

Page 1 - PCB LEVELS DOWN IN LAKE MICHIGAN FISH
Page 4 - HEAVY RAINS PRODUCE MANY WILD MUSHROOMS
Page 5 - PUBLIC PANEL REVIEWS SOLID WASTE PROGRAM
Page 6 - YOU CAN SAY GOOD NIGHT TO MICHIGAN'S SNAKES
Page 7 - THERE'S STILL TIME FOR A COLOR TOUR

September 29, 1977
Editor: Bill Loewenstein

PCB LEVELS DOWN IN LAKE MICHIGAN FISH

LANSING---Noteworthy decreases in levels of PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) in Lake Michigan coho salmon have been shown, for the first time since monitoring began five years ago, reports the Department of Natural Resources.

"This could mean our efforts are paying off, that PCBs are on their way out," says DNR Environmental Protection Bureau Chief William Turney.

The source of Turney's optimism is a September U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report that pegs PCB levels in adult salmon taken last fall from east-central Lake Michigan at 9.21 parts per million (ppm), compared to 10.77 ppm measured in a similar catch from the same area in 1975.

Based on data gathered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Great Lakes Fish Laboratory in Ann Arbor, the report also lists PCB level declines in Lake Michigan chubs and lake trout. However, the only statistically significant, thus most meaningful, decrease was that noted in coho, says John Hesse, Chief of the DNR's Toxic Materials Section.

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***** PUBLIC MEETING CANCELLED

The meeting of the Michigan Land Trust Fund Board scheduled for October 4 has been cancelled. The Board will meet November 1 in the 7th Floor Conference Room, Mason Building, Lansing, at 9:30 a.m.

Before voluntary restrictions on the sale of PCBs in 1971, chemicals of this group were commonly used to absorb heat in capacitors, transformers and hydraulic fluids, and as plasticizers or additives in carbonless reproduction papers.

Voluntary PCB sales restrictions came from Monsanto, Inc., the sole U.S. manufacturer, after it was clearly established that PCBs posed a health hazard to humans and animals.

Among the first creatures to show ill effects were Great Lakes fish-eating birds such as herring gulls and terns, many of which died after eating PCB-contaminated fish.

"In Michigan, we found PCBs in the brains of dying gulls in concentrations as high as 2,600 ppm," says Hesse, "which is 10 times what wildlife researchers view as a lethal concentration." Fish accumulate PCBs in fatty tissue, sometimes to the point where they contain PCB levels thousands of times higher than the water in which they swim.

Also stricken with PCB poisoning have been mink at Michigan ranches, where the animals died or had reproduction problems after being fed Great Lakes salmon. Testing this, researchers have induced reproductive failure in mink by adding relatively low concentrations of PCBs to their normal diet.

Although there is no record of negative human health effects from consumption of PCBs in this country, Hesse says, such effects were clearly shown in Japan after a 1968 accident in which PCBs were leaked into rice oil. Some 1,200 persons fell ill after eating the contaminated foodstuff.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has established 5 ppm as the maximum allowable concentration of PCBs in foodstuff to be sold for human consumption.

Although the PCB problem is far from Michigan's alone, this state was among the first to identify it and take steps to solve it, Turney says.

The DNR, with strong support from Governor Milliken and the Michigan legislature, has played a key role in the drive to rid the environment of PCBs, which are extremely persistent in the food chain. That role has included intensified monitoring

and analysis to determine the extent of PCB contamination, and implementation of control programs that have virtually halted PCB losses from major industrial and commercial sources.

"Perhaps our efforts are being rewarded," says Turney, referring to the report's conclusions. "Perhaps the days when we can stop advising people to limit consumption of Great Lakes fish will come sooner than we've imagined."

Many states, including Michigan, have advised sport fishermen to limit consumption of PCB-contaminated fish such as Great Lakes salmon, lake trout, steelhead and brown trout to no more than one meal per week, and have advised women of child-bearing age not to consume these fish at all.

Two other developments that should help are Michigan's new PCB law, Act 60 of 1976, which took effect April 1, 1977. It essentially prohibits the manufacture, sale or use of PCBs in Michigan for all applications other than in transformers and capacitors, "closed systems," as they are called.

Also, the recent Monsanto decision to halt all PCB distribution permanently in October is looked upon favorably by state and federal officials, and is expected to augment the legislative mandate. Meanwhile, this month's Fish and Wildlife Service report also notes a continued decline in DDT concentrations among the east-central Lake Michigan salmon and among chubs and lake trout caught off Saugatuck.

And, the report lists a decline from past years in mercury levels measured in Lake St. Clair walleyes.

"We'd like to believe these welcome results are from some of our past efforts," Turney says.

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(Norris McDowell)

DNR FILLER FACTS:

LANSING---An informational public hearing will be conducted by the Department of Natural Resources October 17 in Cedarville, regarding the proposed Cedarville marina adjacent to Meridian Road on the Lake Huron shoreline.

A request for a marina lease and construction permit by Robert A. Dunn of Cedarville is the subject of the Mackinac County hearing at 7:30 p.m. at the Clark Township Community Center.

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HEAVY RAINS PRODUCE
MANY WILD MUSHROOMS

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LANSING---Heavy rains during the past two weeks have produced a super-abundance of wild mushrooms, reports the Department of Natural Resources. The situation presents both an opportunity and a hazard, depending on the knowledge of the individual mushroom hunter.

"There are excellent eating varieties available," says Bill Mullendore of the DNR, an avid amateur mushroom hunter. "Trouble is, there are also many 'doubtful' and downright poisonous varieties growing in many of the same places. It takes some knowledge and discrimination to select the 'right' kinds."

Two years ago, when southern Michigan experienced a similar wet fall and wild mushrooms sprouted in profusion, there were several poisoning deaths and many more cases of serious illness among people who didn't "know their mushrooms" and picked the wrong varieties.

In the Lansing area, and probably in many other places, an all-white--caps, gills and stems--mushroom has fruited in great profusion on lawns, in pastures, on golf courses and along roads. This species is not the deadly amanita verna (Destroying Angel) but resembles it closely enough that only an expert can tell the difference.

"Best rule for the amateur collector is to leave any all-white, smooth-capped, umbrella-shaped mushrooms strictly alone," Mullendore advises. The Destroying Angel normally grows in forests, but there's always the chance that it may show up where it isn't supposed to be. I have found them on the golf course behind my home."

The shaggy mane (coprinus comatus), which is choice and very abundant this fall, is all-white in its edible stage. In that stage, it is shaped like an upside-down bowling pin, not an umbrella, and has feathery scales on the cap.

"Mushroom hunting is a safe, rewarding recreation for those who know what they are doing," Mullendore concludes. "But it's a risky venture for the person who finds a bunch of mushrooms in his backyard and decides to take a chance that they are safe to eat. If you don't absolutely know that a mushroom is edible, check it out with

(more)

MONS 001790

9/29/77

HEAVY RAINS PRODUCE

5

a good guidebook or, better yet, an expert.

"Even though the price of commercially grown mushrooms in the supermarket is pretty high these days, it's very low compared to the medical bills or worse that can result from ignorance in eating wild ones."

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PUBLIC PANEL REVIEWS SOLID WASTE PROGRAM

LANSING---A "Public Response Panel," representing Michigan citizen organizations, business and government, met for the second time in Lansing September 28 to review progress and development of the state's solid waste and resource recovery plan.

The panel, organized by the Department of Natural Resources, is composed of delegates from groups and agencies with special interest in the future disposal or reuse of household and industrial refuse.

Solid waste is being generated in Michigan at the rate of 16 million tons a year, say state officials.

Panel members represent the Michigan United Conservation Clubs, the Michigan Manufacturers' Association, glass, steel and packaging companies, the automobile industry, East and West Michigan Environmental Action Councils, townships, counties and municipalities, the legislature and the news media.

"There is an immediate need for better understanding and awareness of solid waste problems and control programs by every citizen," says engineer Tom Work of the DNR Resource Recovery Division. "We're hopeful that meetings of the Response Panel will accelerate that understanding and public awareness." (Gay Cowels)

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DNR FILLER FACTS:

Hunters and anglers have contributed \$237 million to natural resources programs in Michigan since 1952.

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The leading opponent of Michigan's "bottle bill" spent \$188,878 in an unsuccessful attempt to defeat the measure.

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LANSING---Michigan's snakes are getting ready for a long winter's nap. That's the word from a retired Department of Natural Resources game biologist and recognized herpetologist.

Donald F. Switzenberg, who was in charge of the DNR's Cusino Wildlife Experiment Station at Shingleton in the Upper Peninsula for 11 years, says snakes are getting ready to hibernate.

"Last year we had a cold fall. If the fall weather is warm this year, you'll see more snakes," he says.

That's because the snakes want to enjoy the warm fall sunshine before going underground for the winter, according to Switzenberg. Summer weather is usually too hot for the snakes to be out and visible, but a warm fall day is just right.

"The active season of snakes in Michigan is extremely short," he points out. "Michigan snakes come out of hibernation in late April or early May, and gather around their winter denning grounds in late September or early October. At such times, snakes may be seen in unbelievable numbers."

Seventeen species and subspecies of snakes are found in Michigan. Some of these, such as the garter and water snakes, are extremely common in many parts of the state. Others are so rare or secretive that they are seldom seen by most people.

"All but one of Michigan's snakes are harmless," Switzenberg points out. "The only poisonous species, the Massasauga rattlesnake, is confined to the Lower Peninsula, but has been known to range as far north as Bois Blanc Island, near the Mackinac Bridge."

Although belonging to a group of snakes that is as deadly as any in the world, the Massasauga is not considered highly dangerous to man.

"Snakes occupy a variety of habitats in Michigan as elsewhere," he says. "The water snakes are distinctive in frequenting almost entirely the borders of lakes, ponds and streams, and are rarely found far away from such places.

Several of the smaller species spend most of their time under logs, stones, and other such hideouts, coming out only to feed.

"Some climb trees with great agility," Switzenberg points out. "The ease with which the pilot blacksnake, for instance, can ascend the vertical surface of a large tree trunk is a sight to behold."

But for now, snakes are just looking for a nice warm place to spend the winter.

"They have to get below the frost line," Switzenberg adds, "or else they'll freeze."

Switzenberg retired from the DNR in 1961 after 23 years service. He now resides in Okemos.

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THERE'S STILL TIME
FOR A COLOR TOUR

LANSING---If you're planning a color tour in northern Michigan, the Department of Natural Resources advises going during the next two weeks.

William O. Schwarz, DNR District Business Executive in Cadillac, says, "Anytime during the next couple of weeks will be excellent for a color tour in the northern Lower Peninsula."

He reports foliage of 50 percent color now, and although "not particularly dramatic," Schwarz says there is still a lot of color to be seen.

"Lowland maples and cherry trees have already turned," he says. "Oak is still green and sumac is turning now."

Farther north, Wesley Lehman, DNR Regional Forest Supervisor in Marquette, says the color has peaked in the Upper Peninsula.

"Last weekend was the peak," Lehman says. "It's still fairly nice though, with about a week or two left for color tours before the leaves fall."

Lehman notes that the color is not as brilliant as it has been in former years.

"The maples turned earlier," he says. "White birch, yellow birch and aspen came on quite early too."

He points out that aspen colors still are at their height and "if you get some sunshine on the trees, it's still really sensational."

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MONS 001793

9/29/77