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Cries of Great Lakes anglers finally heard in Washington

By WILLIAM ALLAN

DETROIT — The outraged cries of those who fish here in the Great Lakes area have finally penetrated the fog in Washington. For years anglers here have contended that millions of coho salmon and other fish are tainted by PCB (ploychlorinated biphenyls).

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has now found that PCB and other chemicals dumped by industry by the tons into the Great Lakes, caused the sickness the fish now have.

This comes as no surprise to anglers here, who recall the sorry results of a 1972 restocking program for the Great Lakes. Just before the elections that year $175 million was spent to restock the Great Lakes with prime species, such as trout, salmon and other game fish.

For those of us who cast the rod and reel out, hoping that something would latch on, and that it would be big enough to eat and savor, our hopes for such were early blasted. You hook one of these coho and they fight like tigers, leaping, diving, getting under the boat, tangling up your line, even taking hook, line, sinker, the works, and leaving you only the pole. But when you got one, it was a thrill. Then you took it home, letting your fellow workers on the street see the 10-15 pounder dangling from your chain, to be cleaned, dipped in egg and rolled in bread crumbs to be popped into the sizzling skillet. Then came the heartbreak, the great fish was sick, its insides bad, and you wondered what happened?

This sickness of fish in the Great Lakes didn't happen just recently. Anglers here know that Lake St. Clair has hardly any fish left — they have died, unable to reproduce, or from gastric disorders and skin lesions caused by PCB. Nothing was done for years.

Wyandotte Chemical, Great Lakes Steel and Ford Motor Co., along the Detroit and Rouge Rivers, poured the waste (PCB) and other death dealing poisons into the waters. The River Rouge, is no longer a river, it's a sludge hole, the fish dead, floating belly up. The Ford Motor Co. could be fined $500. Henry Ford II spends that for a night out on the town.

Several years ago Wyandotte and Great Lakes filled the Detroit River up with so much poison that 24,000 of the finest fish in the river died and floated to the shore, bellies up. The firms were slapped on the wrist. Since then if you caught anything about nine inches in the Detroit River, you could count it as a prize catch. Under nine, you threw back in.

PCBs are fire resistant liquids used mainly in insulating fluids in electrical equipment, in high powered transformers and capacitors. Some 700 million pounds of PCBs have been produced in the U.S. since 1929. About half that is currently in service, the rest has been dumped in land fills, and leached into the water—like the Great Lakes and the Hudson River in N.Y.

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