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John McCoy –the Charleston Gazette

• **Agencies warn W.Va. anglers of tainted fish**

West Virginia's waters, in general, are a lot cleaner today than they were when I was growing up.

Fish kills were commonplace back then. Sewage, chemicals, mine acid or any number of other pollutants took a regular toll on the state's fisheries.

Passage of 1970's Clean Water Act started a water-quality revival that continues to this day.

Still, some effects remain. The latest fish-consumption advisory put out by the Department of Environmental Protection and the Division of Natural Resources is enough to make even the most avid fish eater think twice before grilling a catch.

The "general advisory," which applies to all waters of the state, tells a pretty grim story about the contaminants today's fish contain.

For example, scientists now recommend that West Virginians eat no more than one meal a month of native largemouth, smallmouth or spotted bass greater than 12 inches.

The same restriction holds true for walleye, saugeye, white bass or hybrid striped bass of any size.

The reason?

Those species contain enough mercury and PCBs — polychlorinated biphenyls — to be considered potentially harmful if consumed more often.

Those same scientists also recommend no more than two meals a month of largemouth, smallmouth and spotted bass less than 12 inches; channel catfish greater than 17 inches; or brown trout, flathead catfish and sauger of any size.

Scary as those warnings are, some of the watershed-specific advisories are scarier.

For example, flathead and channel catfish from the lower Kanawha River (Dunbar to Point Pleasant) shouldn't be eaten at all. Neither should hybrid striped bass. All those species contain too much dioxin, mercury and PCBs to be consumed in any amounts.

The advisory also applies to the Kanawha's backwaters at Armour Creek, Heizer Creek, Manila Creek and the Pocatalico River.

Other "do not eat" warnings are in effect for channel catfish of any size caught from Roane County's Flat Fork Creek, and channel catfish greater than 17 inches caught from the Ohio and Shenandoah rivers.

Restricted-consumption advisories have been issued for:

- Sauger from the Hughes River, no more than one meal a month (contaminated by mercury);
- All fish species other than catfish from the lower Kanawha River, also no more than one meal a month (dioxin, mercury, PCBs);
- Rock bass from the Meadow River and the North Fork of the South Branch, no more than two meals a month (mercury);

- Spotted bass less than 12 inches from Middle Island Creek, no more than one meal a month (mercury, PCBs);
- Channel catfish of all sizes from the Monongahela River, no more than six meals a year (PCBs);
- Channel catfish less than 17 inches from the Ohio River, no more than six meals a year (dioxin, mercury, PCBs);
- Channel catfish greater than 17 inches from R.D. Bailey lake, no more than six meals a year (PCBs); and
- Smallmouth bass less than 12 inches from Wheeling Creek and the South Fork of the South Branch, no more than one meal a month (mercury).

And these are only the advisories for fish species people commonly eat. Other restrictions exist for carp, suckers and other species considered less palatable.

For more information, visit the Department of Health and Human Services' Web site at

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