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Local lakes, reservoirs now a little safer

Families fishing in the Yuba and Bear watersheds now have easy access to information about which fish are safe to eat at over 28 lakes and reservoirs.

On July 11, 19 volunteers organized by the South Yuba River Citizens League, The Sierra Fund and the Wolf Creek Community Alliance traveled to popular fishing locations and posted 98 fish consumption advisory signs.

This marks the first time these state-issued fish consumption guidelines have ever been posted at these water bodies. Anglers now have the information they need to make smart decisions on what fish are safe to eat and feed to their families.

Volunteers gathered at Scaman’s Lodge in Nevada City to learn why these advisories are important. Presentations from The Sierra Fund explained the introduction of mercury into our waterways from historic gold mining, and how it accumulates in fish. Nevada County Environmental Health Director Amy Irani spoke at the event as well.

"It is an honor to be here to support these community groups and volunteers as they work to get this important information out to the public," Irani said.

The information contained in the fish consumption advisory, issued by California’s Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, is important to anglers in the Sierra Nevada region because of historic mining activity that has led to elevated levels of mercury in local fish.

Of the more than 26 million pounds of mercury that was brought to this region for use in processing gold during California’s Gold Rush, approximately 10-30 percent was lost to the environment and remains in local watersheds and ecosystems.

Sport fish consumption is likely the single most significant route by which people are exposed to mercury that remains in the Sierra Nevada foothills from legacy mining activity.

Some popular sport fish such as bass and brown trout can contain the highest levels of mercury, due to the way mercury enters and accumulates in the longer lived and predatory fish. OEHHA recommends limited or no consumption of these fish for children and women of childbearing age.

Rainbow trout, another popular sport fish, is generally one of the healthiest options for eating locally caught fish.

The Sierra Fund plans to survey anglers now that the advisories are in place to learn about the effectiveness of the new signs.

"We were honored by the team of volunteers who showed up to help us with this long-neglected public health issue, and hope to repeat and expand this effort next year," said Kerry Morse, Program Director at the Sierra Fund.
“With the notes and information gathered by the volunteers, we will be able to continue to refine how we do these postings and deliver this valuable information to anglers for years to come.”

The advisories were posted at Rollins Reservoir, Englebright Lake, Combie Lake, Camp Far West Reservoir, Black Swan preserve, Sardine Lakes and other Tahoe National Forest locations in the Gold Lakes Basin, Bowman Lake, Bullards Bar, Scotts Flat, Hirschman’s Pond, Lost Mine Lake, Fuller Lake, Rucker Lake, the Grouse Ridge area, Milton Reservoir, Jackson Meadows, Lake Faucherie and others.

For anyone who would like to assist with this effort, there is still an opportunity to participate.

If you are going camping or hiking in the Bear or Yuba watersheds this summer, contact The Sierra Fund to pick up an advisory sign to bring with you.

Additionally, to sign up to receive information about next year’s poster day, contact The Sierra Fund Outreach Coordinator Kelsey Westfall at 530-265-8454, ext. 217 or kelsey.westfall@sierrafund.org.

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