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Fish lake trout tainted, not reproducing

Lake trout in the Illinois waters of Lake Michigan are not reproducing adequately and contain concentrations of a suspected cancer-causing chemical, the Illinois Conservation Department reported Tuesday.

Harry Wight, a department biologist, said that of the 50 lake trout caught in a recent "census" of Lake Michigan fish, only one did not have the clipped-fin markings applied by the department to the fish it stocked near North Chicago in 1969.

If this 2-per cent reproduction rate is an accurate measure, the species will disappear from the lake within a few years, Wight said. He said the trout apparently return to spawn in the muddy waters of Great Lakes Harbor instead of seeking more desirable offshore reefs.

Wight added that the department is searching for more suitable stocking sites.

The larger trout, Wight said, were found to have concentrations of the chemical compound PCB (polychlorinated biphenyl), a waste product that is a suspected carcinogen for fish and possibly for humans who eat the fish in large quantities.

None of the trout showed fresh wounds from sea lamprey, Wight reported. In past years, lamprey have preyed heavily on the trout.

In nets arranged in scientific patterns, the census last autumn captured 295 fish, including chinook and coho salmon and lake, brown and rainbow trout. Wight said the chinook, most of which were stocked in 1973, should hit a peak next year. The dozen coho in the sampling all were stocked by other states, their markings indicated.

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