



THE SMALLMOUTH HORIZON

Helping to Protect and Preserve Quality Smallmouth Bass Fishing

July 2008

Information about water quality issues and recreation in the wake of flooding

MADISON – High water levels may be receding in parts of southern Wisconsin, but questions continue to flood in about water quality issues.

“The health and safety dangers from recent floods are still a concern,” said Todd Ambs, water division leader for the Department of Natural Resources. “Water currents can be deceptively strong and there’s a lot of debris in the water. Pollutant levels are elevated in some waterways from runoff and overflows of wastewater treatment systems.

“Because conditions are so variable, it’s important for people to be aware of water quality conditions in their area, take appropriate precautions, and use common sense.”

The record rainfalls this month meant record amounts of storm water and runoff was carried into lakes and rivers, bringing along pollutants from urban streets, farm fields and construction sites.

The deluge also overwhelmed wastewater treatment systems in many communities, forcing overflows of sanitary sewers and resulting in partially treated and/or untreated sewage being released into state waters.

As of June 23, 164 communities reported overflow events, according to Tom Gilbert, the DNR wastewater engineer compiling the reports. Information on the specific locations, the number of events, and the duration of overflows is still being collected and in some areas, overflows are still occurring.

Overflows typically contain wastewater that is substantially diluted by the rain or flood waters, and the organic component of the wastewater should degrade quickly, but the overflows also contain pathogenic microorganisms that are a potential public health concern, Gilbert says.

Boating

Water levels and water quality vary greatly, so it’s important to check with local authorities for any health advisories or slow-no-wake restrictions or health advisories. Boaters need to consider that there is a lot of floating and submerged debris in all bodies of water affected by flooding — everything from lawn chairs, dislodged piers and cable, to whole trees and everything in between.

Lower units can snag, vessels can hit the debris and get damaged or capsized, according to Barbara Wolf, regional conservation warden for south central Wisconsin. “As always, wear your life jacket,” she says.

Fishing and eating fish

Anglers who fish from motor boats, canoes or other craft need to follow the general warnings to be cautious of debris and fast currents. Anglers fishing from shore need to be wary of fragile shorelines that might give way underfoot.

Anglers who want to eat their catch need to follow the state’s day-in, day-out advice for eating fish caught from Wisconsin waters.

“We recommend that people always wash their hands after handling surface waters. The fish you catch should be rinsed in clean (tap) water and cooked thoroughly before eating,” says Candy Schrank, a DNR toxicologist. “We also encourage you to follow our fish consumption advice to reduce your exposure to environmental contaminants while enjoying the benefits of eating fish.”

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Fish kills

The heavy rains and flooding have added additional organic material to waterways, making conditions ripe for fish kills caused by a bacterial disease called Columnaris.

Columnaris fish kills generally occur throughout the state during May and June each year and should not be confused with the viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS) virus which is a new disease feared to be spreading inland from the Great Lakes.

Both diseases only infect fish species and are not a health risk to humans. However, people should not eat fish killed by Columnaris or VHS, and should wash their hands if they handle infected fish, because other bacteria that may be harmful to humans start feeding on the dead carcasses.

“The Columnaris bacteria is most prevalent in our lakes after water temperatures reach 65-70 degrees from late May to late June,” says Larry Damman, DNR fishery biologist. The bacteria levels increase after major rainfalls that supply additional nutrients on which the bacteria thrives into area lakes. VHS fish kills tend to occur at temperatures less than 60 degrees.”

Although Columnaris can appear to produce large scale fish losses in a matter of several days, it usually does not have a catastrophic impact on overall fish populations, according to fishery biologists.

Columnaris was recently found in bluegills, crappies, and other panfish in Dane and Kewaunee counties. As waters warm more fish kills may be expected.

If anglers or landowners have additional questions or see large numbers of dead fish especially non-panfish species like carp, largemouth bass, muskie and walleye, they should contact their local DNR fisheries biologist to investigate the problem.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Drinking water: Lee Boushon (608) 266-0857

Boating safety: Barbara Wolf (608) 273-6277; Roy Zellmer (608) 264-8970

Beach water quality: Shaunna Chase (608) 266-2554

Fishing and fish consumption: Candy Schrank (608) 267-7614

Columnaris fish disease and fish kills: Andy Fayram (608) 266-5250

Natural Resources Board approves major mercury reduction rule.

Rule now goes to legislature.

MADISON – The state Natural Resources Board approved a mercury reduction rule that will accomplish Governor Doyle’s goal to reduce the amount of mercury released to the environment by 90 percent.

“This rule is a major step forward in improving Wisconsin’s air quality,” said DNR Secretary Matt Frank. “It will dramatically reduce mercury deposition into Wisconsin’s lakes, benefiting our fish and wildlife and human health.”

The rule targets mercury emissions from utilities. Mercury is a toxic byproduct of burning coal to generate electricity. Mercury is released from smokestacks and falls into surface waters where it enters the food chain and concentrates in fish and other wildlife.

According to the US Environmental Protection Agency, roughly 437,000 Wisconsin men and women are exposed to hazardous levels of mercury by eating fish. All inland waters in Wisconsin have fish consumption advice on how many meals of certain fish species humans can safely eat to keep their mercury exposure at or below acceptable risk levels.

Women of childbearing age, infants and children are at greatest risk from ingesting mercury. A study of Wisconsin women shows about 6 percent of women of childbearing age had elevated mercury levels

The assessment report authors cite evidence that there is a positive relationship between mercury emissions and mercury contamination and that citizens can expect a measurable decrease in mercury deposition following a reduction in emissions in a year or less. They caution however, that it will likely take much longer before fish consumption advice changes due to the amount of mercury already in lake and river sediments.

Following Natural Resources Board approval, the rule moves over to the legislature where it may pass, or environmental committee chairs may call for additional public hearings or request further changes to the rule requirements.

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Articles, photos, information, and calendar events for the newsletter are encouraged and should be submitted by the 1st day of the month of issue to: Dan Johnson, 426 Glenway St., Madison WI 53711. If possible, MSWord files sent to: johnson7@tds.net are most appreciated.

Wisconsin's fish consumption advice booklets now available

Some limits on fish consumption advised for all people

MADISON - Updated fish consumption advisory booklets are now available online and at county health centers and Department of Natural Resources service centers and regional offices.

All people who eat fish, regardless of their age and gender, are reminded to check the advice and consider how frequently they eat fish from Wisconsin waters, the species of fish they eat, and what water body the fish came from, says Candy Schrank, the toxicologist who coordinates fish contaminant testing and the advisory for the Department of Natural Resources.

"All lakes and rivers have some level of advice ranging from 'unrestricted' to 'do not eat' depending on the location, species of fish, and size of the fish," she says. "While fish are recommended as a heart-healthy, low fat source of protein, some fish contain contaminants that you want to avoid or limit."

Fish is the main source of mercury and PCBs in the human diet; both contaminants can harm developing fetuses and children and are also harmful for adults, according to Dr. Henry Anderson, chief medical officer of the Wisconsin's Department of Health and Family Services Public Health Division.

In adults, too much mercury may result in loss of coordination and affect vision, hearing and speech. Some studies have also found higher rates of heart disease in men who had elevated mercury levels.

Key components of the advice are:

Women in childbearing years and children may safely eat one meal of panfish a week and one meal of game fish a month from most waters with the exception of musky, which they shouldn't eat.

Men and older women may eat panfish but eat no more than one meal a week of game fish from most waters, and one meal per month of muskies.

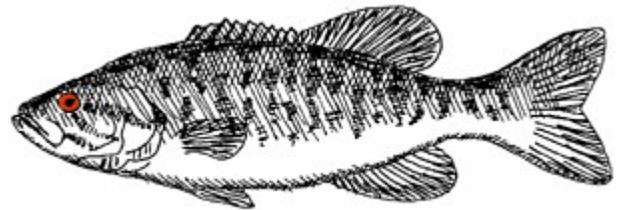
In addition, 95 lakes have more restrictive advice for some species of fish due to higher levels of mercury. Advice for these lakes recommends that women of childbearing age and children under 15 not eat some larger gamefish and eat only 1 meal per month of some panfish. Also, men and older women should limit their consumption to 1 meal per month of larger gamefish and 1 meal per week of those panfish.

49 stream reaches and harbors have more restrictive advice due to PCBs. These waters include lakes Michigan and Superior, and larger rivers of the state. Advice for all people ranges from 'unrestricted' to 'do

not eat' depending on the location, species of fish and size of the fish.

Mercury is naturally occurring in the environment and also comes from the burning of fossil fuels. It enters waters and is converted to a toxic form that's easily absorbed by fish and other aquatic organisms, and in turn, by people that eat the fish. PCBs are man-made chemicals once used in a variety of manufacturing processes but banned in the 1970s; they remain in sediments and accumulate in fish and other organisms.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: Candy Schrank, DNR - (608) 267-7614; Dr. Henry Anderson, DHFS - (608) 266-1253



Smallmouth anglers demonstrate greater awareness of regulations

Adapted from *Fisheries*, the publication of the American Fisheries Society.

Creel surveys done in the state of Minnesota from 2000 to 2004 showed that, on average, 78% of anglers were aware that a regulation was in effect. While the greatest awareness (89%) was observed in smallmouth fisheries.

Unaware anglers were found to be significantly more likely to harvest illegal fish.

The survey also suggests that signs at boat landings seem to be more effective in educating anglers as to the regulations than are pamphlets.

Departments of Natural Resources may need to reevaluate their communication and education efforts in order to improve awareness of regulations. Simply passing a rule and publishing it in the regs booklet is not enough.

Our Next Meeting:

There are no monthly meetings from May through August. Call a friend, go fishing, catch, photograph and release, and send us a picture.

See you in September!

Upcoming Events:

- **Saturday, August 9th Time tba.**
Wisconsin River below Stevens Point

Wisconsin Smallmouth Alliance outing. See details in June Newsletter