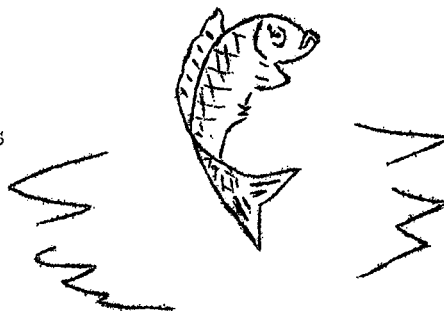


CATCHMENT AREAS - A THING OF BEAUTY OR A FORBIDDEN SECRET?

by J.A.W. Robley

The State Forest of Western Australia is largely situated on existing or potential catchment areas.

As a result of this the Forests Department is not the sole party responsible for administration and it is necessary for Officers of the Department to work in co-operation with water supply authorities.



The Department appears to suffer little or no interference from the water authorities so far as operations of a purely silvicultural nature are concerned. Some small cases of friction do occur from time to time but these are invariably of a very trivial nature and are usually easily overcome.

Difficulties do arise however, with regard to access to the catchment areas for tourists and sightseers, and also the construction of small dams, river crossings etc., on the catchment by the Department. Taking as an example Mundaring Weir and dealing first of all with the question of river crossings, it is difficult to take seriously, complaints that a river crossing in the Division is impeding the flow of water when water is overflowing the Weir Wall by 8" - 10", particularly since the crossing in question is only raised about 9" above the old stream bed.

This also applies to some small dams which were constructed across small annual creeks to act as a source of water during the summer months. It is true that these dams impede the flow of water to an extent, but this extent is so small as to be negligible. The value of these dams as an integral part of the protection of the catchment from destruction by fire is very large indeed.

The hardest pill of all to swallow is the ban on tourists on Forest roads surrounding the Weir at Mundaring.

Mundaring Weir has two attractions to offer the tourist, firstly the opportunity to see some of the finest unspoiled scenery in the Perth area, and secondly to see some really good examples of the work of the Department in the field of Pine plantations.

By virtue of the fact that a good all weather road passes very close to the edge of the water all the way round the Weir, little or no extra expense would be involved in opening this road as a tourist scenic drive, apart from the erection of suitable sign posts to make sure no-one loses themselves.

The value of encouraging the public to view at first hand the work of the Department in the plantation areas must not be overlooked. No member of the public could fail to be impressed with the pines around Greystones and I feel it is important for the public to realise that the Department is engaged on useful productive work as well as regarding us as a glorified fire brigade.

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To take the tourist angle a stage further, it would be of advantage to open the Weir to fishing, or in other words to legalise an existing past-time.

I have never heard of a case where stocking a reservoir with fish and permitting angling has led to pollution of the water.

I am certain there are many freshwater anglers around Perth who would welcome a move in this direction and who would be prepared to pay for this privilege.

Money raised in this manner could be put to improving the fishing by stocking and removing snags and debris.

In conclusion, the present restrictive notices around the Weir deter none but the "bona fide" sightseer. The vandal or "roo-shooter", whichever expression you prefer to use, comes and goes on the catchment almost unheeded. If the area were opened to the type of tourist we want, his movements would be bound to be curtailed. We would also create a public with an awareness to Forestry, and would extend the present drive to open up the West as an unrivalled tourist attraction in Australia.

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