DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife

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MERCURY RESIDUES DISCOVERED IN WATERFOWL

The Interior Department's Bureau of Sport Fisheries and Wildlife (BSFW) announced today that mercury has been discovered in all 26 ducks taken as samples from North Dakota and Michigan's Lake St. Clair-Detroit River area. Residues ranged from 0.038 to 2.26 parts per million (ppm) in breast muscles and from 0.217 to 7.5 ppm in livers.

Highest levels were found in shovelers from North Dakota. Since shovelers are aquatic feeders, the findings indicate that mercury probably is getting into the wetlands they frequent, but it is not known whether it is picked up locally or on their migration or wintering areas.

A major source of mercury contamination for waterfowl, Bureau authorities believe, may be treated seeds. Seed manufacturers have used mercurial compounds for years to protect vegetable, grain and fruit seeds from fungi.

The Michigan Conservation Department has analyzed muscle samples of 39 scaup. Mercury levels ranged from 0.01 to 1.76 ppm and averaged 0.65 ppm. Other analyses are underway by the Canadian Wildlife Service.

Lake St. Clair is believed to be one of the most mercury-polluted areas in the country. It was there that the mercury crisis exploded in March when the Canadians found large doses of the chemical in fish.

The Bureau is planning to expand its mercury analysis effort for waterfowl to other parts of the nation as quickly as possible. Its biologists stress that not enough research has been done to know at this time how potentially menacing mercury is to waterfowl.

Scientists at the Bureau's Patuxent Wildlife Research Center in Laurel, Md., have implicated mercury, however, as a cause of death in America's national bird, the bald eagle.

Mercury and other heavy metals are exceedingly persistent in nature, remaining perhaps 50 to 100 years in stream and lake bottoms. Means of removal are still unknown, but BSFW and other agencies are seeking answers.

Following is a rundown of the Bureau's mercury analyses performed to date for waterfowl:

North Dakota
(Stutsman County)

Shoveler (8)
Breast Muscle: 0.168 to 2.26 ppm; Liver: 0.53 to 7.5 ppm

Pintail (5)
Breast Muscle: 0.139 to 0.9 ppm; Liver: 0.228 to 2.88 ppm

North Dakota
(Barnes County)

Pintail (3)
Breast Muscle: 0.038 to 0.16 ppm; Liver: 0.217 to 0.24 ppm

Lake St. Clair-Detroit River area, Michigan

Mallard (7)
Breast Muscle: 0.10 to 0.80 ppm; Liver (4): 0.23 to 1.4 ppm

Blue-Winged Teal (3)
Breast Muscle: 0.10 to 0.18 ppm; Liver (1): 0.26 ppm

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