

Before the Ban

by Sandy Schuman
Regional Marine Extension Specialist

We get most of our information "long distance," that is by reading, looking at slides, listening to speakers. But on September 11th, twenty individuals from communities around New York's Great Lakes did the best thing. They were there, in Pulaski, to learn about the potential impact of the developing salmonid fishery on their communities.

Why Pulaski and the Salmon River? There is no single area in New York State upon which the impact of the fishery has been more profound. Here our visitors could talk with the people who have faced the problems and explored the opportunities. Here they could see the crowds of fishermen, park in new parking lots, sleep in a recently added motel room, have breakfast at the fishermen's buffet, buy supplies at new sporting goods stores, and feel the pulse of a community experiencing change.

What did they learn? They learned about social and economic impacts: that expenditures in the Salmon River area increased from over \$60,000 in 1973 to nearly \$450,000 in 1975, and from 5,500 angler trips to 22,500 trips; they learned how the City of Oswego undertook their own study and counted a thousand fishermen on its shoreline; they learned how a Pulaski High School class got involved by surveying town and village residents, village businesses and out-of-town fishermen.

They learned about fishing and boating access: how the Department of Environmental Conservation gets involved and how the Fish and Wildlife Management Board works with sportsmen and landowners to provide better access, and how important safe boating access is to the development of the Lake fishery.

They were told by Floyd Carpenter, village mayor, how they had to put up "no parking" and "tow-away zone" signs to keep traffic clear, and how "Just this morning I got a call that the fishermen had pulled the signs up and thrown them in the river."

Bruce Soule, county legislator, explained how close cooperation between county, town and village governments has been important in building parking lots, putting up signs and providing other facilities.

Dick Brott, from the Chamber of Commerce, told how the summer business season has been extended beyond Labor Day and into the Fall; Bob Palmer, a charter boat operator, elaborated on the potentials and hazards of the charter boat business.

Information was pointed out as being an integral part of the whole recreational fishery program. How to get to where the

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On September 14 a ban on possession of certain fish from Lake Ontario was declared. Three articles in this issue describe the situation before the ban, detail the State's actions, and give preliminary indication of the result of the ban.

The Ban

by Michael W. Duttweiler
Regional Marine Extension Specialist

Possess: "to have as belonging to one . . . to own . . . to keep control over." (Webster's New World Dictionary)

Regulation prohibiting possession of certain fish in Lake Ontario and its tributaries: "No person shall fail to return immediately to the water coho salmon, chinook salmon, lake trout, brown bullhead, catfish, smallmouth bass and alewife herring [and American Eel] which such person takes in Lake Ontario. . . ." (Section 12.14, Title 6 of the Official Compilation of Codes, Rules and Regulations of the State of New York)

The mighty fish had begun to return. Communities were swelling with enthusiastic fishermen from all points in the northeast and beyond. The new tradition of fall salmon fishing along Lake Ontario was following its established pattern.

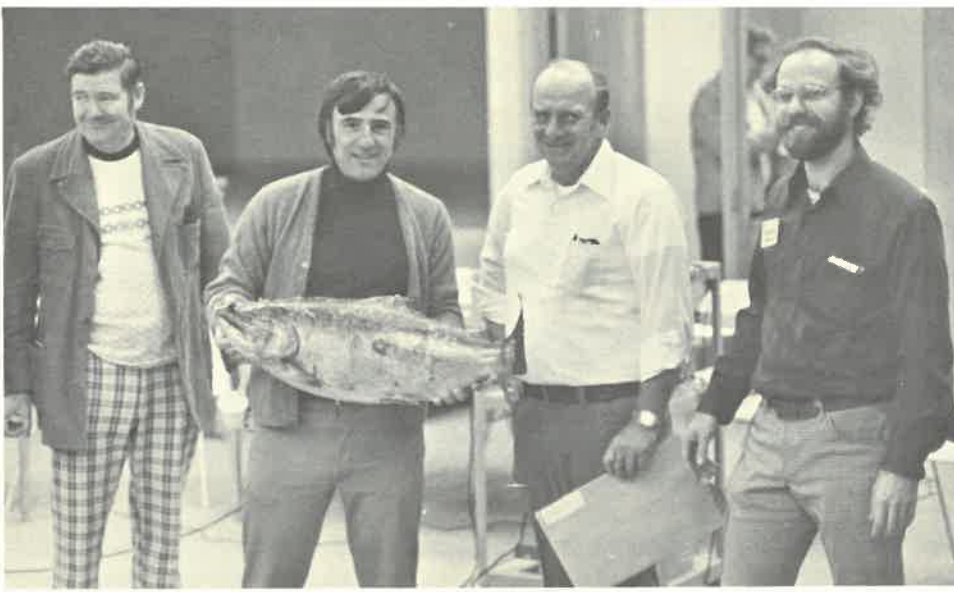
On September 14, 1976 things came to a screeching halt. The Commissioners of the New York State Departments of Health and Environmental Conservation issued a joint statement concerning the consumption and possession of Lake Ontario fish.

The Health Department ruling stated that the above-mentioned species should not be consumed, based on possible health effects associated with contamination by high levels of the manmade compound mirex.

The Department of Environmental Conservation ruling stated that the listed species should not be possessed. This was the means for implementing the Health Department ruling.

Salmon fishing, a contemporary gold rush for many lakeside communities, had been stopped for all except those fishermen who did not care if they could keep their catch.

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Smiles present at the Pulaski tour turned to frowns when fish such as the chinook salmon held by Niagara County Legislator Joseph Pillittere, could no longer be kept for eating. Hosts to the group were Oswego County Legislator Bruce Soule (to the right), article author Sandy Schuman (extreme right) and Bill Pearce, Great Lakes Fisheries Supervisor, DEC.

After the Ban

by Tommy L. Brown
Research Associate, Cornell

The 1976 salmon runs began around the first of September with the usual high angler interest. Businesses and communities were also generally enthusiastic, especially in Pulaski and the smaller communities along the Salmon River, New York's best salmon stream to date.

But the fish possession ban changed this scene. Any change of this magnitude is difficult to implement without resulting misunderstandings, rumors, and confusion. While community leaders, state agency and Advisory Service staff labored to help anglers and affected communities understand the nature of the chemical contaminants and the ruling, Sea Grant's research arm also responded. Investigations of the impact of the ban on Pulaski businesses could wait but questions requiring immediate attention (if they were to be answered at all) concerned the anglers currently fishing. How many were still fishing; were they coming from as great a distance as last year; and had they been given sufficient information on the new regulations?

By reinstating the Department of Environmental Conservation's fishermen census on the weekends of October 2-3, and October 9-10, 1976, during the peak of the season, it was felt a reliable estimate of the change from 1975, could be obtained under this strikingly new situation. We sampled the same sections of the river at the same time as they were sampled last year.

Substantially fewer anglers were fish-

ing the Salmon River than a year ago at the same time. We estimate 1,300 angler trips for these two weekends this fall, compared to 4,400 angler trips for the same period in 1975. Thus, this year's number of anglers was only 30 percent of last years. This held rather constant for the four days studied.

Although the number of anglers was substantially less, the distance anglers traveled increased slightly. In 1973, 67 percent of the fishermen came from nearby counties of Oswego, Oneida, or Onondaga. By 1975 only 47 percent of the fishermen came from these counties and 53 percent were from more distant areas. For the two 1976 weekends, only 38 percent were from this tri-county area. The proportion of out-of-state anglers, which had grown to nine percent in 1975, was up to 20 percent of the fishermen for the two weekends sampled in 1976. Over one-half of the 1976 anglers (51 percent) planned to spend at least one night in Pulaski.

Four out of every five anglers interviewed this fall were aware of the ban on possession of salmon and the subsequent modification allowing possession of trophy fish. This percentage held rather constant for both weekends, even though

it was only announced the Thursday before the first weekend of the study. Also, while there were a few complaints from anglers residing out-of-state or in distant areas of New York that Pulaski sporting goods stores had misrepresented the situation when the anglers called from home with questions, over three-fourths of out-of-state anglers were also aware of the new regulations. About two-thirds of all anglers felt that they had not been given adequate explanations of the ban and the reasons for it, however.

Most of those anglers (61 percent) who came to the Salmon River to fish indicated the ban and trophy regulations have had no affect on how often they fish. Thirty-one percent indicated they are fishing less, primarily because they can't eat the fish. A small number, seven percent, indicated they have increased their frequency of fishing after the ban because it is more enjoyable with fewer anglers present.

Comments and questions frequently voiced by anglers suggest the need for improving public trust in government and for agencies giving greater attention to informing citizens of policy decisions and the reasons underlying those decisions. Examples of comments frequently made by anglers were:

—The information on mirex and the possible health hazards have been presented by different sources and media with diverse viewpoints, so that it is difficult to know whom or what to believe.

—There are hidden political reasons for the ban on the possession of certain fish, rather than just a warning.

—If New York State has known of the presence of mirex and its potential health hazards for several years, why did the Department of Environmental Conservation wait until the middle of the salmonid fishing season to ban the possession of these fish?

—I am going to take and/or eat salmonids anyway because of little faith or low credibility in decision-makers' statements.

It seems obvious that a great deal of work lies ahead, both in solving these chemical contaminant problems and in reassessing fishing regulations and programs as progress is made or knowledge is gained. At least equally important is public awareness — keeping citizens informed of the reasons for policy changes and of the status of progress toward solving these problems.

200 MILE FISHERY PLANS EVOLVING

The Mid-Atlantic Fisheries Council, with its three New York members, is working to establish management plans for that region's fishery out to the new 200 mile limit. The extension of federal jurisdiction takes effect March 1, 1977 and this Council, together with others around our country's shores, have begun their task of establishing foreign and domestic quotas on important fisheries.

Dr. J. L. McHugh and Ms. Nancy Goell, two of the New York members on the Mid-Atlantic Council told us in mid-November the Councils had been active (four meetings had been held since their creation in the summer) and had laid a base for future activities. According to Dr. McHugh those first meetings dealt largely with housekeeping chores (where to locate the Council staff; how should Council staff be hired and so on) but decisions of major significance will of necessity be made in the next several months. Both Ms. Goell and Dr. McHugh, commented on the stature and moderate attitudes of the members, an important element in reaching agreement with the potentially conflicting interests represented on the Council.

One upcoming decision important to New Yorkers seeking fish beyond New York's three-mile boundary are questions of whether the United States should remain a member of ICNAF (International Commission for the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries), beyond the present December 31, 1976 expiration date. Some Council members feel the United States should no longer be a signatory to the agreement, the new law

taking that responsibility for management. Others feel it imperative the United States remain a member of ICNAF, at least for a year, to insure some regulation of the fishery between January 1 and the March 1 initiation date of implementation of the extended jurisdiction legislation.



Fisheries management plans for waters newly under United States control concern recreational as well as commercial fishermen.

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Results were immediate.

The shores of popular streams looked barren compared to the crowding of last year. Merchants reported severe decreases in fishing related trade.

Initial reaction among merchants and sportsmen oscillated between disbelief, rage and melancholy. There now seems to be a growing feeling that the problem of mirex contamination is real, although the handling of the problem by the agencies involved is severely questioned.

One reason for the skepticism is Canada's failure to enact a similar ban. The two countries have come to separate decisions despite working with the same scientific evidence. Many New York

officials have expressed surprise and chagrin that Canada did not follow their lead.

The mirex induced tailspin of the developing salmonid fishery is a painfully local and expensive example of the price often paid for injudicious use of toxic chemicals. Mirex and PCBs weren't the first contaminants of New York sportfish. Unfortunately, they likely will not be the last.

Communities are struggling to adapt to the ban. A recent modification allows each angler to keep a total of three fish of the banned species for trophy purposes only. Other modifications based on size of fish and geographic origin of fish might be possible as more data be-

Ms. Goell indicated the Councils were interested in insuring opportunity exists for fishermen throughout the region to comment on proposed plans as they are evolved. The first such opportunity in New York occurred December 2nd in Centereach where the environmental impact statements for preliminary management plans were discussed. The plans included those for red and silver hake, squid, Atlantic mackerel, and herring.

Future issues of Coastline will attempt to keep commercial and sportfishermen interested in management of these fisheries, abreast of Council actions.

comes available. In the meantime, many salmon related community activities are going on as scheduled and trophy fishing has built up.

Lake Ontario communities and sportsmen have been hit hard. Many are now rallying for sensible solution of the mirex problem and prevention of similar events in the future.

Note: An information sheet on mirex in Lake Ontario fish is now available through the Great Lakes offices listed on the back. Also, a 28-minute video tape that discusses the ban on consumption of Lake Ontario fish is now available. Contact the Oswego office listed on the back for details.

fish are, how to catch and cook them, what's their life cycle; where can I buy things, eat, sleep?

And of course, the over-riding question: what's the future of the fishery?

UPDATE

David Chase, Brian Doyle and Gay Hawk have joined the Advisory Service staff as replacements for William Walters, Roger Allbee and Linda Camp. Mr. Chase commenced work in the Cooperative Extension Office at 246 Griffing Avenue, Riverhead, December 1. He is a graduate of Texas A&M and Cornell. A former fruit farmer in upstate New York, Dave also has training in seafood processing and culturing of shellfish. His efforts will include educational programs with commercial fishermen and those in processing, and marketing of seafood products.

Brian Doyle, a graduate of the SUNY, Stony Brook assumed leadership of the Brockport Advisory Service in early September. Brian expects to continue that office's educational efforts on

When will the hatchery be built? When can we expect a lake fishery? What are our problems with lampreys, PCB's, Mirex? People left the tour to return to their own communities willing and able to resolve the problems in the developing

coastal erosion and control, as well as providing leadership for upstate Advisory Service efforts dealing with Coastal Zone Management.

Gay Hawk's January 1 arrival will bring to Sea Grant her experience as the Public Information Officer at Urbana College in Ohio. A graduate of Kent State's journalism program, Gay has been active in a number of professional communication groups and has been responsible for publications and other media activities while at Urbana College. Coastlines shouldn't be reaching you at this time of year, but with Linda Camp's departure as editor, this issue got bogged down. Our apologies, that problem should be resolved with Gay Hawk's arrival!

Mrs. Beatrice Schermerhorn told the State Legislative hearing in Port Washington in October of problems experienced by St. Lawrence River marina

fishery.

Three days after this "Pulaski Tour," the process of preparing for the impact of the fishery was interrupted by the worst disaster yet to hit the Lake Ontario recreational fishery.

operators following an oil spill this summer. Mrs. Schermerhorn, who with her husband Bill operates Schermerhorn's Boat Sales in Hammond, suggested means of improving the State's ability to respond and assist in such matters. Mrs. Schermerhorn is a member of the committee set up by Steve Brown, Advisory Service Specialist at Potsdam, to develop information to aid affected individuals.

Inexpensive, temporary, protective devices for harbors remains of high interest in New York as evidenced by 20 western New Yorkers who attended a tour of Dunkird's floating breakwater in October. Bruce DeYoung, Regional Specialist in Fredonia, noted the groups interest not only in Dunkirk's experience but that of Rhode Island's as communicated by Neil Ross, Regional Recreation Specialist at the University of Rhode Island (that State's Sea Grant College

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