

Floating of timber

"The floating opened up the wilderness. The landscape changed in a profound way, at least from the perspective of that time. Brooks, streams, and rivers were cleared and straightened, chests and chutes were built, hinged booms and channels were deployed. Lakes and marshes were dammed. Bridges were reconstructed. Shacks and boathouses were erected along the rivers. Timber floated in all waterways..."

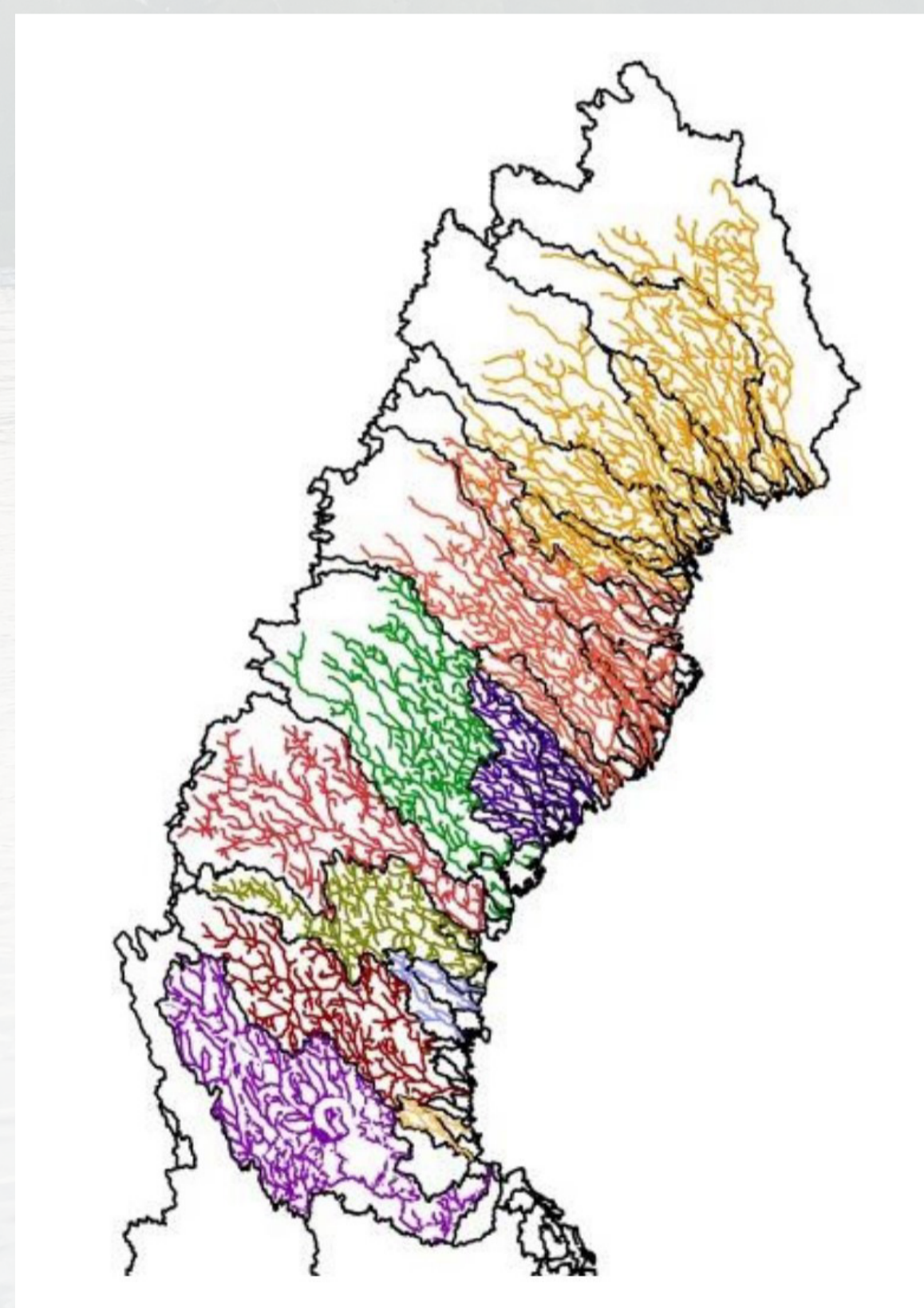
From: Hellstrand, 1980. Timber Floating in Dalälven



Sweden was suited for timber floating

Timber floating developed to meet the increased demand for timber during industrialization.

Throughout Jämtland, a large proportion of waterways have been used for timber floating. Timber was floated over long distances from the inland forests to the large sawmills on the coast. During that time, before the road network was expanded and timber began to be transported by truck, waterways were the fastest and most efficient means of transportation. Timber floating was therefore an important part of forestry at that time, but it also caused significant damage to the environment.



Public timber floating routes in Sweden. Map from the Swedish Agency for Marine and Water Management

Timber floating gradually increased from the mid-19th century until the 1910s when the annual volume of floated goods reached over 10 million cubic meters. This volume was maintained until 1960 when the timber floating routes began to be dismantled. The last timber floating in Sweden took place in the Klarälven in 1991.

Stream clearance

To facilitate timber floating, larger stones and blocks were removed from the waterways, and the water flow was concentrated by building channels and closing off side channels. Rocks and larger blocks were blasted away.

Stream clearance resulted in environments with no variation in water velocity and bottom structure. The closure of side channels led to the loss of important habitat for aquatic organisms and spawning grounds for fish, as the larger stones no longer held onto the finer material. Straightenings and clearances also caused sediment, organic material, and nutrients to flow more rapidly through the water systems and be washed away.

The habitats for fish and other organisms deteriorated significantly.

