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Reid Asks Program to Hire Fishermen for Research

ALBANY, N.Y. (UPI) — State Environmental Conservation Commissioner Ogden R. Reid, who last month banned most commercial fishing on the Hudson River, now plans to hire some of the idled fishermen.

Reid told a news conference Thursday commercial and sport fishing on the river was a "$20 million to $50 million" yearly business. He called on the legislature and Congress to approve compensation for those whose livelihoods had been wiped out.

The commissioner signed an order Feb. 25 barring commercial fishing for all but shad and large Atlantic sturgeon because the level of PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenyls, in most fish "posed a potential and serious danger to public health."

Reid said the fishermen "do not want to be placed on a dole. What they really would like is payment for work on the river for research and reclamation."

The discharge of the chemicals, used to manufacture capacitors and other electric equipment, from General Electric plants at Fort Edward and Hudson Falls are currently being reviewed in hearings by Reid's department.

The commissioner said he had met with GE officials in private negotiations and was optimistic that a negotiated settlement to the discharge problem could be reached.

While legislation compensating the fishermen might take some time, Reid said, he was taking immediate steps to "actually utilize the fishermen for programs" of the department.

He said that as many as 50 fishermen could be employed within a few weeks on such research projects, but added that many of the details were still to be worked out.

The commissioner said his department would soon issue a report on PCB pollution throughout the state, showing the Hudson as the "most polluted in the state, if not the world." Other pockets of PCB pollution existed in Lake Ontario and near Little Falls in the Mohawk, he said.

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