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MAR 14 1976 **BUT PCB CONTAMINATION IS A PROBLEM**

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Great Lakes Salmon, Trout to Be Planted

BY TOM OPRE

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LANSING — Nearly 10.6 million young trout and salmon will be dumped in lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron and Erie watersheds beginning next month, Department of Natural Resources administrators announced here Friday.

But in the face of increased concern over pollution contamination, just how safe will the fish be to catch and eat?

Dr. Wayne Tody, deputy director of the DNR, admitted there are still problems.

"Public health officials continue to warn against eating more than one Great Lakes trout or salmon meal a week," he said. "Yet with one exception, conditions have improved markedly."

The exception is PCB contamination, according to Tody, and he and other Great Lakes state fisheries managers are "upset" over lack of Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) or federal government action on a ban of PCB usage in manufacturing.

PCBs (polychlorinated biphenols) are hydrocarbon compounds used in electric transformer equipment, certain plastics compounds and a wide variety of other modern products.

MICHIGAN'S LEGISLATURE just last week passed a bill banning PCB use in this state. Tody said that other Great Lakes states "are following our lead, too, taking unilateral action to ban use of PCBs."

"That may be as effective as a federal ban," he conceded. "It just takes longer to implement."

Tody said the two other major sources of fish contamination



Millions more fish are on the way

have declined drastically since their use was banned around the Great Lakes.

"Mercury, for instance, was a problem in both Lake St. Clair and Lake Superior," he explained. "With the stoppage of use in Sarnia and the Wyandotte Chemical plant several years ago, we can safely say today that almost all fish are below the

FDA maximum levels for mercury.

"In other words, they're safe to eat," he added.

The only exception are the few very large walleye remaining from the days when mercury was still being dumped.

Mercury levels have always been much lower in Lake Superior fish, and scientists now think much of it has been absorbed from natural sources, mercury actually found in the pre-Cambrian rock shield of the north country.

"There were some chloralkali plants discharging mercury at Thunder Bay," Tody said, "but the Canadian government has cleaned them up."

MOST OF THE LARGER fish that have mercury contamination (roughly one part per million, twice the FDA safe level) are caught around the Keweenaw Peninsula and Isle Royale. "It's a locale problem, mostly," Tody added.

DDT pesticide levels in most fish have dropped below FDA standards in the entire Great Lakes, thanks to effective bans some years ago.

"Only the oldest, largest salmonids (trout and salmon) with the highest oil content will still be above safe levels," Tody said. One example is the Siacowet strain of large lake trout in Lake Superior, an offshore species that few sport anglers usually encounter.

PCB levels have not dropped, however, since their discovery in fish some six years ago. Tody admits that all popular salmonids — chinook and coho salmon, lake trout, browns and steelhead — all carry PCBs today, and the larger the individual fish, the more contaminated it is.

"Take the big lake trout, for instance, which stay in the

lakes the longest while growing," Tody said. "In Lake Michigan, they'll run over twice the 5 ppm FDA limit. About a third of Lake Superior's fish will run to 6 or 7 ppm, and Lake Huron's are somewhere between the other two lakes."

Tody said Michigan's fish would be in even more trouble if the U.S. government follows Canada's lead and drops the acceptable PCB level to 2 ppm. "Practically every mature salmonid we have would be above that," he said.

THERE ARE WAYS to lessen the exposure. All fatty deposits and belly flaps should be cut away when cleaning the fish and the skin be removed, also. Oily tissues hold most of the PCBs — and DDT remnants, too.

The fish should then be cooked by some method to remove all the oily fat possible. Barbecuing is recommended; so are broiling and boiling.

"We feel sure the PCB levels would follow those of DDT and mercury, if we had a usage ban," Tody declared, "and drop to acceptable levels quite rapidly."

In the meantime, the DNR will continue its heavy plantings of salmonids in all the big lakes. Lake Michigan will be 5.9 million, mostly in the lower two-thirds of the lake where fishermen are the most numerous.

The plant will be composed of 2.25 million coho, 1.8 million chinook and about 1.2 million lake trout.

Lake Huron will get 2.8 yearling age fish, and Lake Superior releases will total about 1.38 million. Some 560,000 fish, mostly salmon, will be dumped in Lake Erie.