Lake Pepin Action Urged

Special to The Journal

Wabasha, Minn. -- Congress should intervene in the Lake Pepin fishery crisis, several Minnesota officials urged at an informational meeting here Tuesday.

The officials likened the lake's problem of high concentrations of industrial chemical in carp to the DDT crisis which affected sport fishing on Lake Michigan in the 1960s.

The Food and Drug Administration recently ordered a halt to interstate shipments of carp taken by commercial fishermen on Lake Pepin after samplings showed they contained up to 70 parts per million of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs). The Allowable federal level in fish is 5 parts per million.

PCBs are industrial chemicals that have been known to cause cancer and deformed births among laboratory animals tested at the University of Wisconsin — Madison. The animals were fed a steady diet of PCBs and developed organ damage, skin lesions and were unable to reproduce.

FDA officials have said PCBs can be traced to Twin Cities industries 60 miles upstream, but they have been unable to pinpoint sources.

More than 80 persons, including a dozen commercial fishermen from Wisconsin and Minnesota, met at the Wabasha Middle School to discuss

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the problem. The meeting was sponsored by the Great River Environmental Action Team and the Southeastern Minnesota Assistance and Planning Organization.

The Great River Team is a six state agency funded by the federal government to develop a management policy for the upper Mississippi River.

The FDA ban has curtailed commercial fishing on Lake Pepin, a wide area of the Mississippi River between Alma, Wis., and Red Wing, Minn., and forced a Pepin fish wholesaler to bury at least 60,000 pounds of allegedly contaminated carp.

Similar to DDT

Joel Schilling of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency said PCBs were chemically similar to DDT.

Bruce Hawkinson, a Minnesota Department of Natural Resources manager at Lake City, said samples of game fish from Lake Pepin were being analyzed. He predicted that there would be a statement soon from both states urging restricted consumption of game fish taken by sport fishermen from the lake.

Schilling appealed to the group to put pressure on congressmen for greater controls on the sale and manufacture of PCBs.

Monsanto Chemical Corp. of St. Louis is the only US manufacturer of PCBs, Schilling said. An Italian firm exports PCBs to the US, he said.

PCB is a nonflamable fluid used as insulation in transformers, heat exchangers and hydraulic equipment.

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