THE DETROIT FREE PRESS
DETROIT, MICH.
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JUN 13 1975 CLIPPED BY BACONS

Chemical Tainting Lake Michigan Trout, DNR Says

LANSING — (UPI) — The state Department of Natural Resources says alarming levels of the industrial chemical PCB have been detected in Lake Michigan trout. Other fish and birds have died or suffered reproductive failure.

A DNR staff report, presented to the Natural Resources Commission Thursday, said efforts to rid the environment of polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) had been largely ineffective because the levels of the chemical have increased in some fish.

DNR Director Howard Tanner said PCB damage to fish had reached such serious proportions that his agency would begin pushing for a total ban on the use of the chemical.

Wayne Tody, DNR fisheries chief, said the trout are "being eaten every day," primarily by sport fishermen. But, Tody said, "a lot of fish that are questionable on the PCB levels have probably been marketed."

Most specific information on the distribution of contaminated fish was not available immediately.

THE DNR report said the chemical has been detected in snowfall in Wisconsin and that proper disposal techniques are not being used.

Although levels of DDT and mercury in Great Lakes fish are rapidly declining, the DNR report said PCB has been found in increasing concentrations in lake trout in recent years.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has begun seizing shipments of Lake Michigan fish on grounds that PCB concentrations exceed the agency's guideline of five parts per million.

The federal agency also has seized some Michigan fish because of high concentrations of an insecticide called dieldrin.

PCB is a group of compounds used in many industrial processes as a hydraulic fluid, heat transfer fluid, insulation in electrical transformers and other forms. The sole U.S. producer is Monsanto Chemical Co.

"A serious situation exists with respect to populations of fish-eating birds in the Great Lakes area," The DNR report said. "Severe reproductive failure has been identified in herring gull colonies around Lake Ontario."

Reproductive failures in northern pike and in Lake Michigan salmon have been traced to the chemical as well, the report said.

MONS 031257