



NEVADA'S
UNIQUE
FISH

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There is a very unique fish that makes its home in Pyramid Lake, Nevada. Cui-ui (kwee-wee) is the name of this fish and it lives nowhere else in the world. This fish may soon vanish from the lake, as has the giant Lahontan Cutthroat trout. The trout disappeared from the lake in 1938, and now the cui-ui is in danger of disappearing also.

This is a sucker-type fish whose scientific name is CHASMISTES CUJUS. In general appearance the cui-ui is pale olive in color, with a dense black lateral stripe in males. The female has a brownish-black back. The head and body is broad and round, very robust, with the top of the head slightly convex. Their eyes are small, cheeks puffed, and the lower lips are broad and pendulous. Large specimens may reach 24 inches in length.

Not much is known of the habits of the cui-ui, since it spends most of its life in deepwater. During mid-April it makes a short spawning migration up the Truckee River. Spawning is suckerlike and food is not found in the stomachs of migrating fish.

Pyramid Lake is located in northwestern Nevada, near the California border, and is owned by the Northern Piute Indians. The National Park Service has called this lake "the most beautiful desert lake in the United States."

The tragedy at Pyramid Lake is that it is shrinking because it is being robbed of its water by the Bureau of Reclamation irrigation project. The lake depends mainly on the Truckee River to keep it at a fixed level. Only a small amount of water is received by the lake from underground sources or occasional desert rain; its principal source is the river.

It is because of the shrinking of the lake that the trout disappeared, now if the cui-ui vanishes, it is expected that the cui-ui will join the ever growing list of extinct animals. The cui-ui is a valuable food fish, so this matter has been of deep concern to the Piute Indians. The tribe sent representatives to see the Interior Department to try to resolve the problem, but to no avail. Having no other recourse, the Piutes took the case to the courts.

In November, 1972, the Indians were victorious in their suit, and were very pleased with the verdict. The Interior Department was ordered by the federal court to maintain Pyramid Lake at its present level. Judge Gesell, who heard the case, criticised the Interior Department in their handling of trust and treaty obligations with the Piute Tribe. The department was ordered to revise its regulations and to make new guidelines regarding the water.

So the cui-ui has received a reprieve. May it live on in Pyramid Lake!