

As part of public service work on behalf of nature protection, I often have occasion to visit the upper reaches of the Pechora, where the Pechora-Ilych Reserve is located. It is precisely here, 2000 kilometers from the mouth of the river, that one finds the principal spawning tributaries. The only fish that reaches this point is one that somehow manages to break through the iron barrier. Involuntarily, a gloomy analogy comes to mind. During the "period of stagnation" (euphemism for the Brezhnev era), one of the directors of the reserve invented a hellish device that made possible the "commercial shooting of the losos". A barrier, resembling a funnel with a narrow opening, was placed on the salmon's route. The "forest giant" swam into the trap, unsuspecting, and was awaited at the narrowest point by the noble "nature enthusiasts". These shot the salmon at point-blank range, from behind the barrier. The losos scarcely benefited from this kind of "rationalization". Its numbers began to dwindle rapidly. The infernal barrier was taken down. But the iron net has remained standing on the river for almost 30 years, shored up by talk of State usefulness. A lot of monstrosities in this country are justified by such "State concepts", but it is the State that is the poorer for them.

Here are the scientists' figures: to ensure the survival of the Pechora losos population, a minimum of 50,000 'producers' must be permitted to pass through the iron net to reach spawning grounds. And what happens in practice? Even by official figures, the number of fish which have passed through the net in recent years is 350,000 fewer than required. And how many fish tore their gills on the iron fence and perished? Official secrets are well guarded.