

## THE GREEN CORNER by Gordon Bates

Like lots of other folk, I love salmon, especially wild salmon from the Northwest coast. That poses a number of problems, not just for me as an environmentalist, but for several layers of earth's creatures. The problem, simply stated, is: What kind of "dominion" should humans exercise to be responsible both to the earth, to the salmon and to the legitimate food needs of those who love salmon? The question and the options give us much to ponder, even those of us 3,000 miles away.

You see, to start at the source, the Columbia River as it rushes through Oregon to the Pacific Ocean has been dammed to control the flow of water, reduce the turbulence of the rapids and channel some of it for irrigation purposes. Since that makes it harder (in some cases impossible) for the fish to swim upstream to spawn each year, "fish ladders" have been built alongside dams to allow the fish to reach their genetically coded locations where salmon eggs have been fertilized and dropped for thousands of years.

But besides humans, there are other natural predators of salmon, like sea lions. Figuring out that the fish ladders provided happy hunting grounds for their favorite dish, hundreds of seal lions feast on thousands of salmon every spawning season. Those responsible for wildlife management face a complex dilemma. Some say let nature take its course. Others advocate the trapping and transfer of some percentage of the sea lions to zoos or other locations to prevent predation. Others push for the removal of the dam or some portion of it to let the fish migrate freely. Still others remind everyone that global warming of the oceans and river as well as the general temperature of the region will continue and will make the above dilemma even more complex.

As one publication, the *High Country News* reporters put it earlier this year: *So professional preservationists, and the environmental movement as a whole, are left with unnatural choices: They can intervene aggressively to maintain habitat threatened by planetary warming...Or they can decide to continue to use the traditional hands-off approach -- and thereby allow millennia-old ecosystems to die off and be replaced in ways that would never have happened naturally, if not for global warming.*

At this point, no decision has been reached on how to best solve this dilemma. But how about my part in the problem? Should I even be buying West coast salmon? The carbon footprint of transportation is enormous. The alternative often is East coast farm-raised salmon or other farm-raised fish, with multiple issues surrounding that method of organizing our food supply. Salmon are facing the same human over-fishing mania that now threatens the cod and the lobster. Should I ignore the problem? Should I refuse to buy Chinook and Coho salmon from the Northwest?

How long can we assume that problems like these will simply go away if we ignore them? Can we trust what we're told about the origins of any of our foods? The fact is that this West coast problem is simply a dramatic illustration of the set of choices each of us faces every day regarding how to exercise our dominion over our little plot of ground, over what kind of fertilizer we use, over what foods we buy, over how we help guide our legislators and officials at the state and local level. Often there is no easy answer.

Perhaps the most important lesson for all of us is that at least we are beginning to ask the question: **What is our responsible and faithful dominion over things we can control?**

