

MAY 11 1972

Here's truly sad fish story PCB Articles

By MEL ELLIS

Some 20 years ago I watched a Canadian resort owner fertilize his island garden with tons of jacks (northern pike), some of trophy size, and because I knew the frost usually got his corn, tomatoes and squash long before he had a chance to harvest them, I thought: "What a waste!"

Then, of course, I would never have guessed that the same thing might happen on a much grander scale right here in the United States. But yesterday I read about how the state of Michigan disposed of a million pounds of fish — mostly trout and salmon, each longer than 21 inches — by burying them.

The resort owner who fertilized his garden on the shores of Ontario's Long Legged (sometimes called Stork) lake, did so because at that time northern pike in most Canadian waters were considered trash fish, and were destroyed as we destroy carp, to make way for more desirable species such as pickerel (walleyes), gray trout (lake trout), and muskellunge (muskellunge). Still, every time a boatload of jacks came in to be piled into a wheelbarrow and wheeled to the garden, I winced, but took pictures.

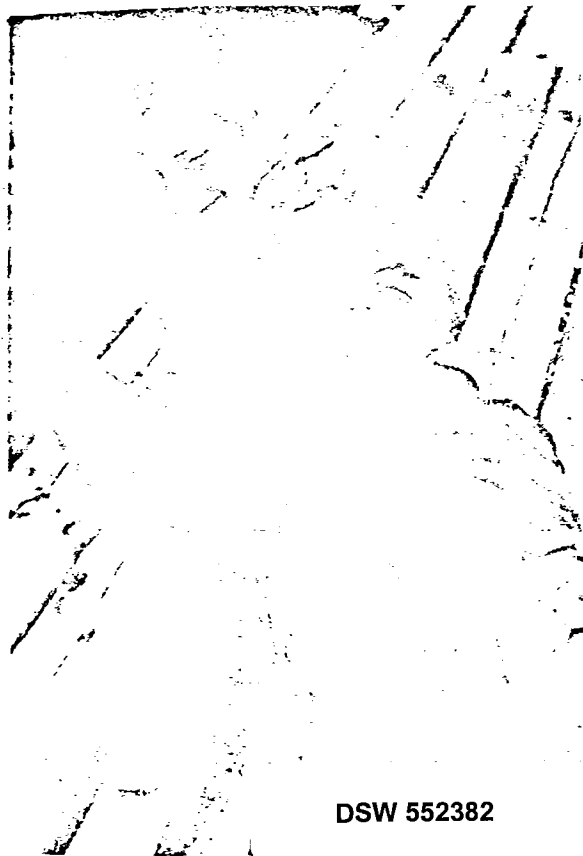
TODAY THE JACK has acquired some status in Canada, and in many waters is eagerly fished for. Meanwhile, his more elite cousins, the lake, brown, speckled and rainbow trouts, and the coho and humpback salmon, have fallen victim to PCB (polychlorinated biphenyls).

It's a tragic story. Long before fisheries biologists converted, especially lakes Michigan and Superior, into super fishing holes as productive of trophy fish as any waters anywhere in the world, PCB was already a world-wide villain, even if its viciousness wasn't generally recognized.

PCB had a quiet beginning. Back in 1929, a chemical company was asked to develop an insulating material for electrical transformers which wouldn't crack or burn.

IT DID. Monsanto Chemical Co. took over the company in

The Good Earth Crusade



DSW 552382

Northern pike destined for fertilizer

1938 and went on to make several PCBs, and early studies saw no harm in it. PCB spills were hosed down drains. PCB drained from damaged transformers was often mixed with fuel oil as a vehicle for weed killing sprays.

There were many other uses, even such as coating the inside of silos, until someone discovered that the PCB was getting into the milk through the silage the cows ate.

Other companies were allowed to take over PCB and it got into specialty printing inks, adhesives, coating for carbonless reproduction paper, hydraulic fluids, special paints, some solvents, etc., etc.

come true, right here in the backyards of millions was better fishing than might be found in most other parts of the world. Hundreds of thousands of anglers from everywhere flocked in to harvest the bonanza.

But now, back to the villain PCB. Quite suddenly too, it began turning up in substances around the world. Then PCB was found to lead to cancer in rats. It was also found to inhibit the reproduction powers of fish.

IN 1970, Monsanto began phasing out orders where it had no control of PCB's usage. It offered to buy back PCB's for destruction for recycling. It instigated safety measures to eliminate spillage.

But, along with mercury which is another poison which gathers in the tissues of fish and animals, PCB was already infecting the finny inhabitants of this Great Lakes sudden fishing fairland.

The government, of course, stepped in. The Food and Drug Administration put the safety margin in foods at five parts per million. It also rated PCB as only moderately toxic as compared to such other poisons as DDT.

MEANWHILE, fisheries biologists, especially in Michigan, began to experiment with salmon and trout plantings in Lake Michigan. Expecting only moderate success, they were astonished when lake, rainbow, brown and speckled trout, and coho and even humpback salmon not only survived but flourished.

To understand and appreciate this miracle, you must be a fisherman. The trout and salmon are to the world of the fisherman what caviar is to the gourmet.

Anglers had been spending great sums of money to travel to distant places so they might fish for these species. Then, all of a sudden, like a dream

NOW EVERY effort is being made to put no more PCB into our ecosystem. The trouble is, it is already there and will not quickly go away since it deteriorates so slowly in water.

According to W. B. Papageorge, of Monsanto Chemical Co., "The mistakes of the last 40 years will be with us a long time. That could mean decades."

So what about the millions of fishermen who across the country are taking fish having a measurable amount of PCB?

WELL, SO FAR as the fish in Lakes Superior and Michigan are concerned, a marketing ban has been observed by the state of Michigan and Wisconsin. The distribution of surplus fish from which these states have milked milt and roe for their hatcheries is prohibited, and so millions of fish are buried.

As for the sport fisherman, the rule has generally been that fish which measure less than 21 inches (best eating size) are considered safe. It is the consensus of biologists from repeated tests, that they have not been around long enough to ingest such quantities of PCB as are injurious to humans.

But what about those lunkers? Those world record breaking monsters which anglers are derricking in?

"Have it mounted. Hang it on the wall to look at."