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Plan group attacks PCB contamination

LA CROSSE — The Mississippi River Regional Planning Commission (MRRPC) vowed Wednesday to use its powers to help solve problems connected with PCB contamination of the Mississippi River.

The commission formed a five-member committee to bring attention to the problem and work with other agencies in coming up with solutions. Its members, who are to be from within and outside the commission, were not named.

The commission's executive committee heard protests at the meeting from the Citizens for the Preservation of Lake Pepin, which organized recently after federal officials discovered high levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in Lake Pepin fish.

Fishing damaged

Commercial fishing has ended on the lake, affecting about 40 commercial fishermen, Mrs. Dorothy Hill, Pepin, told the commissioners.

Mrs. Hill said the group is engaged in a letter-writing campaign directed at local, state and national officials.

"The PCB problem has taken the joy out of everything," Mrs. Hill said. "We think it has ruined tourism on the river for the year."

Clean-up drive

The group's campaign to clean up the lake, a wide spot on the Mississippi between Red Wing, Minn., and Alma, Wis., is also an attempt to "see if people can still be heard over the bureaucratic entanglement," she said.

Others to speak before the commissioners were Norman E. Kirshbaum, administrator of the state Dept. of Agriculture's Food and Standards Division, and John Mosesso, Chicago, chairman of the water quality work group of the Great River Environmental Action Team (GREAT), an agency assigned with planning management policies for the Mississippi River.

They told commissioners agencies were working together on the PCB matter, but that sources of PCB polution have not been located.

PCB is believed to have caused birth defects and reproductive failure in fish, birds and mammals. It is also suspected of causing cancer.