

**THIRTY-EIGHTH ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE COMMISSIONERS OF
INLAND FISHERIES, MADE TO THE
GENERAL ASSEMBLY AT ITS
JANUARY SESSIONS, 1908**

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State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations.

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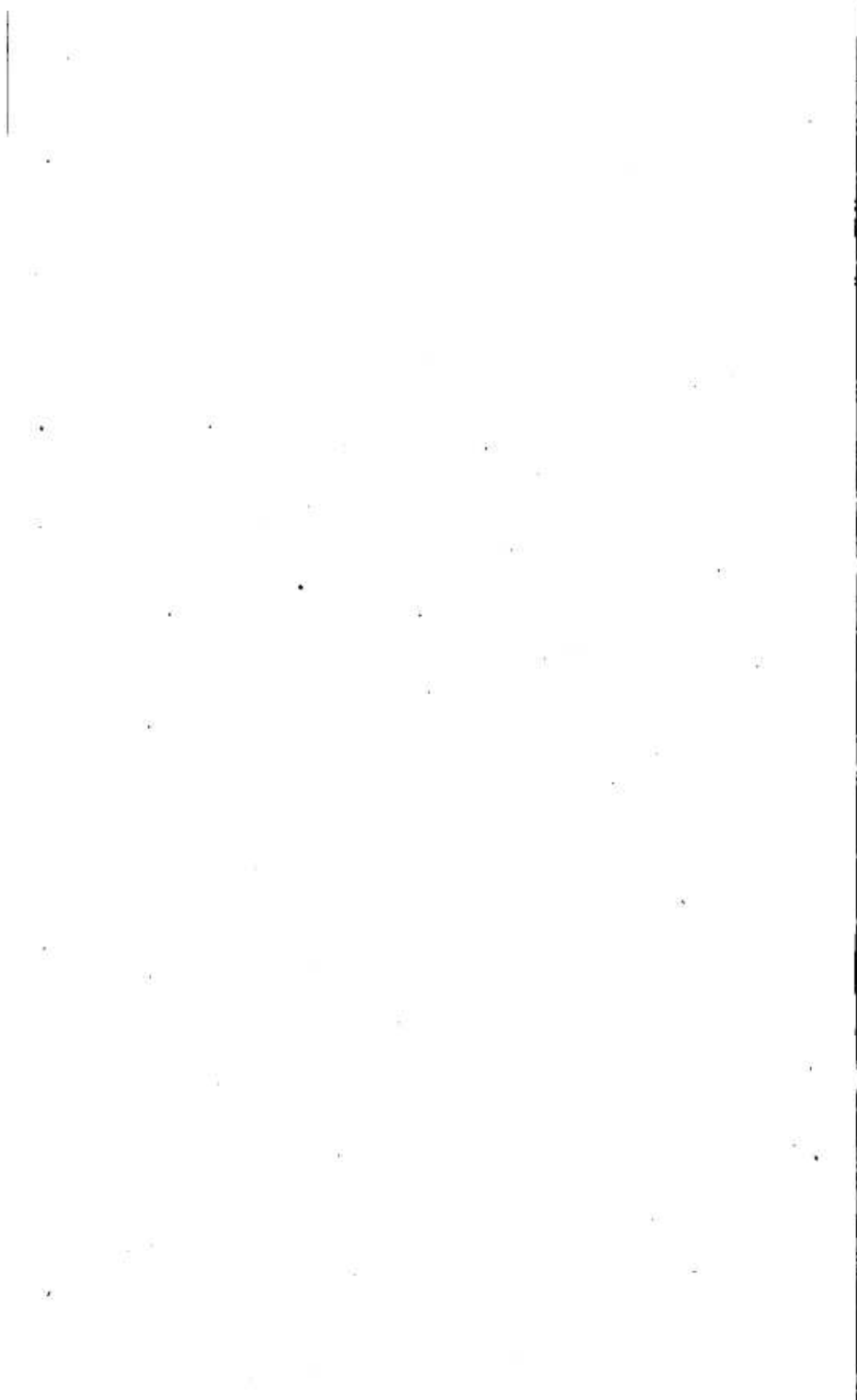
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REPORT.

*To the Honorable the General Assembly of the State of Rhode Island
and Providence Plantations, at its January Session, 1908:*

The Commissioners of Inland Fisheries herewith present their annual report for the year 1907:

The fact that the fishing in the inland streams and ponds of the state continues good, even though each year more persons are indulging in the health-giving and the delightful sport of angling, is due directly to the planting of fish fry and to the protection of the fishes by law. Of the present various activities of your Commission, the maintenance of the fresh-water fisheries within the state is the oldest, and has received constant attention for many years. Annually about 40,000 yearling trout are distributed throughout the waters of the state, and frequently black bass, shad and other valuable fishes are also planted. The efficiency of this procedure is unquestionable, and the beneficial results have enlisted the interest of the real sportsmen throughout the state so that they willingly cooperate with your Commission both in the distribution of fry and in the enforcement of the law. In order that there can be no excuse for ignorance of the regulations governing the fishing, the laws have been printed in convenient form for carrying in the pocket, and copies have been widely distributed and can be obtained at any time from the secretary of the Commission. During the past year 40,000 yearling trout have, as usual, been purchased and distributed.

The duties of your Commission do not pertain merely to the fresh-water fisheries, but extend also to the salt-water fisheries of the state. The latter, besides furnishing sport for anglers, are each year increasing in importance and in extent as a commercial industry.

The increase in the importance of the commercial fisheries is not by any means a local matter, but is general throughout nearly the whole world; witness the development of fisheries along the Atlantic and Pacific seaboard of the United States and Canada, the organization of the federation among the nations of northern Europe into a board of international fisheries, and the paramount fishing industry of Japan. Better organization, new and more effective methods, knowledge of the habits and movements of fishes, increasing facilities for distribution to markets, and the corresponding greater demand for fish food, and the realization of the immense possibilities of the fisheries in increasing the world's food supply are all factors in the development of this growing industry.

Within our own waters, some idea of the increase in the commercial fisheries during the past ten years can be obtained from a summary of the yearly census which your Commission has compiled regarding the number of fish traps set within the Bay and in the waters immediately outside. Leaving out of account the Block Island traps, the data are as follows:

Year.	No. of traps.	Year.	No. of traps.
1898.....	119	1903.....	195
1899.....	121	1904.....	214
1900.....	135	1905.....	234
1901.....	151	1906.....	243
1902.....	161	1907.....	265

The increase in the number of traps has been general throughout the Bay, though it has been greater in some localities than in others.

This appears in the following summary:

Year.	Prov. River.	East Green.	West Passage.	Mt. Hope Bay.	Sakonet River.	East Passage.	Off-shore.
1898.....	4	6	26	9	34	15	25
1907.....	7	37	30	12	87	22	70

This increase in the number of fish traps serves perhaps as a fair index of the rapid extension of the commercial fisheries, but trap fishing is by no means the sole fishing industry. The alewives, herring, shad, flatfish, menhaden, cod, mackerel, sword-fish, and other fishes caught by means of seines, weirs, beam trawls, harpoons, and by the hook and line, figure conspicuously in the grand total of commercial fisheries.

Through enactment by the General Assembly several years ago, the lobster fishery was placed in the hands of this Commission.

Your Commissioners have faithfully endeavored to enforce the laws for the protection of this valuable but waning industry, and their endeavors have met with a gratifying degree of success. The majority of the lobstermen and dealers have been from the first in favor of the law and its enforcement, but there are, of course, some who systematically attempt to evade the law and thereby to gain an unfair advantage over their fellow fishermen by taking short or egg lobsters which honest fishermen put back into the water. The first effect of the enforcement of the law was a decrease in the catch, but since that time there has been yearly the steady increase which the advocates of the law expected and desired.

The present magnitude and the rapid growth of the fishing industry carried on in the public waters of the state must be of interest to your Honorable Body and to every citizen of Rhode Island. Wherever the fishing industry has attained considerable importance, difficult questions of legislative regulation have always arisen. The development of the fisheries, and not their restriction, should always be the motive in fisheries legislation. Restrictive measures are naturally the first to come to mind when the danger of exhausting a natural food supply threatens. While such measures are often warranted, even necessary as more or less temporary expedients, they should be applied with a reasonable care and not blindly, and they should be supplemented as far as possible with positive constructive measures looking to the actual further development of these resources. The history of oyster culture affords a simple and illuminating ex-