress, these words are shown in caps.

Dialect alterations are indicated in regular orthography, that is, *where'd* for *where did*, *y'know* for *you know*, *'em* for *them*, and so forth. Longer pauses are indicated by the word "pause" written in double parentheses. Hesitation forms and reinforcement signals are indicated by the notations *umhm*, *uhuh*, etc. The neutral vowel / / is indicated by the notation *uh*. Double parentheses are also used for phenomena which are not essential as details of speech for the purposes of these transcriptions. These phenomena include laughs, chuckles, and other details of the conversational context like overlapped speech, background noise and so forth. When there is doubt about what the speaker is saying, it is indicated by single parentheses. When an approximation can be made then it is inserted within the parentheses.

The interviewer is transcribed in bold text and the interviewee is transcribed in Times New Roman. A second or third speaker was originally color-coded but given printer and copying limitations, they are now marked by an appropriate number (#2, #3) in front of the phrase they utter.

Duranti, A. 1997. *Linguistic Anthropology*. Cambridge University Press.

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## Interview with Ralph Anglen, May 8, 2003

**How long have you fished the Kootenai River and its tributaries?**

Sixty, seventy years. Something like that.

**Have you or someone you know ever fished for ling cod?**

Yeah.

**Who and where?**

We were in the ( ) in Porthill and they fished there all the time.

**What year was that?**

Thirty-four, thirty-five.

**Where did they fish at?**

Just out on the river.

**After that, can you think of some other times folks fished?**

Not too much. You had to go to work and when you had work to do you didn't have time to do it.

**Well how long have you fished for ling?**

Well, not too long. About four or five years.

**And what years were those?**

Way back in thirty-four. Part of thirty-five.

**So sometime in November in that year and the following year?**

When the river froze over.

**Have you ever heard of any stories of people catching ling or seeing them catch them?**

Well, all kinds of stories. When they found that bank of ling up in Canada, and they come across the border with thirty, forty gallons of filleted ling, full, that's when they shut off commercializing. The Canadians found out they had something finally and they

raised the license and put a limit on them. But before they did that they'd come across with thirty, forty gallons of filleted ling.

**You mean American fishermen?**

Umhm. They were individuals. They sold them to the stores. And the Canadians found out they had something valuable and they raised the license fees and put a limit on them.

**What year was that?**

Oh, Lord, I don't know. About the forties, fifties, something like that.

**As late as the fifties?**

Yeah.

**There wasn't any control before that up in Canada?**

No.

**How long have you fished for ling?**

Well, not very much.

**Oh yeah, we talked about that. Did you fish from the shore or?**

We fished through the ice ordinarily.

**So what time of year were you doing this then?**

From the time it freezes over until spring. All up and down the river. Use minnows for bait.

**So you could fish for the ling before the river froze until after?**

Well it was better fishing through the ice than from the bank.

**So Mr. Fairchild, you fished not through the ice but before it froze, right?**

Yeah, but I didn't catch too many.

They speared these ling at the mouth of all these creeks years ago.

**When you fished, when did you fish for them, the time of year and day?**

In the winter. You'd set lines and you'd catch most of them at night.

**You'd set lines. How did you do that?**

Well you just cut a hole in the ice, hook a minnow on a hook and sink 'er and tie a stick across it so it wouldn't go through the hole and just leave it. And then you'd come back and ( ) set lines mostly.

**How many did you catch?**

I only caught about half a dozen in my life.

**And how big were they?**

Oh, they run anywhere from eighteen to thirty inches.

**Do you recall seeing or catching any small ling? One footers or less?**

No.

**Why did you fish for the ling? Was it sport or?**

Sport. And fun. To eat.

**But it wasn't commercial for you?**

No.

**Do you know any stories or folklore about ling?**

Oh, I could talk for the rest of the day. Oh, like Glenn said, in the heyday, before they drained these districts, that was their spawning. And that's the reason they can't do anything now, because they don't have any place to spawn. They're poor swimmers. And if this river goes up, they can't (buck the cart). Now that's what the biologists tell us. But I don't really know. And they can't buck the cart, and they don't get into the spawning grounds. The river used to be low in the winter time, but thanks to the Libby Dam, they killed it. Because they keep it high and the ling just can't buck it.

**Do you have any pictures of ling?**

I'd have to go through all of these things. Only got one or two anyway.

**When and why did you stop fishing for them?**

I was just- too much work.

**Have you seen an increase or decrease in numbers over the years?**

Decrease.

**And why would you say?**

Libby Dam.

**But why?**

They keep the water high in the wintertime and they can't come up the river to spawn. You could still catch a few ling out of that river if you wanted to fish for 'em at night. It's illegal but you could still do it. And they're big. You don't get any little ones! 'Cause they just can't spawn in there any more. That's what the biologists tell me. All I know is what I read.

**Did you ever fish for other species than ling?**

Oh yeah. I fished the river for trout, whitefish. I done that for years and years and years.

**Did you ever fish the tributaries instead of the main river?**

I have fished the tributaries. I used to dry fly fish the Westside streams.

**How about lakes too?**

Well I've fished all the lakes.

**When you went fishing was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

It didn't seem to make much difference.

**Prior to the Libby Dam was the Kootenai River too rough and too fast to fish?**

No.

**Did you notice a change in the fishing related to the building of the Libby Dam?**

Yes.

**What?**

Decrease in the fish (rate). They had the river high and the fish would go up to spawn and then they'd drop it and the spawn's killed.

**Was it a gradual change?**

Yes. Pretty much.

**Over how many years would you say?**

Oh, ten. Fifteen.

**Have you noticed an increase in different species of fish over the years?**

No. No increase.

**What would you recommend to do to help the fish population? ((Laughs)) We're gonna be here all day.**

Well, blow the Libby Dam out ( ). The Army Engineers have been very reluctant to help the fishery in the Kootenai River. We had a meeting down here and I was the first speaker on the floor. And I told them engineers that what you guys are doing to this Kootenai River is criminal. And if anybody but you was doing it, you'd be in jail. But you guys just plain don't give a damn! And Fish and Game come around and congratulate me. They been telling them that for years but they wouldn't listen to them. You can't hardly buck the Army Engineers for anything. Now they're having problems. I was at some of the meetings before the Libby Dam went in. Had an old logger get up one day and ask the colonel in charge of it, "Colonel, are you going to hold a steady flow on this river or are you can fluctuate it like they do everywhere else?" He said, "We're gonna keep a steady flow." This logger says, "Colonel, you're lying to us. You know you're lying to us. You're gonna be gone and the next man will say, 'I've never heard of it.'" That's just what's happened.

**So, what would you specifically recommend to help the fish?**

I have no idea. I have no idea. As long as the engineers run the Libby Dam like they do, I just have no idea.

**How would like to see the dam run?**

I'd like to see a steady flow but we're never gonna get it. I'm getting too old to even worry about it. I had some fantastic fishing out of that Kootenai River! We used to have a fifty fish limit on whitefish. I got to concentrating on the whitefish because nobody else fished for 'em. Then I got to writing about it and so many people read it, they started fishing for it. And now I got friends who fish for nothing but whitefish. That's about the only answer you got.

That's- that's all.

## Interview with Glenn Fairchild, May 8, 2003

**How long have you fished the Kootenai River and its tributaries?**

Let's see, seventy-five years.

**Have you or someone you know ever fished for ling cod?**

Yeah. We used to fish around Copeland and at Porthill.

**How long have you fished for ling?**

Oh, just about two or three years.

**How long ago was that?**

Sixty years ago or sixty five.

**In the forties? The thirties? After the war? Before the war?**

Before the war.

**The midst of the Depression? Or the beginning of it?**

The tail end of it.

**Why was it only two or three years?**

The Forest Service. They were awful good eating but that's as long as I can remember fishing for 'em. Just three years.

**Have you ever heard of any stories of people catching ling or seeing them catch 'em?**

I heard stories before that when there was water in District One. They'd go out there in boats when it was flooded and they'd spear 'em from the boats.

**When was that?**

That was early. Way early. Before the districts, before they diked the district. They'd catch lots of 'em then, in there. Clear on out through District One and probably other places too.

**Just in flood periods?**

Before they drained the district. They'd go at night but you could go during the day also.

**Did you fish from shore or on a boat?**

From the shore?

**This was up in Copeland?**

That country up there. And the drainage ditches.

**Out of Copeland?**

Everywhere. West side. This side of Copeland.

**When did you fish for them? What time of year and day?**

It would be cold weather.

**January, February? Or before it froze?**

Before it froze. Probably November. When it froze over, they would go through the ice for 'em.

**How many did you usually catch?**

Oh, probably four or five.

**What was the size of the fish?**

It was about, two feet long.

**Do you ever recall seeing or catching any small ling? One footers or less?**

No. I went up to Canada too. You were allowed to spear in Canada. In the lake there they said were just layers and layers. They were so many you could just drop your hook down and get all you wanted. But they stopped that too. They was getting too many of them.

**Commercial use or?**

No commercial use. They was the best eating there was.

**Was it like a community activity? Did a lot of folks get around and do it at the same time?**

No.

**Who would go fishing with you?**

Oh a friend.

**Shorty?**

Yeah. Walter Cox. And somebody else. I forget now.

**Do you know any stories or folklore about the ling?**

When the bottom was flooded you know, they'd go out in their boats and get all they wanted.

**The bottom would be flooded?**

Yeah.

**Would it be live ling or dead ling?**

Live ling. The Kootenai Valley was all under water then. And they would go out there in boats in the shallower places and spear 'em, I heard. That's when there were lots of them.

**And when do you think that was?**

The twenties.

**All along the river?**

Any place out in the flats, where fields are now. It seems like they said it was at the south end there were quite a bit. District one. That's what I heard now.

**Do you have any pictures of ling?**

No.

**When and why did you stop fishing for them?**

Busy, I guess. Working.

**So you just fished about two or three years in a row for them?**

Yeah. Three years. Then I had other things to do.

**Have you seen an increase or decrease in numbers over the years?**

Decrease.

**Since when?**

Oh, 1920.

**Why was that?**

I don't know. Well, they'd run up the Moyie River even, they said. They drained the districts (where they used to spawn).

**Did you ever fish for any other species than ling?**

Yeah. Trout, and steelhead down in the Salmon River.

**Did you ever fish the tributaries instead of the main Kootenai River?**

Yeah. Deep Creek and uh,

**What did you fish for at Deep Creek?**

Trout. They'd run up the big ones in spring, that's why you catch a nice big one. And usually catch smaller ones in there. There's where Walter Cox lived, out at Moravia.

**When you went fishing was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

Yeah.

**How many years did you go fishing in the tributaries?**

Oh, maybe all together maybe five years. Different years.

**What years were those, do you recall? Before the war or after?**

Before the war. Yeah. I fished up Smith Creek too. That was good fishing.

**And what did you fish for there?**

Trout. Rainbows.

**Prior to the Libby Dam, was the Kootenai River too rough and too fast to fish?**

No.

**Did you notice a change in the fishing related to the Libby Dam?**

I didn't fish much since then.

## **Interview with Hartley King, May 8, 2003**

### **How long have you fished the Kootenai River and its tributaries?**

We fished, back in the twenties when I was a kid, up till about '32 or '33. Then we left and went out to Meadow Creek. So we never fished any more. But they were already going downhill because of the dikes and everything. We used to catch them in the river. We didn't go up the tributaries because that's where most people went. That was about February when we went up there. And they were spawning. They spawned in February. There would be ice sometimes. Of course the creeks were bigger than they are now. You'd have to cut holes in the ice to get through to them and then they speared them, through the ice.

### **Well, have you or someone you know ever fished for lingcod?**

Yeah, I have. We always set lines at night in the river, especially in the wintertime. We didn't fish much in the summertime, too busy.

### **Well, how would you set the line?**

We just put a minnow or a fish about four to five inches long, you thread them on a hook, a big hook and then hang it down through the ice, clear down to the bottom. In the morning you're sure to have one. Sometimes they were more than four feet long. They were big, really big.

### **Did you do that with several holes or just one?**

We'd do it in two or three holes maybe. We only took- you could only use so much meat. In the summertime we was too busy to fish and in the wintertime, why we didn't have nothing else to do. That's why we cut holes in the ice and fished through the ice.

### **Where did you fish for them? Exactly?**

I don't know if you know where the Vickaryous place is, four or five miles south of Porthill. Bob Vickaryous lives there now, him and his mother. And that's where we used to live. That, and on up the river a ways, we fished. We fished out of there too on the Riley Bend. What was Vionna Simms' place. That is the Sims' place after we left there. They bought it. We lived in a great big horseshow bend, only about a quarter mile across up at one end of it. And the rest of it was all river come clear back around, probably to a couple of miles, I guess, down there. But anyway, we fished there too until 1929. Then we moved up to the Fischer place, where the Vicaryous's are now. That's the old Craig Fischer place.

**How long have you fished for ling?**

Ever since I was a kid, up till about '37, and then I left here and I never did fish for them anymore.

**When you came back were you able to fish for them?**

No. There wasn't any fish left. They says they got a few, but I don't even know if you can even keep them if you fish now.

**Have you ever heard of any stories of people catching ling or seen them catch them. And where they caught them?**

Well, you got them both places, in the river and in the tributaries, like Smith Creek. I don't know if they're in Canyon Creek or not. But I know they went up Smith Creek. They used to haul them out of there by the wagonloads. Just (dipping) out of the creek.

**During spawning time you mean?**

Yeah, spawning time.

**Was that in February?**

Yeah, if I remember right, it was in February when they spawned.

**Did you fish from the shore or from boat?**

Well, we fished on the ice. We just went out on the ice. We used to do it on our sturgeon lines sometimes in the spring. Great big ole hooks for the sturgeon, you know, and by golly you'd catch a big old ling on them. That was in the early thirties.

**What was a big old ling back then?**

Probably around four feet. Awful close. Between forty and forty-eight inches. We had a big, old kitchen table, and we'd bring the fish in and lay them on that table and they'd hand over both sides, hang clear down. Some people don't believe that. Old Ralph, he didn't believe it when I told him. He said, "No, I never heard anything like that." But he wasn't here in them days either. He didn't come till, when? The thirties?

**Yeah, thirties. When did you fish for them, the time of year and the day?**

It'd depend on how many sets we had out. You could only have one hook on, on one set and then another set. Probably get one on each one. Sometimes you caught a char on them instead of the ling.

**What's a char?**

They're a Dolly Varden. They call them char after they get, they're huge. They're around thirty pounds, probably a little over. They just didn't even look like a fish. They just looked like a great big round cantaloupe. We had all kinds of fish in them days.

**How big were the ling that you were catching then?**

They're about forty inches. Of course, up there where they speared them, they got smaller ones. Usually from eighteen to maybe twenty-four inches, or something like that.

**Now, where would they be spearing them?**

Up the tributaries. Yeah, you couldn't do it in the river. You never, never seen them in there. But there is shallow water up the Smith Creek, you see, so they could see them. And they used the lights at night and shine them on there and catch them. Do it with spears. Spear them. Throw them out.

**Do you recall seeing or catching any small ling? One footers or less?**

Well, once in a while. We never did catch any in the river, but they did, up the creeks, where they done nothing but just spear them. They'd get every size there.

**Why did you fish for the ling cod? Was it for sport or food or just?**

No. Just for food.

**There was no commercial venture?**

No, we never (bragged) none. Nothing. I mean, nobody ever even weighed one. We don't even know what the weight. And we actually never really measured one. We just laid them over that table and figured there was pretty close to four feet. Nobody fished so they could brag on it, you know. The same way with the deer. When we killed a great big ole buck, we never knew what the weight or anything. Just eating them, that's all they was, was food.

**Do you know any stories or folklore about ling?**

No, I don't think so.

**Well, who would you go fishing with?**

We just went by ourselves. My step-dad and I. Sometimes I was alone at it.

**Do you have any pictures of ling?**

No.

**When and why did you stop fishing for ling?**

Well, we just moved away. But actually they were going downhill, already in the thirties.

**In the thirties? Why?**

Well, the way I figured, it's on account on of the diking. (The whole) habitat was gone. They never went up the creeks any more after they diked and digged them ditches down through. We never heard of any of them going up there to spawn again.

**And so, have you seen an increase or a decrease in numbers over the years?**

Oh yeah, there's quite a decrease.

**Starting when? About the thirties or?**

Yeah, [they] started decreasing about in the thirties.

**Did you ever fish for other species than ling?**

Oh yeah. Bass and trout. We had everything in the river in them days.

**What kind of bass?**

The small mouth bass.

**And what kind of trout?**

There were several different kinds of them, rainbow and brook trout and all that kind of stuff was in there.

**Did you fish the tributaries instead of the main river?**

No, we generally fished the river, but some people did fish the tributaries. Like the people who was after the ling. They went up the tributaries because it was easier to get them and they spent any time, monkeying around you know, putting out sets and all that. But we lived right on the river so we just fished in the river.

**When you went fishing was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

No, it was easier for the river.

**Because you lived on the river?**

Yeah, we lived right on the riverbank.

**Prior to the Libby Dam was the Kootenai River too rough and fast to fish?**

Not down there where we were! The river was almost a lake. It just set still almost. It just barely moved. Unless it's in early spring in the year when there was a lot of water coming down. Then it was quite fast. The ling didn't have any trouble at all. But now, they can't get over these, they can't go up in swift water or anything, because they're too slow of a swimmer. But down where we were a way, the water was just like a lake. There was hardly any current at all in the summertime.

**The ling aren't very good swimmers, you say?**

No, they're pretty weak swimmers.

**Did you notice a change in the fishing related to the building of the Libby Dam?**

Well, I wasn't here any more after that. And I was gone quite a while before that because the Libby Dam, I think, was built somewhere in the sixties. And we'd been gone for years before that. But I'm sure the Libby Dam had a lot to do with it. Because they'd keep a raising the water and then they lower. And in a few days it will be up again, and down. Of course, whatever fish is spawning, they lose their eggs right away because when they drop the water down, why it leaves them right out in the open. They just can't possibly live in (our) river that way.

**Have you noticed an increase in different species of fish over the years?**

No. It went downhill with this dam. When we first come here we had some fish in the river. Now there's none! I don't think there's any hardly. Well, there's a few trout, but that's about all.

**What would you recommend to do to help the fish population?**

Boy, I don't know! I think it's gone. I don't think they'll ever get them back. I just don't know what you would [do] because they can't go back up the streams any more. Unless they go way up high, up in the mountain. Of course, the ling can't get up there. They do have ling in the lake up there. I suppose they come in from Canada, [but] I don't know where they come from. But they ain't get up through the falls or anything like that.

**Who did you know in the Porthill area that used to go ling fishing?**

Well, there were several people that ling fished there, but the one that done the most of it is Roy Huff. He had a tavern there and he spent half of his time fishing for ling. And

he'd go up and down the river with a car. And look at their lines. But I know them guys caught ten times more than they could use.

**Did they sell it?**

I think so. I think they sold a lot of them.

**Did they sell locally or out of the area?**

I don't know if they shipped them off anywhere. But I know they used to sell them in the meat markets here. And people used to feed them to their pigs. They were so many ling that you'd get a wagonload of them in just a little while and take them home and feed them to the pigs. Isn't that something?

**Where would they get all the ling at?**

In the tributaries. They'd go up there and spear them. A wagonload in a night! There was so many fish!

**Why would they get so many fish?**

I don't know why anybody would want to take that many fish. We never did. We always just took what we could eat. But some of them just hauled them home and fed the to the pigs. It was in the old timers' column one time.

**Do you remember what the ling sold for in the fish markets?**

No, I have no idea. But I don't suppose it was very much. Five, ten cents a pound maybe.

**When you would go fishing, if you got three ling, how long would that last you?**

Oh, it'd last us a week or two. Couldn't afford to eat our cows or cattle because we had to settle in. But, oh lots of times we'd be without fish, for six months because we didn't have time to go fish for them. But in the wintertime we ate quite a few fish.

**So you would fish for ling year round?**

Yeah, you could. There was no limit on them. You didn't have to have any license. Nothing! It was just a big waste! It was just a shame! But we've done that with everything. We just let them go at it until there's none left.

**What's the waste part that you're talking about?**

You know, it's catching so many of them. Like feeding the pigs. And probably a lot of them just take them home and throw them in the garbage. A lot of that goes on too. I

seen that up in Alaska, when we was up there. People that catch them Dolly Varden...If they'd done that with the moose or an elk there wouldn't be a one left. But they watched that a little closer.

**How many folks from your area actually fished for ling?**

Not very many of us. Some of them never fished. We had several families lived there. Some of them never even went down to try it. They just never bothered about it. Maybe they didn't like fish. I don't know.

**Could you rely on having ling during the winter months?**

Oh yes.

**And in the spring you could catch sturgeon?**

Yeah.

**Now how big were the sturgeon?**

We used set lines on them too. They'd run up to three hundred pounds. They were huge. We caught one, one time there, and we had the neighbors, all come over there and each cut them off a whack of it. There was only little (parts of it). I can't even remember what it tasted like! But they're kind of like shark. You gotta know how to cook them or they ain't fit to eat. I didn't especially think they was so great.

**How long were you able to fish for sturgeon?**

Well, you could catch them year round, pretty much. Because they're just kind of like a pig. They had their own channels down there, clear down to the bottom of the river. And they'd run along in that. And if you happened to get a hook hanging down in that channel, which you didn't know for sure, they'd grab it.....Fish and your garden. That's what we lived on.

**If you had an opportunity to go back to some of the ways during that time, what would you do?**

I don't know. We didn't have any money. No money but we had lots of food.

**Did your mother can the fish or what?**

She canned. You'd be surprised, she canned squawfish. Pickled them. And we'd catch them buggers, I'm telling you they were huge! They were bigger than ling. The ling, she's got a great big head, like that, but it just tapers right down. Just like an eel. But squawfish, the bigger the better because they had so many bones in them that you could find. In a little one there'd be so many you couldn't find them. You get strangled on them. But she used to pickle them squawfish. They was big buggers. We caught them

the same way as we did the ling. Have small suckers, about that long for bait and string them on a hook and drop them down through the ice or whatever and catch them. That's all them big fish.

**It sounds like quite a variety of fish actually?**

Yeah, there was a lot of fish. That river was just chock full. Because I remember we lived right on the riverbank where we looked out on the sandbar and out on the river. And I slept upstairs. Had my window open in the summertime. And about four o'clock in the morning the fish started jumping and you could hear them spotting (spawning) out there. Wake you up! Now, not a one. Stand there all day and never see a fish jump.

**So when you went back, after the forties, did you ever see it at that level again?**

Oh no. It just kept sliding downhill and doing down, down, down. Then the dustbowlers come in from over there and they were hungry when they got here and they were all fishing. Before that, there wasn't hardly any people in here. And half of them never bothered about fishing.

**So do you feel like the dustbowlers that came in used the fish more widely and more quickly?**

Yeah, well what they should have done was had a limit. It wasn't the people's fault. It should have been up to the game commission or somebody to have a limit on that. I don't know how many they took or if they took too many or what, but I know that there was an awful lot of people fishing, about '35 and there on and up. They just poured in here. But before that, there wasn't, you know, like Porthill to Bonners Ferry. There was only just a few houses along the road. That's all there was up till then. I think it was just overfished because they never put a limit on anything. They never done anything. It was just kind of like them pigeons years ago, killed every one of them.

((Recorder being manipulated)) **So, you were just talking about Smith Creek?**

Well, what I was saying is Smith Creek was there thousands and thousands of years, you know. And it meandered all over the flats and down into the river, clear down to Clarklin place almost, where it went into the river. It was full of gravel and sand all the way down. Of course, there is no sand and gravel out in the flats, but the water carried them down from the creek, from the mountain and just kept losing gravel after so many years. Why, it was all gravel clear to the bottom. Same way with Canyon Creek, it was the same way, pretty well straight out to the river, but it was all nice gravelly bottom in it. And of course they spawned all through up there. And then when they go through building the dikes over there, why they put the ditches right straight to the river and they're all just mud. Maybe if they would have put some gravel in them or something in there, I don't know. But they won't go up them old mudholes. And that's what it all amounted to.

**Tell me the story again, that you told me about going to school and about the bass that day.**

Well, they were building the dikes across, in District Six, and right there at Lucas Creek, and we lived right across the river from it so we went to school every morning, went across the river every morning to school, and we got over they, they were just finishing the dike and they had it all built in and all filled. The whole Lucas Creek was filled in with dirt and gravel and sand and rocks. And then they had a pipe running out about six feet off of the water to drain Lucas Creek up there. We never even knew about the bass going up there so much but when we got there that morning why there was bass by the millions in there swirling around in that, probably fifty feet across there, four or five feet deep, and it was just a solid mass of bass and they couldn't get up to their spawning grounds anymore. And that was the end of them. We never saw them again. It was the last of them. So that's what happened to our fish, that kind of stuff. And the same goes for the ling. They just quit going up them creeks because it was all mud. And it changed everything. It changed their spawning grounds, their habitat. In Canada they still fish for ling. They got ling there, probably a few spill out and come up the river here but not very many. They got their water comes right down off the mountain. They've never been tinkered with. Behind the lake there, nobody's ever fooled with that so the ling still go up them to spawn, but they don't on our side.

## **Interview with Vonnie Smith, May 8, 2003**

### **How long have you fished the Kootenai River and the tributaries?**

Well, I can't really say I've ever fished the Kootenai itself, but Smith Creek and (Mowry) Creek, I've fished a lot in there.

### **Have you or someone you know ever fished for ling cod?**

Yes, my husband did, (Walt) and my uncles, they all fished for ling cod, over at the Smith Creek. There's a place just below the bridge, they called it the ling hole. They used to [go] over there and they'd break off the ice and push it out and under the ice the ling would be just laying under there. And they'd take pitch forks, and pitch them up on the bank. I've heard my husband say that they'd take sleigh loads of fish home.

### **And what would they do with them?**

Well, his mother always canned a lot of them. Put them up in jars, you know. And of course they ate them, a lot of them too. But she used to can the fish that they caught.

### **Do you remember about what time of year they-?**

I think it was in February. It was in the winter. February, when they break the ice off and push it out and they'd be laying under the ice. One time my uncle came home with a (Houston Austin). He had one on a stick, over his shoulder and it was dragging all over. His tail was dragging on the ground, that's how long they were. It was (six eighteen) pounds.

### **You never fished for ling yourself?**

No, I can't really say I ever fished for ling. Not much. We used to fish for the Kokanee there in the creek. Lot of Kokanee. My son fished for ling in the river here, when we first moved down here in fifty-three. (He was in) high school. He used to go over here and set ling lines. We always set ling lines. When we moved down here in fifty-three he was only in the second grade, but not then, after he got older, when he was twelve to fourteen years old, he used to go down here on the river and set ling lines and get ling. Down at the ranch, we used to set ling lines along the river, the boys did. Sometimes they'd get the big Dolly Varden instead of the ling. I remember one time they were (cutting ice) and (Pat Stenderson), that was my husband's nephew, he set a line for ling in the river and he caught a great big ole Dolly Varden I think. And Todd said to him, Todd was my husband, he said, "Pat, you better go freeze that fish or it'll freeze on the ice." And he went and cleaned it and over the hole where he had been fishing a little bit he saw his line ajerking and he got two of them. ((Chuckles)) We sliced them just like salmon. It was as big as salmon. I said I had never fished for ling in the river, that's not right because 1948, when we moved to town, Mom and Dad lived at the KV, she was cooking

at KV Farms and we went down there a lot and caught and fished for ling there, in the river right off of KV Farm's buildings. We ( ) fishing through the ice.

**You fished through the ice?**

Yeah.

**About what time of year was that?**

That was along in the winter. February, March, I don't know.

**And how many would you catch, do you recall?**

Well, we'd just catch a few. Because we just set lines in and pull them up and they'd be a ling on it. Maybe set three or four ling and we didn't do that too often. Just once in a while we'd set some ling lines.

**How big were your fish?**

Oh, about two feet. But years ago they used to be real big.

**When your husband and your uncles were fishing, do you remember them ever saying what size the fish were?**

Oh, I was about in the second grade. And I remember Uncle Houston coming with this big fish on his shoulder. He was a man probably five seven or nine or something like that. He was, tail's hanging, dragging on the ground. So they must have been, let me say, six feet probably. No, it wouldn't be six feet, maybe five feet, four feet.

**And what year was that, would you say?**

About 1921, '22, something like that.

**Do you ever recall seeing or catching any small ling? Like one footers or less?**

O yeah, after that winter we went down there to the KV Farms, we caught some smaller ones.

**Where's the KV Farm? Where was that located at?**

From Porthill. It's the district at Porthill, where the hops fields are now. And the buildings were at Porthill, way over on the riverbank.

**Why did you fish for ling? Was it for food or sport or?**

Just for food. Oh, they're good, real good. They're ugly fish because they look kind of like an ( ). You know, with a big ole mouth, but their meat is good. They're not real fish tasting like lots of fish.

**Do you know any stories or folklore about the ling?**

No specifically, no. I got two or three pictures in there of sturgeon but not a ling.

**When and why did you stop fishing for ling?**

I don't know. The last time we fished for them was in forty-eight, down at the KV Farms, and then we set some lines and fished for them, but since then we never have. And John (Mc?), he used to fish for them here in the river after that.

**Do you know if he fished for them in the sixties?**

Oh yeah, he was about twelve, fourteen years old when he used to fish for them. One time he has some ling lines set off here in the river, [with] Alvie. He was kind of an odd fellow, all towns have these odd ones you know. And he was kind of (funny) and one day, Mike was gonna go out and take his fish lines in because the river was thawing out. And he was going out on the ice to get them and Alvie come along and he seen him, he went down to the river and he said, "Mike, you're crazier than I am." ((Both laugh))

**Have you seen a decrease or an increase in numbers over the years?**

I think they decreased. Oh yes.

**Why do you think that might be?**

Well, way back there was no limits and they just caught all they wanted. Like I say, some folk, they'd take sled loads home, because they just throw them out and take all they wanted. And I think they just overfished them, probably.

**Did you fish for other species other than ling?**

Oh yeah, for trout and the Kokanee and fished those in Smith Creek a lot. All the creeks, I fished from Bonners Ferry clear to Porthill (and on the west side), you know, by Long Creek, Canyon Creek, Parker Creek. I fished all of them. I loved to fish.

**Did you fish the tributaries instead of the main river?**

Oh yeah. I never fished the main river. A time or two we went on boats out here and one time I caught a great big trout out here. (Louie Dowd) had a boat and we'd go out there

and troll up and down and I caught a few out there but I never did fish the river much. Because we didn't live right on the river, we lived over against the foothills.

**When you fished the tributaries, which tributaries did you fish?**

Oh, Canyon Creek, Parker Creek, Snake Creek, Boundary Creek, all of those.

**When you went fishing was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

Well, I was raised up in Boundary Creek. I was raised jumping rocks. We played on the rocks and run and jump the rocks and I was practically raised in Boundary Creek so played there all until I was grown up. So I liked the creek so I always liked creek fishing much better than lake fishing or river fishing.

**Prior to the Libby Dam, was the Kootenai River too rough and fast to fish?**

Oh no, everybody fished the river and a lot of them used to fish down along the river banks. My son did a lot of fishing down off the KV bridge. You always see people on the rocks down here below town fishing in the river. But it was harder to get to the river. If you didn't have a rig or something to fish. In the creeks you could run up and down the sides of them and fish. I liked to fish in the creeks myself. That's my favorite.

**Did you notice a change in the fishing related to the building of the Libby Dam?**

Well, I can't say I really did too much fishing after the Libby Dam went in. You know, I was getting older and I just didn't. Only the creeks was all right.

**The creeks were still all right?**

Only, I think they quit letting us fish for the Kokanee in those. But then we always went up to the tributaries. I supposed they went up there and spawned and then go back. I don't know. During the spring of the year I think they'd go up the tributaries and spawn.

**Have you noticed an increase in different species of fish over the years?**

No, I think there have only been trout and suckers and squawfish and peanos in all the creeks.

**When did the Smiths start fishing for ling? What did they just fish out of Smith Creek, or did they go into Boundary Creek or what?**

I think mostly Smith Creek because it was closest, right by, next to their meadow. When they moved there in 1900, Smith bought, been Smith's homestead, and I think in some papers I was going through the other day that about 1901, that they came here.

**So when they were fishing they would just fish around Smith Creek then?**

Yeah. Mostly just on Smith Creek, I think.

**And how did they use the ling? I know you said that they would get quite a bit, right?**

Yeah, they'd get a lot of them. And (Mercy) I would say, she canned them. And they probably smoked them. And then they ate all they could fresh. They had a smokehouse because we used to smoke bacon and ham and they probably still hung them in there and smoked them. Of course (Todd) was seventeen years older than me so I wasn't in the family until I was about seventeen, sixteen. We got married when I was seventeen.

**So there was a lot of family history before you?**

Oh yeah. Got lots of family history. Yeah. I got that box over there full of history. I just keep anything I find. I cut out an awful lot. I got a lot of cut things. Through the years I've cut out the history of, like, the Continental Mine and all that. I love to cut because I lived up there for about, let's see. About 1921 we went up there and then Bunker went out in 1928 and that's when we moved out of there. When you're between seven and fourteen, you see it like that's the longest part of your life. I lived up there a long time, it seemed to me.

**Was there ever a time when you didn't have fishing in Smith Creek?**

Oh no, we could always fish in Smith Creek.

**Not just ling but what else?**

Well, was Kokanee and trout and squawfish and peanos and suckers and all those little scavenger fish besides.

**So did your family use the ling and these other fish to subsidize your diet? Did you eat a lot of fish and such?**

Oh yeah. Quite a bit. You didn't have meat and stuff because we didn't have electricity. We couldn't keep meat because of lack of refrigeration, so we did eat and work, chicken and fish and stuff like that. Once in a while, after they got lockers in town, we'd butcher meat and put it in there and that was the later years when Tom(Todd) and I was at the ranch.

**And where was your ranch?**

On the west side, from Porthill. Up on the river from Clocklin's. About five miles form Porthill. If you stood at Porthill you'd look right over and see our home, our ranch buildings and all.

**How many acres did you have?**

Five hundred and some. We didn't have quite six hundred.

**Five hundred acres! What did you do? Did you run cattle?**

We had cattle. About two hundred head of cattle. And in the summer when the water came up high over the meadow, why we'd run them up to Smith Creek [to] the meadows up there.

**Did your husband work out of the home?**

We just lived there and raised cattle and made a living on the ranch. We had a great big garden and I'd can and can and we'd raise lots of chickens.

**And your kids went to school where?**

They went up at the Lindberg school, up in District Ten. Till they were ready to go to high school. Then, the first winter they were in high school, we stayed in town with my sister, Jessie (High?), and then the next year we sold the ranch to (Huch Hizom) and then we moved to town, up by the old high school. We bought Rose Kosten's house.

**Which house is that now?**

Well, you go across the street there up at the old high school. At the old high school you come up the street and turn this way, it's the second house. There was a big house on the corner and we lived right next to them. It was a nice neighborhood at that time. And then we got the '48 flood and it wasn't so nice. The houses all got full of water. [The water] went over the dike down here, below town, and the water came in. We had thirty-five inches of water on our floor. When we went back to the house, everything was ruined. Everything in the valley went in '48. Tom(Todd) was working down District Eight so the kids and I packed everything that we could upstairs. ((She continues describing some of the personal effects lost in the flood.)) We just hauled stuff to the dump and save what you could.

**Was that the last flood?**

The last time the town went under.

**And then the dam went in?**

It stopped all the flooding then. The dam was a blessing because it's- The funny thing is, I don't really like to be living right down in there with the dam, especially when all this (war/work) business going on, you know. If they ever started bombing any of these dams down the rivers we'd be in trouble. ((More talk about the horrors that would ensue if the dam broke for any reason))

**What would you say as far as the Kootenai River itself? What are some of the changes you've seen in that?**

They used to claim it was ninety feet deep at Porthill. And I bet it isn't half that now, because I think the silts come in. My cousin worked for the Northern Lights company for years and he said that if they ever dredged this river out instead of letting it fill up with sand, it would get away from all this silting because it would make the river faster. But nobody ever listened to him. And I think the river has filled up a lot because I can't remember years back when there used to be sandbars all along and trees were growing on them and things like there is now. So I imagine that it's filling all the time. It stands to reason there's gonna be silt washing down, washing down and where it's narrow it's gonna fill in.

**In the thirties did you see an influx of people called the dustbowlers?**

Oh, did I. I should say so.

**Do you think that affected the fishing in the area?**

Well, I don't know. It could have, a little, but I don't think those people probably fished that much. I don't know. But I know there was lots of people come in here. One time my sister and I heard these two guys talking, growling about all the Californians coming in here and they was gonna ruin the country and I said to my sister, that's what we said about them a few years back. You know, you gotta have progress. That stands to reason. And people do have to come in and change, but what's wrong with Bonners Ferry, now this is my sentiments, what's wrong with Bonners Ferry is they have never, never let any industries come in here. Well we had a flour mill here for a while called the Kootenai Chief, it was down in ( ). We had a cannery down here. They raised peas in the valley, canned lots of peas. They kicked that out, they didn't want that. I worked at the ice cream shop when the cheese factory wanted to come into Bonners Ferry. And they had meetings and meetings and meetings and the farmers come in and they were just begging to put the cheese factory in Bonners Ferry. Nope, you had to go to Sandpoint. They wanted to put in a big box factory in here. They wouldn't have it. Take it out of here. They wanted to put in clothing. They went around and asked all the women if they would sew for this clothing outfit. Nope. Couldn't have it. Kicked that out. They don't let any industry come in this town. Now they're kicking the logging out. They're done. Bonners Ferry is on its last legs because they don't let any industries come in.

**When did these first businesses start? You said something about a flour factory? When was that here?**

That was back in the twenties, '22, '24, '25 and all. They would never let anything come in here. 1926, '28 something like that. They called it the Kootenai Chief. That was the name of the flour. They had a farm mill. It was just two or three years and they got rid of it. And they claim that the wheat in the valley has more protein. You know, it's really good and they could have flour mills, canneries, box factories. They could have had all

these things. They wouldn't let anything come into Bonners Ferry. I don't know why.  
((More discussion on the same topic)).

## Interview with Denny Marquis, May 31, 2003

**We're at the home of Denny and Sandy Marquis and I'll interview both of them today. So, Denny, the first question is, how long have you fished the Kootenai River and its tributaries?**

I started up in Worland, which is no longer there. It's up behind the dam. Worland is in Montana. It was a small town. I talked to this ole feller that fished that river for years, and he told me how to make sap lines and catch ling and whitefish. And then, when the rainbow would run in the spring, I'd catch them. I won the derby at Libby one year for the biggest fish, and I don't remember how big it was. That was in the later fifties.

**Have you or someone you know ever fished for ling?**

Yup. I've known lots of people. I fished for them.

**When did you start fishing for them?**

About the war. That's when I first started in Worland, Montana, above Libby. I learned from an old guy how to catch everything up there. And then, they had a thing, that looked like a (bull ?it). And you'd go out at night with a flashlight. And we'd flatten out a fork and stick them behind the head so they'd stay alive. And we'd use that for saplines, the bait. They called it...no, I can't think of the name of it.

**Um, about what time was this? What year?**

It was in the late fifties.

**Okay, have you ever heard of any stories of people catching ling, or seeing them? And if so, where?**

Mouth of Deep Creek. Uh, Ripatti's Island. Horseshoe Bend...

**Oh, was that Riley's? I mean between Copeland and Porthill? Riley's Bend?**

Shorty's Island. Used to go out there in them deep holes for ling, at night.

**Where was Shorty's Island at?**

In between Bonners and Copeland. I couldn't tell you the exact spot.

**Did you fish from the shore or from a boat?**

From the shore, casting out.

**What time of year did you fish for them?**

In the spring, when they were running.

**And how many did you catch?**

You'd usually catch from three to four a night, per person.

**How big were they?**

Oh, they varied.

(#2) Two and half to four feet.

Some of them were probably four feet long. So from two and a half to four, four and a half feet. We never used to measure. We'd just, "Whoa, we got some big ones tonight."  
*((Laughs))*

**Was there a real abundance of them when you were fishing?**

Yeah, there was a lot of them.

**So, if you all caught some, there would still be more left over for anybody else?**

Oh yeah. There was abundance of ling in them days.

**And do you ever recall seeing or catching any small ling? One footers or less?**

Oh yeah. We'd throw the little ones back because there wasn't enough meat on them.

**And where did you recall seeing these little one footers at?**

Down in the Sewage Lagoon. That's what I'd go by now. Fred Meddock used to fish down there. I don't remember what they used to call it, but we caught ling there. The boys caught ling there. Lot of friends.

**Even into the sixties?**

Oh yeah. Sixties on up into the seventies.

**About what size were they then in the seventies?**

It was still nice ling. Three. Four. Five foot.

**And it was over here, by the sewage?**

(#2) Deep Creek's side, where the water line goes across the river, where the new boat dock is now.

We used to call it Meddock's fishing hole. ((Laughs))

(#2) Where the old city dump used to be, this big, high outcropping on the town side of the river and where they fished was right across from that.

**When was about the last time that you saw the ling up in that area?**

(#2) About the early eighties, very early eighties.

Very early eighties, all of a sudden, nobody was catching ling. Maybe one, once in a while, when we could catch some. The females with their eggs would be hardened and turned black inside of them. So we, Russ Ivy, and there were several others, and Roy, we all got to talking about it, and sent the eggs to Boise to be analyzed, what was taking place, and we never did hear any word back from them. And then, as the years went by, we found out the chemical spill happened up at the Zonolite. (Line/Lime) was, bunch of it, dumped accidentally, I don't know, but it did happen. And that ended the ling species.

(#2) It slowed down.

It got less and less, where it wasn't even worth your time to go out anymore.

**About what time was that then?**

Oh, that was in the late seventies.

(#2) Very late seventies to early eighties.

Yeah, first part of the eighties when this chemical spill happened.

(#2) I would say between eighty and eighty-five.

**So you were still, up until like even 1981, 1982, you were still getting four footers?**

No. Once in a while you'd catch them but they'd be real small. I mean, there wasn't enough meat on them. This time, maybe they was one, maybe three feet. But they just kept getting smaller and finally everybody just, well they wouldn't let you run lines any more. They stopped us from that.

**So, you were running lines in the spring?**

Oh yeah, we run lines in the spring.

**You never fished during January or the winter months for them? Through the ice?**

No, I never did. It was always in the spring I fished for them.

**About what time in the spring?**

(#2) February and March because that was when he was laid off in the woods.  
((Chuckles))

**So why did you fish for ling? Was it for sport, food, culture, a community activity or commercial purposes?**

Food. Very tasty.

(#2) Sporting and family fun and food.

**Do you know any stories or folklore about ling?**

Part of it, when they used to run up Smith Creek and you could spear them at that time.

**You did that?**

Yeah.

**About what time was that?**

(#2) We had the four-wheeler, right?

Yeah, because I went with Ted Moline's mom.

(#2) (Marlene?) Oh no, Ruth.

Ruth, Ruth Moline.

**Up to Smith Creek?**

Smith Creek Falls. Because they'd run up there to spawn and you could spear them at that time. And we'd just have a flashlight. There'd be thousands of them. We'd just take what we needed because there wasn't no limit on them at that time.

**And what size were they?**

They were all sizes. Big and in-between.

**Over four foot?**

Yes, there were some five-footers.

**And this was about what time? Fifties? Or sixties?**

(#2) Must have been early sixties because we got married in '66 and that was before we got married.

Yeah, it must have been in the sixties.

(#2) Early sixties.

**Do you have any pictures of ling?**

Yeah, I've got some we've taken.

**Why and when did you stop fishing for them?**

Well, when we found the eggs that started- it was getting less and less and it just got to the point it wasn't worth staying down there, fishing at night, 'cause they just weren't there no more.

And then we used to fish for the rainbows, that come out of Kootenay Lake too. They started shocking the river one year. I really got mad. They were shocking them, right at the mouth of Deep Creek, the big runners. It was their spawning time. And they used to lay out there at the mouth of Deep Creek and we'd catch them. It was right in the middle of a run. And that was the biggest run Deep Creek had ever had while I've fished it. And the Game Department's out there with a big drop net, and they would put this deal down in the water and set an electrical charge and the fish come up. I yelled out at this Game Warden. I don't know who he was at the time. And I says, "That must hurt them fish 'cause they come up so fast." "Oh no, it don't hurt them," he told me. And I looked down behind the boat down the river and here was fish floating belly up. He done that for several days. I only seen him do it once but I heard about other times. And I was thoroughly mad. If I'd had had a rifle, I'd probably blowed his boat out of the water. That's how mad it made me.

**What was the purpose behind that?**

They was measuring them and weighing them and then they'd throw them back in the water, but they broke their airbag, they'd come up so fast. They killed them. That was one of the mishaps around here.

**So about what year was that, that you stopped fishing for them?**

That must've been the first part of the eighties or tail end of the seventies.

**So have you seen an increase or decrease in numbers over the years?**

Well now they're planting the sturgeon back. I don't know how many is in there. That trout has come back, somewhat.

((Detail about photos. The sons fished for two days in '89 in order to catch two fish, possibly rainbows.))

**Do you fish for other species, other than ling? And which ones?**

I fished for the big rainbow, the ling, whitefish.

(#2) Dolly Varden. You also caught some brown trout. Down at the mouth, didn't you?

**Did you fish the tributaries, instead of the main river for these other kinds, and if so, where did you usually fish?**

We used to fish below the Smith Creek Falls for the blueback, under the old bridge, when they were running. It's been so long ago, I don't remember when we fished for them.

**When you went fishing, was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

Yeah, because they had water, running in them. I mean, we used to fish where the creeks would dump in to the river, at the mouths of the creeks, as they'd call it. 'Cause you couldn't fish up the creeks. Only so far and then they'd stop, you couldn't fish in any part of the creek. Unless it was way out there, then you could where the water was flowing into the Kootenai River.

**Prior to the Libby Dam was the Kootenai River too rough or fast to fish?**

At times it could be if we'd have a fast runoff. But the fish was still there. I mean when it was down you could see them, the big trout. It would be shallow where it broke off and the creek would be down and then big trout would come over and you could see their backs in the water swimming up to spawn. Lots of them.

**And did you notice a change in the fishing related to the building of the Libby Dam?**

Oh yeah. It changed the fluctuation of the water. I mean you either had lots or hardly none. And then, it changed the mouth of Deep Creek. I mean, it washed so much silt, and that had an affect on things as well.

(#2) And the fishing- catching a fish was less and less.

**Was it a gradual change?**

Yeah. I mean, you could tell things weren't right, between the spillage and the raising and lowering. When they'd need electricity, they'd just open her up. They didn't care if fish were running or- 'cause it goofed them up somewhat.

**Did you or have you noticed an increase in different species of fish over the years?**

Well, I just quit fishing the river because I lost interest in it. I mean, Roy ((the son)), he's kept on fishing. He's caught Dolly Varden. I know they've made a pretty good comeback. I mean, it got where he couldn't even catch a Dolly Varden out of this river. They'd come out of Kootenay Lake, I'm sure.

**Where did you notice this increase in different species? Like what part of the river?**

Well, the mouth of Deep Creek.

(#2) Oh, by the sewer lagoon.

Yeah, by the sewer lagoon. I did go fishing with Roy a few times and the cutthroat had come back. But we didn't catch any Dolly Vardens. It was just rainbows and cutthroat that we'd catch down there. Because they were doing a survey, and, releasing fish at that time, was the way I took it. And then Kootenay Lake had built their lake back up, because the spill and all the silt ((silt)) going down raised heck with Kootenay Lake in Canada. And they had to pretty much start over too.

((Showing photos)) See, here's the mouth of Deep Creek. You can see a picture there. See, this is Bill (Drake's), another old fisherman. And this is how this point originally come out. See how wide that river is. That's where the creek's dumping in. We used to fish right off of this point because there's a big hole right in here. And that's where the big trout would lay.

((Another photo)) And there are some rainbows. There were some big rainbows in that river.

((Back to the 'point' photo)) We fished there for them ((the point off Deep Creek)). But now, it's no longer like it used to- They put them docks in there and stuff. I mean it's all changed. Used to need the four wheel drive to get down, drive down. You could drive right out here on the sand bar itself.

((More photos. No new information))

**Well here's a real good question ((laughter)). I asked this question to Ralph Anglen. What would you recommend to do to help the fish population?**

I don't know. If they'd 'a build the ladder on that dam like they was supposed to, and built the regulating dams and purifying dams, we'd still have the best fishing around, I

think. But they never put none of them in. They said they was gonna put them all in but it didn't happen.

**So ladders to the dam and what was the other one?**

Fish ladders. And they was supposed to have a regulating dam, for water. And then a nutrient dam. To put the nutrients back in the water. And that was never built neither.

**Do you think the ling can come back?**

Well, they're working on it. I know Canada is doing a lot of research. I guess when ling get way down like that, it's really hard to recover them. But they are working on it now. So, maybe it will come back.

**What do you think about fish in the river now? Like, you said earlier that you don't fish it that much any more.**

As for me, it isn't worth my time. Because you can't keep this, you can't keep that. What's the use of going fishing if you can't get a fish to eat. That's why I always went fishing.

**So, the water levels and things, it-**

Changing all the time.

**When you go fishing, do you know what you're gonna get or what you're fishing for or whatever?**

No, you just go for it and see if something bites. But I don't know.

**And what about, to fish up around Smith Falls?**

Below Smith Creek Falls. You can't even fish there any more because somebody owns that bridge there. And they don't like people fishing there. But I don't think the blueback run up there any more because there's water either too low or too high. Yeah, from what talking I've done to the Canadians, the silten and the chemical spills from the Zonolite, it infected this river big time. I mean, they're working on it, but it's gonna take a lot of years for it to ever be like we seen it. I mean, there was an overabundance of ling, your rainbows, the young kamloops coming up to spawn for the first time, that's all gone. It's gonna take a lot of years. The tributaries, I mean....

**Does Deep Creek ever come back?**

No.

**And the fishing spot that it was?**

No.

**Since about when has Deep Creek been just not the same?**

Ever since they started messing with it. Taking gravel out of it. That was their spawning ground, you see. Deep Creek was a big tributary. It was their spawning ground, because it had the right kind of gravel. And they put in ridges, dug out rock, their ( ) spawning grounds.

**When did they put in the docks?**

That was in the seventies, late seventies. I mean, it had all silted shut anyway from the dam. Roy still goes down there. A few years he caught quite a few, of course, you can't keep a Dolly Varden now. He caught some and released them. They were nice healthy looking fish, as far as I could tell.

**When it comes to the ling, you think there's an opportunity for recovery for them?**

Yeah. I think there might be. I'm no biologist, know what's in that river any more. You know, like, a fish could live on it or how long he can survive in all this silt that comes down the river. I've never talked to none of them biologists.

**Now, you were saying, we were looking at this picture here, Jim French, holding up this ling, and you were saying how you could identify it, the parts? What were you saying about the fish?**

Well, this one right here, he's been feeding a lot. See, when they full of fish, their belly poonches out like this. And they'll gorge theirself clear up their mouth. I've caught ling with a tail, right here, and still they're just gluttin'. Eating that, what they call peanos.

**During spawning time?**

No. When they're in the river. You know, you'd see it in the springs when we used to catch them. But we used to catch them this big and bigger up at Worland, before they put the dam in.

**So this picture, that was taken in 1931, you were catching fish that size in the late fifties?**

You see, we was there for three years I think it was. And I supplied the whole town of Worland with ling, trout, and whitefish. Yeah, and I smoked and ( ). I mean, it was plentiful.

**And you took what you needed and there still was enough for everybody?**

Oh yeah, everybody. There was a lot of other people. I (could) fish for them as well. They're called the Lake Superior Whitefish. I caught one up to eight pounds one time up there. But most of them run, oh probably, three, four pounders. These Lake Superiors, they're big, big whitefish. Heavy, real meaty. When the ice would go out of the river up there at Worland, we'd go up to where the water would slow down, in a bend, and you could look in the water and they'd flicker, and the whole bottom, I mean there's thousands and thousands coming down that river. It was unreal. All you needed was just a maggot on a hook or a couple of maggots and you throw it out and wham, you had a fish. It was unreal. You can't see the bottom for them, they're right on the bottom. It's just a steady flicker of them from twisting and turning and you can't see the bottom. There's no way. I don't know how deep they were but-

**So when was the last time you saw it like that?**

That was in, well, that would have been about fifty-nine. Then we moved back to St. Maries, then we moved back here. Then I picked up, from Fred Meddock, and asking the old divers, I started fishing down at this end.

**When did they stop fishing up at Smith Creek Falls?**

It was after they put that dam in. I think eighty was the last because you couldn't, they just weren't there no more. Last time we seen them there was very few in the river that managed to get up there with this up and down. After that dam was built because after that the water was either too low, then it was way high, but then they wouldn't be running. But most of the time, when they would run up there, and I can't remember if that was in August or in the spring, it used to just be full, Smith Creek. I mean that creek clear down to the river, where Smith Creek dumped in the river, it was just solid with blueback. And I think at that time that if you could catch twenty-five, fifty, it was no problem. As fast as you put her down in there. Finally I quit going. I just stayed home frying fish and smoking fish.

**So, as Ralph was telling us, the drainage districts came in [and] just ruined the spawning grounds for the ling, and also, over-fishing. No regulation and [since] there was no regulation some people would just take the ling home, put them in their wagon and feed it to their hogs.**

I never did feed them (to the hogs), only for ourselves.

**Then, the dustbowlers came, and, according to several of them, it was just like a land of plenty and they just took whatever, so, I'm surprised that you're saying that even as late as the seventies, there was still, and, in the fifties, still plentiful amounts?**

Yes, there was a lot of ling. I mean, the guys that I knew, my generation time, they'd been taught by their dads. I mean, we knew where the ling were and they were running, and I would not say that we overfished them, because there was a lot of ling still in this river. But I remember the old timers, there's not the ling there used to be, which, Fred Meddock, I mean he said you should have seen them when I was young. How things change. You know, for the amount of people that fished here, these people, they had savvy, that you take what you can use. This is what was handed down to us. You take no more than what you can use. You don't waste. You can tan, you can smoke, you can deep fry. This is all been handed down to us. So we learned from that older generation. And the messing with everything, I mean the fish couldn't keep up. I've seen the amount of fish that went up creeks around here, was unbelievable. After the old timers tell me it was even better back then. ((Laughs)) It was unreal to me because I'd never seen that many ling before run up the creek. And nobody then, I mean nobody was gluttoning about, that I knew that ever had speared them. They took what they needed and rest of them done their thing with Mother Nature and done their spawning and went back to the river and next year another cycle. That's why I say, when you start messing with Mother Nature's spawning grounds and their water, you start dumping chemicals and whatever, all dumped in this river, we'll probably never know. It has taken its toll. I mean Kootenay Lake had, they took boxcars of fertilizer to get that lake to come back because he was just about a dead lake, from everything that had happened, the silting. And I seen it. I talked to the Canadians, the silting that this dam has created there. They gained land losing water from the silting. I've talked to them, a lot of them old timers up there.

**And you say it's silting here and the Kootenai is affected and the tributaries and the river itself?**

Oh yeah.

(#2) You're riding along on the river, constantly up and down, up and down, up and down. And, it's seems like when it's spawning time, then they start jacking the river up and down and that affects and ruins the spawn-- they don't have enough water or they'll spawn and then they'll lower the river.

That's what would happen before. Your creek pulls down. What gravel they did have left, before they started digging gravel up and putting around bridges and stuff, that didn't help things at all. If they'd a done like they was supposed to – Montana, Idaho, and Canada, all made an agreement, to supply fish with hatcheries on this river. And the money got in the way of everything, with the dam. No fish ladders, no purification, and no nutrients. There was a dam to be built to put the nutrients back in this water. And that other dam was to control the flow so it wasn't a big gush coming down through here. I mean, I've seen it through the years, the silt and what it's done and how it's eroded the banks, the old dykes and-

**So, do you think if the dam was built like it was originally intended to be built, with all these safety guards and such, that you might be able to return some of these breeds, the fishing breeds, to the river?**

I don't know. A lot of people say it don't make no difference, but I feel it does because you've got to have your nutrients replaced. You can't just keep doing that. Pretty soon you don't have nothing. And that's what's killed the Kootenay Lake. That's what the Canadians has told me. But then all the other stuff that went right along behind the dam, the chemical spill, the flooding, and taking away their spawning areas, something's gonna happen when you do that. They're trying to make a comeback but now it's gonna take a lot of years. I'm sure. I think the sturgeon has done real well from what they've released. They've dumped a lot of sturgeon in this river. But a lot of things people don't understand, you go to catch big fish you use big bait. All right, but there's little sturgeon in there. How the hell are they gonna know if there's little sturgeon there if they don't catch some of them. You got to use little bait for them little fellows. It's common sense.

**Okay, so why do you think the dam didn't work, like it was supposed to have, originally planned?**

Because Montana, Idaho, and Canada all agreed to replenish fish stock in this river and the dam, it was supposed to have a fish ladder in it and that wasn't done. The big money stepped in and the hell with the fish. That was part of our livelihood and they never done what they said. The money got in the way and the greed. So nothing was done the way it was supposed to.

## **Interview with Lamar Olsen, June 3, 2003**

### **How long have you fished the Kootenai River and its tributaries?**

I've fished since I was a child, about age seven or eight. About in the early forties. Fished mostly the streams running into the Kootenai: Smith Creek, Boundary Creek, also Cow Creek. Some at Round Prairie and some at Deep Creek. But our favorites were Smith Creek and Boundary Creek, especially later in the summers. During high water there was too much debris in the water but later in the summers most of those streams were good fishing.

### **Have you or someone you know ever fished for ling cod?**

Oh yeah. We called it ling. We'd only do that in early spring, February or so. They'd be at the mouth of the rivers, and the rivers would always freeze over then. We'd cut a hole in the river, usually in the late evening or at night. And the fish would come by and we'd spear them. That was legal at that time. And we'd do it by the gunny sack fulls and we'd usually one sack full and maybe two. Then we'd come home and dress them out and then preserve them. I can't remember if we canned them or frozen.

### **How long did you fish for ling?**

Probably seven or eight, or maybe even nine years. Probably from the early forties up into the early fifties.

### **Have you ever heard of any stories of people catching ling? Or seeing them? And if so, where was this at?**

Quite a few people, of our neighbors, who went spearing, the same as we did. Sometimes even on the same evening. Just had a hole on a different spot on the ice. I don't remember anyone talking about getting them out of the Kootenai 'cause it was pretty deep and they stayed toward the bottom. But when they came up to the mouths of the streams was mostly when they'd get them. And usually they'd spear 'em.

### **Did you fish from the shore or from a boat?**

Just walked on the ice. Back then before the dam, the river froze every winter, and usually a couple feet deep. And that's where we got our ice. Made blocks of ice out of the Kootenai River and then take 'em home and store them in sawdust and then we'd have ice through most of the summer.

### **When did you fish for them? The time of year and maybe the day.**

Mostly in the spring. Like probably February and maybe in January, but January, February, March I'm guessing.

**How many would you catch?**

Gunny sacks full. I don't remember having more than two sacks full, but there's would always be at least one gunny sack full. It was strictly for food. There was no waste or anything. We just got what we figured we preserve.

**How big were your fish?**

As I remember, probably the smallest were about two feet long and I don't remember having any more than three foot.

**Do you remember catching any small ling? One footers or less?**

No.

**Why did you fish for ling? Was it sport? Food? Culture? Community activity? Commercial?**

Strictly for food.

**Do you know any stories or folklore about the ling?**

Not really. I remember reading a letter of Hartley King's and people did fish ling then for food also. And probably the same reasons we did.

**Do you have any pictures of ling?**

I don't.

**When and why did you stop fishing for them?**

During the fall we'd have lots of venison and venison and ling were our main items for food. Then later on, when we had enough farm products caught up so we could eat other kinds of food, then we just drifted away from ling and venison and started eating pork and beef that we raised, which we didn't have earlier.

**Have you seen an increase or decrease in numbers over the years?**

Of ling? It probably has decreased some and I haven't fished for them for about fifty years now. I don't really know.

**Well, why do you think there would be a decrease?**

Well, a couple of things. Of course all fish go upstream to spawn and a lot of fish decreased some as the lands became diked off, because as they diked them off they had to put the culverts where side streams would come down off the foothills into the river.

They had to put those high enough that it wouldn't back from the river on up. So they were up high enough so only during high water were the fish able to get up into the streams. So that kind of reduced the number of spawning. So that was probably one of the main reasons, I would guess.

**Did you fish for other species, other than ling?**

During the summer time, yes. Mostly trout, rainbow and cutthroat.

**Did you fish the tributaries instead of the main river?**

Yes. Always. I very rarely fished the main river. It was always the tributaries.

**And which tributaries?**

Mostly Smith Creek and Boundary Creek. That was our home.

**When you went fishing was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

Not easier necessarily because we had to travel there. One of the things we didn't have a boat. But I kind of like the walking around rather than out on a boat. The challenge of going either upstream or downstream. I usually fished upstream. I just enjoyed looking at the layout of the ground, occasionally seeing wildlife, whatever.

**Prior to the Libby Dam, was the Kootenai River too rough and fast to fish?**

No.

**And did you ever notice a change in the fishing related to the building of the Libby Dam?**

Not in the two tributaries where we fished. I couldn't see any difference. I don't think that there was any significant difference there.

**Did you or have you noticed an increase in different species of fish over the years?**

You know, I haven't really studied that either. You know another thing about the fish was not necessarily the Kootenai or the tributaries though, it was the lakes. The fish in the small lakes up high are, to me, firmer and more lively than the fish in the lakes or river were less lively which is why the tributaries were more fun. It was more of a challenge.

**What would you recommend to do to help the fish populations?**

I don't know. There's quite a controversy as far as the way to regulate the height of the water coming down the river nowadays. I don't know if that's good or bad. I'm not educated to know whether that's good for bad for the fish. All I know is that the fish were used to having high water in the spring and low water most of the rest of the year. And I don't know if raising the river at various times of the summer or fall has confused them or not. I don't know.

## **Interview with Chris Taft, July 3, 2003**

**How long have you fished the Kootenai River and its tributaries?**

I suppose since about 1950.

**Have you or someone you know ever fished for ling cod?**

Yes. I have fished for ling cod.

**Where on the map? Or if you could just tell me, where you fished for ling?**

I fished for it all the way from District 5, down the river, to Kootenai River, at Balfour. And that's where I last fished for ling cod, at the bend on the Kootenai River in Canada. And now they're about extinct. You used to catch as many as six ling, now I think it's one. And I don't know if you can even catch that many or not. I don't know why they disappeared but they have.

**So you have fished all up the river for 'em at different spots or mostly District Five?**

I've fished the full length of the Kootenai River but it hadn't been for ling cod. It's been for whitefish, and for trout and for perch and for crappies.

**Where did you usually find the ling cod at?**

District Five, in the river. Years ago, before Libby Dam was in, and we fished through the ice. We'd go on down there in the afternoon and catch some penos. And we'd set lines out for the ling cod. You'd take a big hook, like right here, and you'd just use ( ) cord for a line and then we'd set it in and we'd check for 'em. You'd fillet a peno and when you raised it up and down, it would circulate like a live fish. And then when we fished over in Canada, we just used nightcrawlers.

**And they would bite a nightcrawler?**

Well you put 'em up on a hook. Yeah.

**When did you first start fishing for the ling?**

About 1948.

**And when was the last time you fished for them?**

I don't know. It's been so long now. But I ended up in Canada. You couldn't get them here any more.

**Was it like in the sixties or seventies?**

Before I came here in 1946, it was legal to spear ling cod when they went to spawn, but then it wasn't allowed any more, so that's when we started fishing for them in District Five. And there were a lot of places on the river you could fish for ling cod. And a lot of fellows would put out (settle) lines and fish commercially. And you used to be able to buy them at the Zimmerman Meat Market, when I first came here.

**So for a long time there were no restrictions on any, amount, purposes?**

No. Now there's a restriction but I don't know what it is now.

**Have you ever heard any stories of people catching ling or seeing them or where did they see the ling at?**

I've caught a ling myself.

**Did you fish from shore or boat?**

I fished from boat and on the ice.

**And what time of year did you fish the ling?**

In the Fall, around Christmas time and on into January.

**How many would you catch? Let's say in the forties when you first started fishing, how many would you catch in a day?**

Oh, about six I think.

**And how big were they?**

Oh they varied up to four or five pounds.

**Do you have an idea how long they were?**

No, I don't.

**About the last time you fished, how many did you catch then? Did you catch fewer or more as the years went on?**

I can't remember. And we ended up fishing up at Balfour in Canada. We used to go up there and stay overnight and fish through the evening and through the night. Or we'd get up early in the morning when there was first light and we fished for them there at a place where there was what they called the bend in the river.

**What time of year were you fishing for the ling at Balfour?**

Latter part of December. We fished for them at night, early morning.

**Now how big were those you were getting at Balfour?**

I suppose eight pounds, five pounds.

**Do you ever recall catching any one-footers or less?**

No.

**Why did you fish for the ling? Was it for sport, or food or culture or commercial stuff?**

For the sport.

**Were they fighters?**

They're bottom feeders. When we fished for them at Balfour we'd jig for them. You'd catch them on the bodies and you'd snag 'em. Of course then you'd have a real fight on them.

**Do you know of any stories or folklore or stories about ling?**

No.

**Do you have any pictures of any ling?**

No.

**When and why did you stop fishing for them?**

Well, I don't know. It's been so long ago I can't remember. It's like Ralph, I can't remember.

**Have you seen a decrease or increase in numbers of ling over the years?**

Oh, a big decrease. They're probably an endangered species.

Why do you think that is?

I don't know.

**Did you see a sharp decrease all of a sudden or did it just gradually get smaller?**

Here locally they were hard to fish so we went to Balfour in Canada 'cause they thought they were trash fish and we fished there until it was hard to catch any in Balfour and then we just quit fishing for them.

**Did you fish for any fish species other than lings and which ones? What else did you fish for? On the Kootenai?**

Whitefish and bass and perch. But the main fishing were ling and whitefish and trout.

**Did you fish the tributaries instead of the main river?**

No, the main river.

**Where did you usually go fishing at when you fished all these different fish?**

From the Canadian border into Montana.

**You just followed the Kootenai River?**

Yeah.

**When you went fishing was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

Yes, to a point. That's where you'd fish (ling).

**And prior to the Libby Dam was the Kootenai River too rough and fast to fish?**

No.

**What about after the dam, what was it like?**

Well the Kootenai River can be, the high water can be real rough.

**Was that now or after-?**

Anytime.

**Well before the dam what was it like fishing in the Kootenai? Let's say in springtime.**

Well it could vary some. We'd fish through the ice in those days. In December, January.

**Did you notice a change in the fishing related to the building of the Libby Dam?**

That I couldn't tell you.

**And did you ever notice an increase in different species over the years?**

Yes. Yes. Well I noticed a decrease in the whitefish, a big decrease in the whitefish.

**Well have you seen more of another kind of fish come up then too?**

No.

**What about sturgeon? Did you ever fish for sturgeon?**

No.

**What would you recommend to do to help the fish populations?**

I don't know.

**What are some of the best fish you've like for fishing?**

I enjoyed fishing for whitefish for a while, and I enjoy all kinds of fishing. But for eating I like perch, and crappies. But I eat trout too.

**When you fished the Kootenai how did you travel around? Did you get in a boat or what?**

When we go up the stream we fish for trout and when we come back down we fish for whitefish.

**Have you noticed a change in water temperatures in the river since the dam went in?**

I haven't noticed it. No.

**Do you like fishing around Porthill a lot?**

No, I like fishing closer to home. I like to fish (at the mouth) of Deep Creek and clear to Montana to Libby Dam. I've fished the whole length of it. And a lot has been for whitefish and for trout.

Up in Canada, that's fast water and that's the lead sinker we used. This one with the three pronged hook is an inch longer. We had a single too. Sometimes a single is better.

**And is this what you used for the ling, this three pronged hook on the bottom? And that's what you jigged them with?**

Yeah. When we jigged them, a lot of times, if we had a peemouth, that we'd filleted, we'd use a single hook, and run it through. We actually used this heavy one up at Balfour where the water's so fast. So it would bring it down. And some lighter ones too if the current was bad. That was it.

## **Interview with Paul Flynn, July 8, 2003**

**How long have you fished the Kootenai River and its tributaries?**

Well, I been here since 1947. I've fished them all.

**Have you or someone you know ever fished for ling cod?**

No, I never did fish them.

**Have you ever heard of any stories of people catching ling or seeing them?**

Oh, I arrested a lot of guys for spearing ling.

**What were the years when you were doing that?**

Well, from 1947 to 1961.

**And when was it illegal?**

Well, it's always been illegal to spear.

**To spear ling?**

Yes.

**Have you heard of any stories of people catching ling? Or seeing them?**

Well, do you want the illegal stories where they were spearing them?

**I want them all. Yeah.**

And they've done that forever. When the ling runs were on, in these feeder streams, certain individuals would go out in the nighttime with the palouser. That's a light made out of a lantern. And they would find- laying on their spawning bed to spear them. And there's a consequence. I would have the duties of law enforcement arrested them. When the river flows over.

**Which time of year was that?**

Well, before Libby Dam was put in. There would be groups of individuals, from two to a half a dozen men and boys. Run ling lives. They would cut holes in the ice. And certain places along the Kootenai River, below Bonners Ferry, from here to Porthill, and they might have as many as thirty or forty ling holes.

### **Was that illegal?**

No, that was legal. There was no limit on them, like there was on trout and so forth. They could cut holes in the ice and bait their hooks with peanos. That's a member of the shiner family. The ling would not take a dead peano. It had to be alive. And the peano was hooked back of the dorsal fin, in front of the caudal fins. And put down there on x number of line. They would run their ling lives, they call them ling lives, holes in the ice, and there might be half a dozen or might be thirty or forty holes in the ice. The ling they caught was for their own consumption but they also sold them to Zimmerman Meat Market. Frank Zimmerman had a meat market over here. And George Miller had the M&M store. And they both bought ling, which was legal. They needed a commercial license to sell ling. But the Fish and Game Department had no special Kootenai River license for selling ling, but they modified a blueback and whitefish license from Pend Oreille Lake. I think it cost ten dollars for a license. Boise always would scratch out the blueback and whitefish and write in ling license. That enabled fisherman to sell ling. There's no limit on them. But the guys spearing ling at night was illegal. A fish that had been speared would show spear marks. As a consequence, the buyers were reluctant to purchase ling that had been speared because it was evidence against them. They didn't [want to be caught] for possession of illegally taking fish.

### **Why was it illegal to use the spears?**

Well, it's unsportsmanlike. [In] Canada, the Columbia had a law on their books also making it illegal to spear but they closed their eyes to it. People used to go up Dutch Creek or Spillimacheen and spear ling and get drunk and fall in the creek. ((Chuckles)) It was an annual occurrence for some locals to go up there and spear ling on Dutch Creek and Spillimacheen, but it was still illegal in the British Columbia to spear ling but the authorities closed their eyes to it, and I wouldn't do that. What the heck, the law's the law and it don't play any favorites.

### **Because you didn't fish for ling, let me ask you some questions. When you came on board up here as a Fish and Game, what is your title?**

I was [the] Idaho Department of Fish and Game Conservation Officer, but I also managed McArthur Refuge. Lived there for most of the time right here.

### **So when you were on with Fish and Game, when you saw the fish then, for the ling, were most of them caught from the shore or using lines?**

No, from ice fishing.

### **What time of year did people do that then?**

The wintertime, when the ice was on the river. Ling run in the winter months. It was always the same months, an annual event. When Libby Dam was constructed it eliminated the ice on the river. As a consequence, there went your ling fishing through

the winter ice. I had about thirty years with the Idaho Fish and Game Department, about ten of them on pheasant farms, Lapwai and Jerome. I was also the officer at Kooskia. I was enforcement officer for the Lochsa and the Selway and the south fork of the Clearwater. From there I was transferred up here. We lived at McArthur in its glory days when the limits were two or three fish. They were catching brookies and rainbow in the two and four pound class. But, under the new management after I left there in 1961, then McArthur fell by the wayside. The evidence is there for all to see. The water is full of water weeds, mosses, but when we left there in 1961 it was still a number one trout fishery. The ling never got up there. I never saw evidence of ling there. I managed on it a trout fishery. As a consequence I have photos of fish that were taken there.

**What were the size, in the late forties, of the ling that people were catching?**

Well, probably two or three pounds at the largest.

**Do you know what an average length would be?**

Eighteen or twenty inches.

**Where were people catching them?**

Well, in the Kootenai River through ice holes. They didn't fish for ling from the bank. And it wasn't a summer sport. It was a legal winter sport except spearing them.

**Do you recall seeing or catching any small ling? Like one foot or less?**

I didn't, I saw them. We ran a electric shocking survey on Deep Creek, at the confluence of Ruby Creek. We brought up a nine inch ling. And that was in the summer months.

**What year was that?**

It was probably '59 or '60. Ruby Creek enters Deep Creek there at Deep Creek itself. We brought up a nine inch ling. Now that's the furthest up Deep Creek that I've saw them.

**Have you seen an increase or decrease in the numbers over the years?**

Well I can't speak from personal experience because I never fished for ling. But I'm guessing that they're decreased like the Selkirk Mountain Goat. When I was with the department we had a biologist named Stuart Branberg, ran a survey on the Selkirk Mountain Goat. And he counted 181 I think. And then he missed some. On the (north) Snowy Top and the head of Myrtle Creek but there was 180 mountain goat there. Later a survey found five. They were managed out of existence.

### **What happened?**

Open the season on them, and then predators of course. That leads into another story. You have to appreciate the fact that I graduated from Lewiston High School in 1932 and I went to work that same summer at the Lapwai Timber Firm. One of the emphases the superintendent put on us is the control of predators. That means everything from skunks and weasels to hawks and owls, which leads me up to your question what happened to the mountain goat. Now people that lived on the west side said the cougar had an impact on them. But we've always had cougar and they've always preyed on the deer and the goat. I think, the seasons, that were set by the Fish and Game Department biologists was a major factor in the decline of this mountain goat on the west side. To me that's common sense. Some familiar with the west side goat blame the cougar. I'm not a lover of predators but I rationalize it by saying the cougar has been there. They're a native species as well as the goat. And as a consequence I find it hard to lay the blame on strictly the cougar. The seasons set by the Fish and Game Department biologists were the contributing factor. Now that's just an open and shut case.

### **Did Fish and Game put a limit on the number of ling that you could fish for?**

There was no limit on them. None that I know of.

### **Should there have been a limit?**

It wasn't a good thing. Of course not. It was a kind of Dr. Jekyll/Mr. Hyde situation. They didn't like the ling because they said they were predacious. But yet loved to eat them. They're number one table food. But they would spear them and I never caught them dynamiting but I wouldn't have been surprised if they'd been dynamiting them but they would go out there at night with their lights or flashlights and their palousers and spear ling. Of course that was illegal. I have to tell you a story. On Deep Creek where Snow Creek enters, there's what they call a lay hole there. Well, one night two Bonners Ferry men were out there.

### **Did you fish for any other species, than ling?**

Oh yeah, I fished all the creeks, fished McArthur, and we, the Game Department, rehabilitated local lakes. It was the first program in the state. Solomon Lake was the first. Rehabilitated means to eliminate the existing fish population in the lake and replant them with the desirable fish species. Solomon Lake was full of squawfish and it's a small (eight acre lake) and we treated that with (rotenol and baste) which is not a poison but it takes the oxygen out of the water and the fish suffocate. And the following year we re-stocked it with cutthroat fry. The lake was closed for a year and the next year it opened and it was fabulous fishing. Cutthroat ten, twelve inches long. That would prove so successful that we poisoned Brush Lake. I had a good relationship with the British Columbia Fish and Game people. I asked them if they would give me some kamloop fry. "You bet!" they said. We'll plant them in the lake or we'll deliver them at the boundary line in our fish truck and your fish truck can pick them up. And I said no, come up and

get them. So a fish hatchery employee and I went to Nelson and got Kamloop fry. And we put them in the Sandpoint Fish Hatchery that's on that road out across the Long Bridge. Originally it was a whitefish hatchery but we wintered them there. And I went to the Clark Fork Fish Hatchery and got the Kokanee fry. And we put the Kokanee in Brush Lake along with the Kamloop. By then they were fingerlings. And that was fabulous fishing. The Kokanee were eighteen or twenty inches long.

**Now what years are these that you're talking about?**

Well, I'd have to check my records. Would have been in the fifties, fifty-four, mid-fifties. I favored Brush Lake because it had an inlet stream for (swallers/spawners). It was fabulous and then the dam broke and things deteriorated.

**Which dam is that?**

It's an outlet dam and must have broke in fifty-five or fifty-eight. At Brush Lake, it was built by some farmers. It was a dirt filled dam. It had a stow way plank and they stored water. They had a ditch down towards Deer Park. And they diverted, stored Brush Lake water. But when we treated, I hesitate to use the word poison because that indicates it's toxic, but toxic only to fish. When the dam broke, it was the beginning of the end for the sports fishery at Brush Lake.

**Well why did they rename it?**

Because I think there's been an implication that the word squaw is a derogatory word. They pay a bounty on pike minnows. But they've got two sets of laws. There's a bounty on squawfish, but there's no bounty on cougar. And Pike minnows are predacious and they eat the salmon. And that's bad so we're gonna pay a bounty on them. But if a cougar eats a deer, I have a problem for predator control. I wanted to get that in.

**You've fished McArthur and where else did you fish?**

I fished all these lakes, from Smith Lake to Solomon to Brush to Perkins. Perkins Lake one time was the source of Eastern Brook spawn. And that's a non-native species

**When you went fishing was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

I don't know. There was very few no trespassing signs. I was fly-fishing. I fly-fished the river, well, prior to Libby Dam.

**Prior to the Libby Dam, was the Kootenai River too rough and fast to fish?**

No, there were people that fishes.

**Well how do you think the river changed, fishing-wise, when the dam came in?**

I don't know. I'm not up on that anymore.

**What I'm asking is if you noticed any changes in fishing because of the dam? What was the influence it had?**

I talked to people that fished the river and they cast for them. I don't know if there's anybody fly fishing on the river but they could be.

**Have you noticed an increase in different species of fish?**

The so-called spiny ray fish species are much more prolific than the trout species. The spiny ray species include bass and crappie and perch and sunfish, and they're much more prolific. As a consequence, in a lake there is only so much available food supply and your spiny ray fish species increase to such numbers that there's not enough food for them so they're stunted. And when we poisoned Bonner Lake, the first time, they poisoned it here a few years ago, there was sunfish and perch in there. And I took a gallon can and filled it with sunfish. It took 125 sunfish to fill a gallon can. They were about the size of a quarter. And so before I would authorize rehabilitating I had to get public access because it was surrounded mostly by private land. Only little corner there was public. They're a game fish but they're so prolific they outnumber the food supply. As a consequence they become stunted.

**What would you recommend to do to help the fish population?**

Well, I'd start on McArthur and clean up that mess. Because there was never any spiny ray fish species in McArthur when I was running it. They were introduced later. I don't know by who. But the perch and the spiny ray fish species, they would pollute the feeder streams at Deep Creek, Dodge Creek and upper Deep Creek, and Falls Creek, Brown Creek, Twenty Mile Creek, Trail Creek, Ruby Creek, what I'm saying is it would be a source of supplies, McArthur would be a source of supply for these stunted fish into their feeder streams. There might be some argument as to whether these spiny ray fish species would thrive in a feeder stream, a cold water stream. There might be some contention there. But nevertheless it's available for them and then, because McArthur would be the mother body of water as a source supply for any of these fish species that would pollute it. I don't know whether it would take a major effort to clean up that Deep Creek watershed.

## **Interview with Bill Kuntz, July 30, 2003**

**How long have you fished the Kootenai River and its tributaries?**

Oh, it's been years. I haven't been fishing since I got out of the Forest Service.

**But when did you first start fishing?**

When I was, the best catch I got when I was seventeen on the Moyie River. Caught a sixteen and eight inch rainbow. I had a heck of a time trying to land them, the rapids was pulling the strings out of the poles ahead of me. Someone, I forget who it was, he has one of these nets so we netted them and helped get them in otherwise we'd lost them.

(#2) How big was it.

Oh, one was sixteen and the other was eighteen inch.

**When you were seventeen did you say you did this?**

Yeah.

**And you're ninety what now?**

Four.

The river's still running. It will last longer than that.

**(#2) Where did you catch those burbot? When you got a bucketful of them that day?**

That was down at the mouth of Deep Creek.

**(#2) Did they come up there to spawn?**

No, all them creeks would come out of the Selkirk Mountains. People would fish them the time of the year they were running.

**(#2) What time of the year was it?**

Oh, it was in October, November.

**And what year was that?**

Oh, I supposed about 1917, '16, '17, '18.

**Were the drainage districts in at that time?**

Oh no, there wasn't any dikes then. First dike was in 1921, I think. At District One about that time.

**Have you or someone you know fished for ling cod?**

Oh, maybe that's the right name for them. I just call them ling.

**So you went fishing down near Deep Creek, right?**

Down at the mouth of Deep Creek you could catch them, or the mouth of Myrtle Creek, all them creeks that come down out of the Selkirk Mountains on the west side over there. They came in to spawn, you see.

**Did you fish from shore or off a boat?**

No, fished from shore and waded in the river.

(#2) I'll be it was different in those days, before the dam and everything.

Oh yeah, quite a bit different. There was more fish. There wasn't all those fish laws and all the environment and all that stuff going on.

**Well, how many did you get at one time?**

Oh, I don't know. I didn't catch many. I suppose about six or seven, ten maybe. I got a string one time of twelve nice looking trout I caught in the (Moyie River).

**What time of year did you fish for the ling?**

It was in the fall.

**In the fall. So it was before the dikes too?**

Oh, there was no dikes in the district. (We had) our first crops in 1921 or 1922. District One. That's on the west of town.

**How big were the ling?**

Oh, them ole ling would be two foot long, longer.

(#2) Maybe two and a half.

**Did you ever recall seeing or catching any small ling? One footers or less?**

((He never answers the question))

**Why did you fish for ling? Was it for sport or?**

Oh, I just went out with (Roy, on the lake) and fishing.

**Do you know any stories or folklore about ling?**

No.

**Do you have any pictures of ling?**

No. Oh, now you mention ling, however, they think I was an ole ling fisher, but, I just have this experience a couple times with ole Rory, go out in the spring. Well, I think, last October till January when the fish for them. So the young fellows go out, he has a son that's about my age and they'd fish. They'd sit up there on the bank and beer wasn't in yet quite, drink beer or moonshine or something and fish ling.

**How'd you fish for them?**

Oh, there's a (light ladder or a gas ladder). Bring them up in the whole thing and there'd be an old net full. And some of them would take a hook and fish them. I'd just catch them in the daytime, though I'm no expert on ling fishing.

(#2) I'll bet there's not many people that fished for them before 1920 left.

Oh yeah. But that homestead out here in 1900, he wasn't much of a sportsman. But I bet there's ling that's crawling in there. Same way with the old sturgeon. They'd just have them tied up on a line. Used to hang them up in the butcher shop on Main Street. I've seen them hang up pretty (hard off) the hook, come down on the tail and lay out on the floor. Then they needed more ling. They sold them for fish to eat. They go down and pull them off this hook and they had them tied into the pier.

(#2) That'd keep them fresh. Wouldn't have to refrigerate them that way.

**When and why did you stop fishing for them?**

Oh, I don't know. I never fished after 1930 for ling. They were still fishing then. When they put the law through that you couldn't fish ling any more.

(#2) Just a few years ago with ling.

Although you could fish for them down in Canada. See, they used to come up all the Kootenay Lake and spawn.

**Have you seen an increase or decrease in numbers of ling over the years?**

Oh, I imagine there's a decrease. There's more people fishing, more people using them. There really isn't any dams between Bonners Ferry and Kootenay Lake.

**Did you fish for other species other than ling? And if so, which fish?**

Yeah, (fish) on those creeks for trout.

**Did you fish the tributaries instead of the main rivers?**

Well, that's about the biggest fish I ever caught was I was just telling you about the sixteen and eighteen on a line that they call a split. And I can't think of the name of the hook. Well, you can catch fish on the Kootenai River now if you want to fish.

**When you went fishing was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

Oh, it was all about the same. Hard to access some of them.

**And prior to the Libby Dam, was the Kootenai River too rough and fast to fish?**

Oh no. There's places that was right down here in District Two it was very still. See all that gravel (set far) up the river from Bonners? You notice how wide it is? Well that was caused by the ( ) Golden Rummy, right up there by how you get to Troy, Boulder Creek comes out into the Kootenai River. But you can still see some of the old canal, things in there. That's an abandoned town up there, a cemetery in the mountains.

**(#2) How did they mine for that ( )?**

Oh, they had big sluice boxes and things down that caught the gravel. The water would come down and they cleaned them out.

**(#2) So a lot of the gravel went into the river?**

Yeah, it all went into the river. So one year, they're gonna make it more efficient, the mining company was. So they build a bigger dam up in there, one that's to hold more water and they had a better path down the river to catch the overflow of the water coming down, to catch the gravel, this mud and some of this gravel, mostly sand coming through. And they had an extra warm spring, warmed up quick, had a lot of snow on the mountains, they had a heavy rain that come down and it (come up on shore to them to turn their drum out) and ripped their whole skeboddle out.

**(#2) Was it on Boulder Creek?**

Yeah, you'd go in, you could see Boulder Creek. You gotta know where to look. There's a road that goes where Boulder Creek comes out at Naples.

(#2) Yeah, Twenty Mile.

It goes down through that and Buck Mountain had a ( ) (right along) between Boulder Creek and East Boulder, comes right to a point. Right down below that pint the two creeks come together. Down below that's where they (had their ole) goldmining. Maybe they saw some rupees. I don't know how they got the rupee name into it.

**Did you ever notice a change in the fishing related to the building of Libby Dam?**

Well, in fact, it probably got better behind it. You see, they was gonna build a equalizing reservoir, between the city of Liberty and the dam. ( ), but they could control the flow of the river below the dam. Now they got that big dam and they got two generators and only run one of them, ( ) 50,000 watt generator, but they had room for five. And they took a lot of the power, it sure could have helped the power situation this last winter out, they could run all five generators. And that way why they could hold water, that reservoir or whatever they call it, ( open it up), could catch it and they could let it out at a certain height so that it wouldn't interfere too much with (boat docks) and stuff down the river. But the Sierra Club put a stop to that in San Francisco. Regional judge or whatever it is. Has a stake down and starting to build a little road to get access and they shut it down. So it was running without several hundred thousand watts of generation. If you had five generators going, using this water. See now it comes up. Used to be where (there) at the dam in the water come way up to- rushing down the river. Nineteen forty-eight, (a house or two) comes down, there was logs, it flooded Bonners Ferry and all. It didn't break the dike right at Bonners. It broke the dike down at Myrtle Creek. And the Myrtle Creek dike caused an eddy and it cuts the District One dike out, the water backs up into Bonners Ferry. I remember, just as high, the water in the building. There was a drug store down there, had a fountain where you served ice cream, it got up just to the bottom of the stool.

((More talk about Bonneville Power and electric power and off-topic subjects))

**Have you noticed an increase in different species of fish over the years? And where?**

I don't pay much attention to fishing.

**What would you recommend to help the fish population?**

They ought to tear out Libby Dam actually. That's supposed to help it. It- stops- still have floods. You're still gonna have your up and down of the river. But now you have to- the army engineers they go to lower that water so it won't disturb the sturgeon from going up and spawning. Here a while back, you know here two or three weeks ago, I never saw so many snags and stuff on the bottom of the river. (You looked up the river?)

((Laughs)) They can control to a certain sense, the flow of that river the year around. And all the farmers (are) making in the Kootenai Valley, the farming- gosh, my Dad, and we had ( ) grew up on this farm, down in District Two, he was frightened the old dike would break. Some dikes, that District Five over where Deep Creek comes in, there's two or three districts that break- there's lots of years the water would get a little extra high. And then if it didn't get high, (this breaking) up business of trying to keep the water pumps out from seepage.

(#2) Yeah, I'm sure there wouldn't be much good grain ground in there if they didn't have the drainage districts. And the control of the dam. That's what makes this good agricultural ground, really.

((Inconsistent comments on the Indian (sic) fish hatchery))

**So how long have you been in the valley?**

Since 1917.

**And you came here as a young man then?**

I was eight years old.

I got here October 17, 1917. World War was on. I can remember old troop trains was going through Bonners. Of course, it was steam then. And one time we was kids in school, the old courthouse, and there was a group leaving to go to Europe. Recruits. ( ) and to Fort Lewis and Spokane and wherever. They had a kind of a built platform out there. And most of the fellows that I know are, my age at school, are dead. ((I think he says they were ten years old at the time.)) Old (Walden) had a dry goods store. He was a bandleader. And they had the band. ((And I think he says the recruits come with their suitcases to get on the trains to go to a fort either near Spokane or over near Olympia))

**So did you guys live in town?**

Oh, about two miles out on District (Two), right down over the hill here. ((More talk about the '48 flood and BPA. Too much is impossible to understand))

## **Interview with Dan Ripatti, June 7, 2004**

### **How long have you fished the Kootenai River and its tributaries?**

Possibly about 80 years. I was about 10 years old probably when I started fishing. I was born 11 December 1913, on the island on the Kootenai River; it was called the Ripatti Island. The little bend has been cut off from there, water had cut the channel across, and it is an island now. There used to be 77 acres in it. It's off on District 4, between Fisher Creek where it used to enter the valley bthere. We lived there, and we fished all of our lives practically in the river. Because we went out with my Dad and Uncle to fish, There was Uncle Willis, but he went back to Finland, Anyway, he lived in a little cabin on the upper side of them, The cabin started caving off and the river started washing. When they started diking the country they forced more water into the river and the heavier currents just ate the upper side of the riverbank down. So the building was going to cave off into the river. We moved (the cabin) it over where the home place was on the north side of the place. My uncle and another fellow stayed over there and we'd hike over there and have breakfast. (Laughs) There was a deep snow; the Ling were plentiful over there.

### **How long have you personally fished for Ling?**

I probably fished since I was ten years old maybe, went around with my Dad. We'd have to catch the Peanose for bait. You'd have to put the baitfish on the hook line, live bait. They didn't like suckers or squawfish as well as they liked those Peanose. One year, after the flood, there was a stream in the middle of the district: out there that had water left in it. We went there in the fall, and there were just a lot of suckers. Boy, we thought we thought we had a lot of bait. We put them on the line and the Ling didn't bother them. They took a pass at them and put their mark on them. They'd live forever; those suckers don't die as easily as those Peanose.

### **Have you ever heard of stories of people catching Ling or seeing them?**

Well, anywhere in the river. But, you'd want to put your hook someplace there wasn't any brush; to tangle up on. It didn't make much difference, anywhere where there was 5 to 10 foot of water, for them to feed in. In the wintertime, they started moving up the river about Thanksgiving time. There were small ones in the river all the time. catch them on a little hook.

### **Did you fish from the shore or boat?**

Most of the time we'd fish through the ice. Years ago there were some people that fished in the certain river bends earlier, when the river wasn't froze yet. They'd use a lantern (light) at the river bend. Just across a corner in the river bend, they'd sell the fish to A.C. White Lumber Company. I never was over there with them to see how they did, but I could see their lanterns across the river. I think it was before the ice formed on the river, not sure, maybe in spring. They'd also fish in the river bend by the Colony Ranch, just

below District 5. The river comes across the valley almost to the walk or riverbank. We'd fish in 10-15 ft. of water. You'd want to bait pretty close to the bottom, not around brush.

**When did you fish for them?**

I fished in the wintertime, through the ice. We could have gone out in a boat, but we just waited until the river froze over. The biggest run would be coming up the river anyway, then. Thanksgiving time to all winter long. Maybe in March, not be as many then.

**How many did you catch?**

Any amount. You could put a line in as many holes; sometimes we'd just stick a pole in the ice, and have the line on it.

**How big were the fish?**

I caught them up to 10 lbs. (cleaned). Most of them smaller, 3-4 lbs. They probably weighed 7 – 8 lbs., almost. The longest Ling Cod I saw was up to three feet long, in the twenties or up until the sixties when they quit biting. We always skin them. Hang them up by the head; make a little cut around the head. Take a pair of pliers and pull the skin off. They'd have a little underneath skin that we'd strip off, too. We didn't have all of those extra bones that way. They didn't have very many bones to bother you. They were easily boned out. You slow cooked them. My mother put them in the frying pan, and added butter. We hardly ever floured them, just slow cooked them. The kids liked the Char; it had a nice flavor to them. The Char had more bones.

**Do you ever recall catching any small ling?**

I have in the high water, along the riverbank, fishing from the shore.

**Why did you fish for the Ling?**

During the thirties and the Depression years, we'd fish for them, clean them up and peddle them off to the Bench people up there. The Bench people were newcomers that lived along the highway. (Highway 1 and 95). We did sell some to the meat market in town. We'd charge 50 cents a pound. (Mike R. recalls receiving 55 cents a pound at Safeway in the 1950's). It's surprising that the amount of Ling that were that they would pay 50 cents a pound for them in the thirties. I really started peddling the Ling after I got out of high school in 1932. When money was scarce, funny we could get the 50 cents in harder times.

**Do you know any stories about the Ling?**

People that lived on the mouth of Mission Creek told me that they would get them out of Mission Creek with a pitchfork when they started running.

### **When and why did you stop fishing?**

When they quit running so heavy, After Libby Dam we didn't have the ice feed for the fish to feed on.

### **Have you seen an increase or decrease in the numbers over the years?**

I can't recall the year, But there was still ice on, and I'd put out 100 lines, and I could hardly catch one fish. (Mike Ripatti; He worked on the pipe line from 1960-1961, I had a commercial fishing license when I was in the seventh grade. The next year, when I was in the eighth grade, I can't remember catching any in the 1960's. We had seven years where we didn't catch any.

We didn't start catching until the late sixties. I moved away. He would fish from the shore with setlines in the 70's, no ice; he'd put bait on the line and swing it out. When I came back in 1979 I started fishing again. You could catch them in March, but you couldn't catch the bait, the Peanose, )

### **What would you recommend to do to help the Ling population?**

I would recommend that we fix it so that some of the stream would flow through some of the wetlands. We should build a locked dam and fish ladder so that they could hold the water up to a level , so the Ling could back up into the districts. It is too shallow for them to get up to spawn now.

I think to rebuild this river with Ling you have to fix some of these streams and wetlands, so that the little Ling can live in those ponds. If they had a fish ladder dam built on the river, the Ling could go up there and easily work up into where they used to spawn, by the foothills and Mission Creek.

Hold the ladder up so they can work back into these ponds. Most of the time the river is to low and they let the water run through it. The Ling can't work back into the wetlands like Myrtle Creek and Boundary Creek. A little bit of work on Mission Creek, I think they could get those slow ponds up above the culverts, if the water level was higher then they could run up. Years ago Robert Krause (grandfather to Bob Krause) lived over by us; he said that when the little Ling was born. They would go out and live in the swamp. Mission Creek run right through the middle of District 4. We used that for a swimming hole (it was different place and one of his horses fell through the ice. That was where the Mission Creek flowed through there. We hooked up and pulled that horse out.)

But I think that a number of Ling declined because they didn't have their original spawning grounds. So, you hardly ever see any Ling move up Mission Creek now. The Mission Creek originally went out into the valley (District 4) and flowed down into the middle, just about where the road goes over to the river bank (by the bridge) then flowed to the channel that is by the road here. It made a big loop out there. Mission Creek flowed into the tributary of the Copeland Lake.

They didn't seem to be going up the stream as much as before. Maybe they had more Peanose before. The Copeland Lake was a low area in the swamp. The little Ling would go out there and live on bugs and frogs and migrate back into the river.

Before they diked this area, and put the drain ditch, they had a lot of peat and moss in it. It would stay pretty well flooded all year round before the drain ditch was in. We once drove across the river with a team of horses on the ice and we drove right straight to Copeland.

## **General Questions**

### **1. Did you fish for other species than Ling? Which ones?**

I remember one year in 1926 the river never got above 14 feet, all the years it was 30 feet, practically when there was flooding. There was a lot of trout in the river that year. The water was clear; we had a raft on the river on the old home place. We caught lot of trout. In the fall we'd put a setline out, (a wire with a couple of floats on it) and we'd bait it up and catch a lot of Rainbow Trout. We'd be butchering the hogs and we'd see those cedar shingles for floats and we'd get the boat out when we saw the fish. There was a lot of trout and Char (Dolly Varden). We really liked those Char; they'd get up to 20 lbs, sometimes. We caught them at 7-12 lbs.

### **2. Did you fish the tributaries instead of the main river?**

We just fished the river mostly, unless we wanted to fish for trout. We'd go up to the streams then. Years ago when I was in High school they sold fish spears in the hardware store. They'd go near Mill Creek or some place at night and go spearing Ling. The game warden would collar someone once in a while. My Dad bought a spear but we never did go use it. The spear was a four-prong deal with barbs on each prong. you'd put a wooden handle on it.

### **3. Prior to the Libby Dam, was the Kootenai River too rough and fast to fish?**

No, it was never to fast for fishing. I spent a lot of time on the river in the rowboat. I'd catch river planks. We have buildings built out of planks we caught out of the river. We had chicken houses. When the river started rising the drift would float down, and we'd get two or three-inch planks. I think they must have thrown them off when they were building the railroad, there were a lot of them. They had big square spikes in them. Then they built the new bridge in Bonners Ferry. I'd find 40-ft. planks floating down the river. We used them in high water, in our house when the river flooded. We had planks propped up to get upstairs to get to bed. The house had two feet of water in it. They channeled all of the water into the river it made it higher and faster. Years ago it used to flow right through District 4 and the other side of the river to the other districts.

(Mike: The old homesteads were built on the high ground of the riverbank, then when the high water cut back away they'd be high and dry)

A lot of times we'd have 28-30 feet of water. Our bank was high enough for that. We'd move our livestock to the foothills. We'd milk cows, and could never get them over there. So, we'd build a plank floor in the barn, three feet or second floor. We moved across the cattle across the river in a raft. The raft was pulled by neighbors and Ripatti's motorboat. We didn't hardly have enough power to pull the raft against the current we were fighting the eddy's up the river. We moved up the river where we wanted to land, we 'd just about make the landing, if we didn't make the landing we'd have to go back and do it over again. One time I was about to make the landing. So, I just jumped into the river with the rope and tied my boat to a tree, and the raft was pulled into the place I wanted to be in.

(Mike: tells a story of how his Dad would sandbag a drainage ditch when the river flooded. The Dan would stack the bags until the water level reached 27 feet. Then he would quickly remove the bags, so the water could drain out.)

**4. Did you notice a change in the fishing related to the Libby Dam? Was it a gradual change?**

I think before the Libby Dam the fish practically disappeared from the river. There was still ice in the river with 100 lines and I couldn't catch one little on it.

(Mike: In the 1950's there was better fishing, especially for Peanose).

## **Interview with Alvin Flory, June 15, 2004**

### **1. How long have you fished the Kootenai River and it's tributaries?**

I've fished the Kootenai River ever since 1917, when my folks first came here. My folks fished them; I didn't; because I was too young.

### **2. Have you or someone you know ever fished for Lingcod? Where?**

We fished for them up at Smith Creek. They used to go down and build some big bon fires by some of those big holes and fish for them on old Smith Creek. Of course, now Smith Creek has changed. They put it straight into the river, where it used to come around and flow into Boundary Creek. The county dug a channel and run it right straight into the river; instead of going around into Boundary Creek. We used to fish when it went in the other way.

### **3. How long have you fished for Ling?**

I used to fish them way back in the thirties; at Stone Creek and Caribou Creek on the West Side. I used to spear them. I would spear them in the wintertime, possibly January or February if there was any ice. The only time we fished for them in the river was with setlines; down in the Copeland Area.

I was assistant ranger at Snyder then. We'd get a bunch together and we'd go down and catch the bait first. We'd catch the bait in the river and set our setlines. Then we'd go back and get the women and go to the show. After the show we'd all (even the women) go and get our setlines. We always caught lots of Ling.

We'd use Peanose for bait. They seemed to be in abundance. The best way to get them was to take a calf or cow's stomach (after butchering): and sink it into the river. You'd weight it down around some snags. The Peanose fed on the stomach and you could pretty well catch your bait around that area, where you planted that stomach.

### **4. Did you ever hear any stories of people catching Ling or seeing them? Where?**

Most of the people used to spear them, running up the creeks, like Snow Creek. Set lines; in the river is the main way they caught them.

### **5. Did you ever fish from shore or boat?**

We fished on top of the ice. We'd put a hole in the ice. We had a weight on the end of the line that went down. You didn't go out in the deep part of the water. You usually fished the sandbars. That's where the Ling would come in and feed for these Peanose. It would be in 8 to 10 feet of water, right off of the shore, not in the middle.

I used to fish a lot with Old Sam Steels. I was in high school; about 1936 or 1934. Old Sam Steels was a real expert at catching Ling. He was a good old trapper and everything. He used to work for the Forest Service in the summertime. He ran trap lines in the winter. He lived on the West Side. He taught me more about fishing for the Ling Cod in the River than anybody I ever worked with. He'd catch the Ling and sell them to the Butcher shops in town. They would buy all he could catch.

**6. When did you fish for them (time of year and day)?**

I would usually fish on weekends, when I was out of school. I'd fish in the ice around the river, off the Mission through the curve in the river. I'd fish down in Copeland, in District 6 or District 4 across the river. We'd fish off of Turner Hill. In the old Colony Ranch was down by right opposite District 10.

I'd fish when the ice was solid on the river. The river didn't go up and down, like now when the dam is in. The ice stayed pretty firm on the edge of the river. After they put in the dam, they kept raising and lowering the ice so much that the ice would go down. It wasn't safe to fish anymore, so we didn't.

**7. How many did you catch?**

It all depended. After you set your setlines, put your Peanose on. You'd have to cut a hole in the ice and put it down in. You'd usually have a weight on the end of the line to figure out the depth. You'd put it down and bring it up from the bottom of the river a ways. We'd fish within 2 or 3 feet from the bottom. In 1942, when I was at Snyder we fished up at Copeland. A good catch was 6- 20 Ling.

**8. How big were your fish?**

They were a good size: 24 inches in length. They weighed three to four pounds. This was from 1936 and on. My parents never said the Ling were bigger when they fished for them. But there were more of them. Instead of using a gas lantern like we did, they just built a big fire along the bank of the river. The fish were pretty numerous in these big holes on the Smith Creek. A lot of them used to use pitchforks to catch them instead of spears, they were that thick. They were 24-30 inches in length.

**9. Do you recall seeing or catching any small Ling? Where? When?**

Very seldom we would, mostly they were the bigger fish.

**10. Why did you fish?**

We fished for family use, out at Porthill. When I fished with Sam Steels I would give most of them to Sam. Because he was selling them at the butcher shop. Ray Scott and I were both in high school. We'd go along with Sam and keep two or three of the catch.

**11. Do you know any stories or folklore about the Ling?**

Only that there used to be more of them than now. There's not many in the river. Of course, you can't fish for them, now.

**12. Do you have any photos of Ling?**

I don't but, Fred Maddock and Charlie Miracle fished for them all of the time. The library has pictures of their catches.

**13. When and why did you stop fishing for Ling?**

There were lots of Ling in the thirties and forties. You could still fish the river. Now, I haven't fished them for years and nobody else can.

*General Questions*

**1. Did you fish for any other species than Ling? Which ones?**

I fished in the Moyie ever since I could remember. I started fishing with Mr. Warren Scott. He was quite a fly fisherman. He was the editor of the Bonners Ferry Herald. His son, Ray, and I chummed around a lot. We'd (Ray and I) catch the S.I. (Spokane International) passenger train and get off at either Meadow Creek or Snyder. It would cost us .30 cents to catch that train early in the morning. Then you'd pull the cord, they'd let you off and we'd go fishing. His Dad would come up on Saturday, when he wasn't working on the paper, and stay the night on the old Cap Drary place and take us home. The Moyie was excellent fishing then. I was mostly catching Rainbow. It was in the early thirties.

**2. Did you fish the tributaries instead of the main river?**

We fished Deep Creek and a lot of the West Side streams all of the high lakes. We were all over this country when we were kids. That was his dad's idea to get us out in the hills, instead of hanging around town. He'd take us out and drop us off for days. You could find work but you had to take commodities. Nobody seemed to have money, but they would give you commodities. So, we'd rather go fishing and go in the hills.

**3. When you went fishing, was it easier to access the tributaries instead of the river?**

Yes, much more so. Deep Creek was excellent fishing. I caught Rainbow out of there up to 30 inches long in the spring of the year. Now, you can only keep two fish. When we first started fishing the limit on the fish was 15, and then it dropped to 6. I'd catch Char (Dolly Varden) once in a while. You didn't necessarily just fish for Char; we were after the Rainbow. I fished for White Fish in Priest Lake, in the wintertime, when I was working over there.

**4. Prior to the Libby Dam, was the Kootenai River too rough and fast to fish?**

No, it was good to fish then, a lot better. After they put in the dam it was really kind of touchy to take your boat up there. Because they'd raise the water and you'd get caught up there. Before that it was excellent fishing. We used to go up to the mouth of the Moyie and actually fish the Moyie, dam down. Boy, you'd catch some beautiful rainbow.

**5. Did you notice a change in the fishing related to building of the Libby Dam? Was it a gradual change?**

Mainly, you couldn't tell where the fish were because they raised and lowered the river so much. Some of the better holes that you used to fish weren't there. The other problem was that you could get up the river with your boat, and they'd lower the river, it was hard to get out because of the rocks, even if you knew the channels. It made a lot of difference in the fishing after they put in the dam. So, now I fish around the Copeland area or around Deep Creek.

**6. Did you or have you noticed an increase in different species of fish over the years? Where?**

There is a definite difference in the amount of fish that you catch in the Moyie and Kootenai River compared to what you used to catch. They've cut the Moyie and Kootenai River Trout limit to two and 16 inches or better. We used to fish the lakes for Bass years ago. Charlie Smith was running Bonner Lake then, he'd loan us a boat. We would give him a lot of the fish. He would catch the fish. The Bass fishing was excellent then in Bonner Lake.

**7. What would you recommend to help the fish population?**

I know that they have cut down the limit of fish that you can catch anymore. That's a good thing because there isn't the fish there that used to be. They are trying to encourage the spawning of the fish to encourage better fishing. When we were kids there was nothing but trails up to the smaller lakes and the fishing was excellent. But it's gone now because too much logging and silt got in them, there are big holes and it's brushy. It's hard to get up and down the creeks anymore. We used to walk clear up to Snow Creek, about 8 miles, and fish down. We'd stay overnight in a forest service cabin. It was excellent fishing for cutthroat. Then they planted all the high lakes. Not too many people fished them then. You'd go back in three or four years and catch some pretty good fish, 12-14 inches long. But after all of the roads were put in, there were more people where you never used to see them in the early days. There were 30 some lakes in the Selkirks that we planted fish in, way back in the thirties and forties. Alvin and others carried the fingerlings in iced cans carried on mule packs. They planted rainbow and cutthroat trout. The cutthroat were harder to plant than the Rainbow, because they were sensitive to the warmer water temperatures.