

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

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FUNDS TO BE SOUGHT FOR HEAVY METALS POLLUTION SURVEY OF THE GREAT LAKES

The Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife will seek funds to provide for a complete investigation of the effects of heavy metals, including mercury, on the fish and wildlife in the Great Lakes and its tributaries, the Department of the Interior reported today.

The investigation was ordered on April 21 by Secretary of the Interior Walter J. Hickel and will be conducted under the direction of the Great Lakes Fisheries Laboratory at Ann Arbor, Michigan.

"Intensive study is needed to identify sources of contamination, to determine the effects of this pollution on fish and wildlife, and to learn ways of eliminating this hazard from the environment," said Assistant Secretary Leslie L. Glasgow, who heads Interior's programs for fish, wildlife, parks, and marine resources.

"We do not know how widespread this contamination is, and it is urgent that we find out," he added.

Late in 1969, fish taken from Canadian waters were reported by the Canadian Government to contain mercury residues of 5 to 10 parts per million.

The maximum allowable level is 0.5 parts per million in Canada and the United States. As a result, more than 700,000 pounds of fish were confiscated and destroyed. Since then, various restrictions on commercial fishing and sports fishing in Lake St. Clair and Lake Erie have been instituted.

Canada estimates that 250,000 pounds of mercury are deposited in the Great Lakes by Canadian industry each year. The United States share may exceed 500,000 pounds annually.

Mercury and other heavy metals are exceedingly persistent in nature, Assistant Secretary Glasgow pointed out, remaining perhaps 50 to 100 years in stream and lake bottoms. He said means of removal are still unknown.

"In addition to the harm heavy metal contamination does to fish and the subsequent losses to commercial and sport fishermen, consumption of contaminated fish may have long-term detrimental effects on human health," Assistant Secretary Glasgow said.

He indicated that the research, while concentrating on the effects on fish, waterfowl, and other wildlife, would be complementary to research of public health and pollution control agencies.

Assistant Secretary Glasgow added that the Bureau has been working closely with Congressman Marvin L. Esch of Michigan and other Members of Congress who have expressed great concern in the future development of environmental research in this area.

In addition to ordering intensive research on the effects of heavy metals on fish and wildlife, Secretary Hickel also took other action on the mercury problem last week.

He called for a reconvened enforcement conference on Lake Erie in Detroit, followed by enforcement workshops in Toledo, Cleveland, Lorain, Sandusky, and Ashtabula, Ohio; Erie, Pennsylvania; and Lackawanna, New York.

He assigned his special investigative task force to obtain firsthand up-to-date data on the entire water pollution problem in the Lake Erie watershed.

He directed the Federal Water Quality Administration to identify and prepare a list of all toxic substances now being discharged in waters throughout the United States.

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