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N.Y. ban on fishing came as no surprise

By Todd Strasser
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RED HOOK — State Conservation Commissioner Ogden Reid's announcement of a partial ban on commercial fishing in the Hudson River because of high levels of PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls) in river fish did not come as a surprise to fishermen.

Warnings against eating river fish issued by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) last fall gave rise to speculation then that Reid might close the river. Some fishermen had even curtailed their fishing early last year.

There is growing evidence that PCB cause cancer, Reid said.

A number of fishermen who catch shad during the fish's annual spring spawning run up the river expressed dismay that the small herringlike fish was the exception to the ban.

Reid said that conditional permits to fish for shad would be issued, but if PCB contents in this year's shad were high, the permits would be withdrawn.

"The fishermen shouldn't have to prepare for the season and put money into nets and equipment if they're not going to be allowed to fish," said Raymond Minard, a part-time shad fisherman.

"They should close the shad fishing for this year and get their homework done," said Warren Spinnawebber, a Port Ewen shad fisherman.

Another fisherman pointed out that even if shad fishing is allowed, there's been so much publicity about PCB that many people won't buy the fish.

Reid said the federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) suggested the ban because tests showed most river fish exceeded the FDA limit for PCB of five parts per million (ppm).

The average PCB contents in river fish were: 45 ppm in American eels; 16 in sturgeon, 10 in large- and small-mouth bass; 17 in striped bass; 17 in yellow perch, and 14 in blue crab.

American shad, however, showed an average of only 2.5 ppm, thus leading Reid to suggest that shad not be banned unless tests this spring show contents higher than five ppm.

The implications of the ban reach far into the Atlantic and to other states along the northeast seaboard, Reid said.

Both shad and striped bass spawn in the Hudson and then swim into the

ocean, where they account for a considerable part of the commercial fishing take each year. Both fish, but especially the striped bass, are also sought by sports fishermen and often wind up on the family dinner table.

Reid said he also will warn sports fishermen to restrict their intake of fish caught in the Hudson.

Possibly 60 to 80 per cent of all the striped bass caught in the northeast each year spawn in the Hudson, a study

by the Atomic Energy Commission showed, and fish from the river may account for as much as \$100 million of the northeast's annual catch, environmentalists say.

Reid, not unsympathetic to the fishermen, said he has discussed the possibility of the state or federal government paying damages to river fishermen whose incomes will suffer.

Another development that caused concern among the fishermen who met with Reid was the news that efforts to prevent the General Electric Co. from dumping more PCB into the Hudson at its Fort Edwards and Hudson Falls plants will not quickly end the PCB problem.

There was also little consolation in the news that the FDA is considering lowering its maximum permitted levels of PCB in food from five ppm to two or even 1.5 ppm.

Even if PCB pollution is stopped, the PCB now in the Hudson River bed and sediment will be there for many years to come, Reid said.

He said at least half the people in the room that afternoon probably had PCB in their blood.

No scientific method has been found yet to remove PCB from the river, Reid said. A Maryland scientist, Dr. Edgar W. Garbisch, is experimenting with river grasses that apparently absorb PCB, he said.