

Social and Economic Impacts of Catch-and-Release Fishing on the Hudson River: A Workshop

Office of the Hudson River Foundation

**June 12, 1996
9:30 a.m.**

In March 1994, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) prepared a Site Review and Update for Hudson River PCBs under a cooperative agreement with the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) for the Hudson River PCB site. This site is a National Priorities List (NPL) site consisting of the Hudson River between Hudson Falls in Washington County and the Federal Dam at Troy in Rensselaer County. The report recognized that the site poses a public health hazard primarily from possible exposure to PCBs through consumption of fish.

The concentration of PCBs in fish is greatest in the 40 miles of river between Hudson Falls (Washington County) and Troy (Rensselaer County) where fishing was prohibited from 1976 until 1995. However, many fish species from the 40 miles between Troy and Catskill (Greene County) also have quite elevated PCB concentrations. Sportfishing is currently permitted throughout the Hudson River, but between Hudson Falls and Troy fish must be returned to the river (an enforced catch-and-release fishery). NYSDOH advises anglers to eat no fish from the Hudson River between Hudson Falls and Catskill and continues to work closely with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) to inform anglers about this and other advisories. A fishing license is required to fish in the Hudson upstream of the Federal dam at Troy, but no license is required to fish in the tidal portion of the Hudson downstream of Troy.

A 1991-92 survey of 336 anglers on the Hudson River (Barclay, 1993) found that 72% of anglers eat their catch or reported giving it to others who were believed to be eating the fish. Consumption behavior differed dramatically depending on ethnicity, age and where the fish were caught (upper, mid, lower Hudson) and to a lesser extent on income. However, no information was summarized regarding the kinds and sizes of fish caught or the frequency that they were eaten.

NYSDEC has extensive data on the PCB concentration in most gamefish species from the Hudson River, but little quantitative data are available regarding what and how many fish are being caught and eaten. Thus, the actual exposure to PCBs from eating Hudson River fish is not well- documented because little or no recreational catch statistics are available, particularly for the most contaminated portions of the Hudson River fisheries.

The purpose of this workshop will be to outline a research agenda and/or a study or series of studies to quantitatively estimate the commercial and recreational catch of various fish species from the Hudson River downstream of Hudson Falls and to develop a strategy for securing or sharing funding for these studies. With coordinated planning and implementation, these studies

could produce data that will be useful for a number of important objectives to the Hudson River:

- Assessing the public's exposure to PCBs from eating fish from the Hudson River,
- Fisheries management,
- Natural resources damage assessments, and
- Assessing the effectiveness of health advisories and catch-and-release regulations to reduce exposure to contaminants in fish.

Workshop Invitees

Mark Bain, Cornell University
Jerry Barnhart, NYS DEC
Betsy Blair, Hudson River National
Estuarine Research Reserve
Sharon Brooks, NYS DEC
David Chapman, NOAA
Gordon Colvin, NYS DEC
Clifford Creech, NYS DEC
Frank Csulak, NMFS
Herb Doig, NYS DEC
Frank Dunston, NYS DEC
Fran Dunwell, NYS DEC
Wayne Elliot, NYS DEC
Clay Hiles, Hudson River Foundation
Ed Horn, NYS DOH
Carol Jones, NOAA
Barbara Knuth, Cornell University
Bill Ledwitz, NYS DEC
Cara Lee, Scenic Hudson
Kim McKown, NYS DEC
Andy Mele, Clearwater
Marian Olesen, US EPA
Anne Rychlenski, US EPA
Steve Sanford, NYS DEC
Bob Schmidt, Hudsonia/Bard College
Anne Secord, US FWS
Nancy Steinberg, Hudson River
Foundation
Dennis Suszkowski, Hudson River
Foundation
Doug Tomchuk, US EPA
John Waldman, Hudson River Foundation
Kimberly Williams, MSRC SUNY Stony
Brook and Hudson River
Foundation
Byron Young, NYS DEC