

# The Amazing 150th Anniversary of the American Fisheries Society!

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Would you accept payment for your fisheries work in “company script” instead of cash? Paying impoverished employees with “company script” in lieu of money is something we generally associate with coal operators, logging camps, and others in the 19th century. However, in the leanest times of fisheries science during the Great Depression, one of AFS’s former Presidents, Homer Swingle (1957–1958), and his colleagues at Auburn University had to accept “Certificates of Indebtedness” as funding. Furthermore, Auburn’s employees were not paid “in-full” for their fisheries work (Shell 2019). Food from the agricultural schools was also used to supplement faculty and staff diets at the University (Cochran 2003). Even working under these conditions, this former AFS’er and his colleagues were able to develop foundational freshwater fish and pond management principles that are at the core of our profession today.

In the depths of World War II, AFS member activities were curtailed (Moffitt 2001). Fighting Axis armies consumed the efforts of most North Americans. From 1943–1945, no AFS meetings were held. Restrictions on fishing were lifted to provide protein for the war effort and women replaced men in fish processing industries. Nevertheless, fisheries science persevered and research produced during the war years was published later in the decade (Moffitt 2001).

Now we are in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic is affecting AFS state and local conferences, our ways of communicating science, research of our members, and our 150th anniversary meeting. We do not know what the future will bring, but the examples above, and many others show us that fisheries professionals will find a way to move forward, no matter the hardship.

What more fitting tribute to our anniversary is there than highlighting some of the history of the American Fisheries Society and the fisheries profession in a special 150th anniversary edition of *Fisheries*? Within these pages, you will see how fisheries professionals have dealt with the many challenges that have faced us in the past—and how we have kept going. You will see how we have celebrated the triumphs of fisheries. You will see how we dealt with the mundane.

What will the next 150 years bring? Challenges remain, but the types of challenges change over time. Currently, the scientific method itself and the scientific profession are being attacked in powerful circles when scientific results do not further specific agendas. This has occurred here and there throughout our history, but the frequency of this lately is a

new phenomenon in North America. The people of North America have always been receptive to advancing science. So much so that James Smithson, founder of the Smithsonian Institution, was thought to have given his money to the United States in part because it was a beacon advancing scientific study. Most of us know that attacks on science cannot stand if our society is to remain relevant and we are to advance.

In the next 150 years, emerging challenges will increase in scale. The fisheries profession will need to increasingly team with organizations outside our profession and incorporate data generated by scientific disciplines such as climatology, human population biology, medicine, psychology, and others. We will need to understand that aggressive sharing of data and solution options is not advocacy but education. We will need to join our partner scientific disciplines to address challenges to world society, such as human overpopulation, climate change, disregard of science, and biodiversity loss. We will need to be courageous and say what the science tells us, even if our words and data are uncomfortable for some, to provide the public and policymakers with the ammunition they need to make good decisions.

We are at a proud milestone for our profession. That the American Fisheries Society has lasted for 150 years and is the oldest and largest fisheries society in the world is an impressive accomplishment. This is my final column as President, so I want to thank all of you for allowing me to join you in making a small bit of this history. Enjoy the contents of this volume, and learning from this, let’s look forward to plotting our course for another 150 years!

*The opinions and tips given here, like all my columns, are mine and do not necessarily represent AFS or my employer.*

## REFERENCES

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