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PCB's serious threat for Hudson



'Fishy' Fullum

Outdoors

Prior to the spring of 1974 I spent some of my idle moments dreaming of Atlantic salmon. Dreaming about these superb fish might have beeen quite ordinary with one exception. Those dreams were not of Iceland, New Brunswick or some other far off fishing paradise. The fish I dreamed of came from the Hudson River.

I realize my hopes were a little premature, but they were based on some past experience with the river. Slowly the river was improving and along with the improvement of the water came the improvement of the fisheries resource. The herring were back by the millions, the shad were returning in increasing numbers and the striper fishing was excellent, but it was not just the species which came from the sea that interested me. I took a 22 - inch smallmouth that went over five pounds and several others over two pounds. The white perch were averaging a bit larger and the big pike were also taking advantage of an improving forage base. Several area anglers were taking big pike to prove the cycle. If this trend would continue for three or four more years, the anglers of this state would soon change thier tune. The once "dirty Hudson" had the potential of becoming one of the finest sport fisheries in the U.S.A., including a very real possibility for a salmon fishery.

Just about the time I had completed a research file of great fish and greater stories to come, a new problem began to raise its ugly head. A factory to the north had been, and still is, dumping a new poison into the Hudson. PCB's have in a very short time destroyed the majority of the commercial fisheries of the river and put a heck of a dent in the sport fisheries as well. Pollutron

There are still great schools of game fish in the Hudson, but some are totally inedible and all others can be consumed only in limited quantities if you are old enough and if you are not pregnant.

Some fishermen have displayed their feelings about the PCB situation, but few of the general public seem to give a damn one way or the other. I am amazed that the residents of this state can accept the fact that General Electric has been and is still poisoning a future source of food. PCB's may not be degradable. We many never be able to eat most fish caught in the Hudson for years, for generations or, God forbid, ever again. Compounds

In my mind the fact that this toxin has effected only an aquatic environment doesn't minimize the seriousness of the situation. If the toxin were put into our air instead of our waters and if the PCB's had rendered 90 per cent of our terrestrial species inedible, it would be quite a different story. What if instead of shad being the only species marketable, it were hogs? What if beef, like the eel, were completely inedible and all other sources of protein could be eaten only once a week?

I commend all those who have contributed all their time and efforts to a solution of this problem and I hope that more residents of this state will soon understand the seriousness of this problem. After talking with DEC staff involved with PCB's and after wading through the reports on the subject, I am even more concerned. No one knows how serious the problem is at this time or how long we may have to contend with it. We will just have to sit back and wait. Hopefully PCB's will turn out to be similar to DDT. Mother Nature has been able to clean up our mess in the past, but this time General Electric may have given the gal an impossible task.

I am sick about the recreational setback on the Hudson, but the destruction of the resource is far worse. As always the resource must be the first priority.

In the past I have been critical of some of DEC's decisions. In some incidents I feel the executive office has been in error, but in the case of the PCB situation Commissioner Ogden Reid has worked long and hard. The reasons for his interest in this one may or may not be because of his interest in the sport or the commercial fisheries of the Hudson, but if Mr. Reid's efforts improve our resource, we owe him a pat on the back no matter what.

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I would like to thank everyone who looked me up at the boat show. I'm not much for the big boats with monstrous engines, but I welcomed the new fishing boats, particularly the bass boats and the crowds of anglers they drew. We held quite a fishing clinic at the show. With the able assistance of some of the members of Helderberg Bass Anglers we covered all aspects of the sport.

It is amazing what a couple of days of nice weather can do to the fishermen. Even the pike, bass and walleye fishermen were full of enthusiasm and their season openings fall long after the first day of trout.

I have been going to the Wally Taber shows for many years. The show is another sign that the new season is just around the corner. I have always enjoyed the programs and I am looking forward to this year's film. It will be at Hoosic Valley Central School in Schaghticoke, Tuesday, March 9 at 8 p.m. The cost is $2 for adults and $1.50 for students under 16. My wife and I and the two youngsters will be there. We all look forward to Wally Taber each year. See you there.

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