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Minnesota and Wisconsin disagree on threat level of IPN fish virus

But federal official says it's a concern

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Minnesota and Wisconsin view differently the threat of infectious pancreatic necrosis to their fish populations.

When the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources mistakenly allowed a shipment of trout from a Wisconsin hatchery into the state May 28, 2008, DNR officials followed an aggressive plan to rid the pond of fish, fearing the disease could spread into the wild.

IPN is on a Minnesota list of "emergency" diseases that require swift action to contain them, said Roy Johannes, DNR aquaculture specialist.

Wisconsin has a different take on the virus.

Myron Kebus is Wisconsin's fish-health veterinarian. He said IPN is not listed as an emergency disease in Wisconsin because some private and state hatcheries already have it. There is no prohibition on stocking fish with IPN in Wisconsin, he said.

"I haven't seen any documentation of IPN contributing to fish kills in Wisconsin," Kebus said. "There have been hatcheries and farms who have it, and even those farms have not reported significant mortalities."

A more impartial view might come from Becky Lasee, director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's La Crosse (Wis.) Fish Health Center, which monitors fish diseases across the country.

IPN is a "serious pathogen," she said, adding that trout and salmon are vulnerable to the virus, which attacks the pancreas and can cause stomach bloating and other hemorrhaging.

If the virus were discovered in Minnesota, "yes, I would be very concerned," Lasee

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said, especially if it were found in waters connected to Lake Superior, which has vulnerable trout and salmon populations.

When Minnesota DNR officials realized they might have let in a shipment of fish exposed to IPN, "we needed to stop it as fast as we could," Johannes said.

"We have lots of opportunities for fishing (in Minnesota). As part of providing a good-quality product, fish health is key," Johannes said.

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