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Study to Detail Trouble in Fishery

Special to The Sentinel

Alma, Wis. — Fish samples taken recently from the Mississippi River here and being analyzed in Madison are expected to shed new light on the status of the river's troubled fishery.

A State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) team of aquatic biologists, hampered at times by thunderstorms and high water, spent four days gathering samples of rough fish and game fish at preselected stations near here and Nelson.

About 120 samples were collected from hundreds of fish netted or shocked by the three-man team.

The samples are being examined for signs of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCB), a manufactured chemical known to have caused cancer and deformed births among laboratory animals.

In May, the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) discovered illegally high amounts of PCB in carp processed by a Lake Pepin fish wholesaler. The fish contained more than the 5 parts per million PCB allowed by federal standards.

FDA ordered a halt to interstate shipments of the fish, most of which were harvested from Lake Pepin on the Mississippi River, and the wholesaler was forced to buy 30 tons of carp fillets valued at \$2,500.

FDA's action also halted commercial fishing activity between Alma and Red Wing, Minn.

Study to Continue

DNR plans to continue its current study of the fishery at stations near Pepin and Prescott along the river in July, according to Stan Kleinert, chief of DNR's surveillance section.

Of special interest to DNR and sport fishermen are game fish found in the river. Experts say PCB levels generally are higher in game fish because of their feeding habits.

Wisconsin and Minnesota agencies also have urged limited consumption of fish taken from not only the Upper Mis-

issippi River (Lake Pepin area), but Lake Michigan and the Fox River near Portage as well.

Samples from the PCB hot spots are flowing into DNR laboratories, creating a backlog of work, Kleinert said.

Fish samples are ground and fat is extracted with hexane solvent. The extraction is heated in a gas chromatograph and various substances are emitted at different intervals, Kleinert said.

Twin Cities Eyed

With this method, chemists have been able to establish "fingerprints" of substances in the extract and compare them with "fingerprints" of forms of PCB — the most common being araclor 1242, 1248 and 1254.

PCB is found in heat exchangers, cooling insulation, hydraulic fluids, and sewage treatment plants. Suspected sources on the Mississippi River center at the Twin Cities area.

The chemical, similar to DDT, has been detected in the river since 1970 and DNR's most recent testing came in 1973.

Kleinert said a report on the 1973 survey is expected to be released soon. Workload at the lab has slowed its release.

Early Release

However, in light of the scope and publicity PCB has attained recently, a report on the 1975 study is expected in August, he said.

It will be shared among a task force of Wisconsin, Minnesota and federal agencies. Eventually, data assimilated by Minnesota agencies attempting to locate PCB sources and determine the PCB impact elsewhere on the river will also be included.

"In the early stages of PCB analysis chemists weren't as sure of the results as they are now," Kleinert said.

"When we have our most recent samples analyzed, we'll be in a lot better position to give results on what the situation is now."