

Pilon, Janet

Subject: Can we please do a better job of telling people about the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish downstream of the Hamilton International Airport?

From: Joseph Minor

Sent: October 23, 2020 4:00 PM

To: clerk@hamilton.ca

Subject: Can we please do a better job of telling people about the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish downstream of the Hamilton International Airport?

October 10, 2020

To: The Mayor and All members of Hamilton City Council c/o the Clerk, The Ontario Ministry of the Environment Conservation and Parks, The Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry, Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority

Can we please do a better job of telling people about the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish downstream of the Hamilton International Airport?

Again, I want to start by saying that I remain very thankful to be living in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. We have it really good here, thanks in no small part to the hard work being put in by politicians, government officials, and public and private sector workers. While we are all under stress due to Covid-19, I think the response to Covid-19 here has been pretty good. Please keep up the good work by keeping things running...

Unfortunately, people do not usually take the time to write just to say “Good Job”. They usually write when they want something done better. That is also the case with this letter. I think we are failing to properly notify the public about the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish downstream of the Hamilton International Airport.

Context:

The year: 2011

Reference: The Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish, 2011-2012 edition

The 2011 edition of the Guide to Eating Ontario Sport Fish added a new category of chemicals contaminating fish: PerFluorinated Compounds (PFCs). The first ever guidelines in both Ontario and Canada for PFCs in fish were created due to the unusually high levels of PFCs (mostly PerFluoroOctane Sulfonate (PFOS)) in turtles and fish downstream of the Hamilton International Airport.

While fish are significantly contaminated with PFOS way down the Welland River downstream from the Hamilton International Airport, I will be focusing this discussion on the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish that live between the Hamilton International Airport and the dam at the downstream edge of Binbrook Reservoir.

The 2011 Guide listed two locations with highly contaminated fish: “Binbrook Reservoir” and “Welland River Upstream of Binbrook Reservoir”. The latter location is about where the Welland River crosses Highway 6.

“Do not eat” advisories for highly contaminated fish in 2011 were:

Welland River Upstream of Binbrook Reservoir:

- 1) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat carp that are 14 inches or longer.

Binbrook Reservoir:

- 1) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat largemouth bass that are 8 inches or longer.
- 2) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat smallmouth bass that are 8 inches or longer.
- 3) Males 15 and over and females over childbearing age should not eat smallmouth bass that are 16 inches or longer.
- 4) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat carp that are 14 inches or longer.
- 5) Males 15 and over and females over childbearing age should not eat carp that are 18 inches or longer.
- 6) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat brown bullhead that are 12 inches or longer.
- 7) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat channel catfish that are 12 inches or longer.

The year: 2013

Six months in Chile teaches me about caring for the well being of visitors and newcomers.

I had the good fortune to be able to live in Santiago, Chile for 6 months in 2013. Soon after arriving I decided to go birdwatching at the southern edge of the city. I took the Metro (subway) to the end of the line, and then walked through the commune of Puente Alto to the actual Puente Alto across the Rio Maipo. Once at the bridge I turned west and walked along the edge of the river valley and followed a trail down through a gravel pit.

Important context: When I go birdwatching I look odd. So odd that on multiple occasions I have been detained and questioned by the police while birdwatching.

On this day, because I was looking up at the birds I stepped in a pile of fecal matter (species uncertain). While I was trying to clean off my shoe with a stick, a man comes running out of a house that was across the street from the gravel pit. There was a torrent of Spanish, but the only parts I understood were: “No es zona turista” and “Bandidos con pistolas”. When he saw that I was not understanding, he switched to English: “You cannot stay here. Robbers come here to practice shooting their guns. They will kill you. You must get in your car and drive away now.”

I told him that I had come on foot from the Metro station. Apparently I was very lucky, because he said the walking path I chose took me through a high crime area. “You wait here.” He then went to a neighbor’s house, borrowed the neighbor’s car, and then drove me all the way back to the Metro station.

He may have saved my life. All he knew about me was that I was odd looking and smelly, and he still went way out of his way to keep me out of trouble.

On three other occasions while I was in Santiago, someone who I did not know came up to me and said “No es zona turista”. Two of them did not speak a word of English. To all I said “Muchas gracias” and immediately back tracked way my way out of the area. None of these four people had anything to gain by helping me, and they may even have faced repercussions from the robbers who were waiting to rob me.

It is my intention to repay the extraordinary kindness of Chileans by telling visitors to Canada about any hazards they might face while here. For example, if they were to eat the fish they catch while fishing downstream of the Hamilton International Airport.

The year: 2017

Reference: Guide to Eating Ontario Fish, 2017-2018 edition

It has been six years since the 2011 Guide designated many of the fish downstream of the Hamilton International Airport as highly contaminated “do not eat” fish. The common name for the group of chemicals involved has been changed from “PFCs” to “PerFlouroAlkyl and PolyFlouroAlkyl Substances” (PFAS). But the dominant contaminant is still the specific chemical PFOS.

“Do not eat” advisories for highly contaminated fish are (these remain the most current data for this location):

Binbrook Reservoir:

- 1) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat black crappie that are 6 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 2) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat brown bullhead that are 14 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with mercury.
- 3) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat channel catfish that are 12 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 4) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat carp that are 12 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 5) Males 15 and over and females over childbearing age should not eat carp that are 22 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 6) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat largemouth bass that are 6 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 7) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat northern pike that are 24 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 8) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat smallmouth bass that are 8 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 9) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat white crappie that are 10 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.

The year: 2020

Reference: Guide to Eating Ontario Fish, 2020 online edition

<https://www.ontario.ca/environment-and-energy/eating-ontario-fish>

The newest “Do not eat” advisories for highly contaminated fish are:

Welland River Upstream of Binbrook Reservoir:

- 1) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat brown bullhead that are 6 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 2) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat carp that are 8 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 3) Males 15 and over and females over childbearing age should not eat carp that are 22 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 4) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat green sunfish that are 6 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.
- 5) Women of child-bearing age and children under 15 should not eat northern pike that are 10 inches or longer because they are highly contaminated with PFAS.

The date: September 28, 2020

Many of the fish downstream of the Hamilton International Airport are so highly contaminated that they are designated “do not eat” fish. This has been the case for over 9 years, and it is likely that there will be highly contaminated “do not eat” fish for many more years to come.

A proper consideration of the best long-term public education program to make sure people in the future do not eat the highly contaminated fish is long overdue. Of particular concern to me are newcomers to the area who might be unaware about the bizarre contamination that has occurred here.

On Sept. 28th, I took a drive from the Airport down the contaminated upper Welland River all the way down to the dam at the Binbrook Conservation Area. I wanted to see if there was any information about the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish.

There was nothing...zip...zilch...nada. Nowhere was there even a hint about the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish.

From Highway 6 all the way down to and including the upper entrance to the Binbrook Conservation Area not only is there zero information about the highly contaminated fish, there is also zero information about fishing.

At the Binbrook Conservation Area entrance on Tyneside Road there are six signs covering 15 topics. Some topics are repeated on multiple signs. There is no mention of the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish. There is no mention of fishing at all. (In contrast there is another sign that says “No Hunting unless posted otherwise”.) There is contact information on the signs for two governmental authorities (NPCA, City of Hamilton) and one NGO. Nowhere is there contact information to obtain information about the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish. Could we please find space on one of these signs, or add a seventh sign, that says:

“Many fish here are highly contaminated

For more information:

Guide to Eating Ontario Fish

at www.Ontario.ca/fishguide

or call 1-800-820-2716”

I then proceeded on to the main entrance of Binbrook Conservation Area off Harrison Road. I paid the day use fee and entered the CA.

Please note that the area behind the main entrance gate is a very small fraction of the total fishable area downstream of the Hamilton International Airport that contains highly contaminated “do not eat” fish.

There are many signs behind the gate, but nowhere was there any mention of the highly contaminated “do not eat” fish.

I did find signs that said “Catch and Release Policy in Effect”. Here is a photo of one of the signs:

In case the photo does not copy in the letter, here is the full text of the sign:

“Niagara Peninsula Conservation Authority

Catch and Release Policy In Effect

In an effort to sustain a healthy fish population at Binbrook Conservation Area, please be advised that a Catch and Release Policy for all fish is in full effect.

Please be sure to follow additional Binbrook Fishing Rules and all provincial fishing regulations.

For more information, visit www.npca/parks/binbrook

@BinbrookCA 905-692-3228”

This sign is “honesty challenged” in that it fails to disclose the real reason that all fish should be released. If the fish were not highly contaminated, and the goal was just “to sustain a healthy fish population” then the policy should ask people to retain and kill exotic invasive species (e.g., carp). But because the carp over 12” are so highly contaminated, there is no accessible place to dispose of the highly contaminated carcasses. (They could be put in a properly constructed toxic waste disposal site, but that is highly unlikely to happen.)

While I was taking the picture of the sign, there was a man at the boat launch preparing to go out and fish in his “belly boat”. He was targeting crappie, but mentioned others had been having good luck catching walleye near the dam. He

said that he was a long time resident and that he knew about the contamination from the Airport. He also mentioned that one of the reasons he liked to fish from the belly boat was that it got him away from the shore fishermen. He said that when he fished from shore and caught a fish, the other shore fishermen would ask him for the fish that he caught. The request was something like: "Since you are just going to let it go, can I have it?". He said that he always let it go, explaining the "Catch and Release Policy". But he was also certain that some of the shore fishermen are keeping fish to take home and eat.

Since people are still catching and eating the fish, perhaps the effectiveness of the "Catch and Release" signs could be improved by adding:

"Many fish here are highly contaminated

For more information:

Guide to Eating Ontario Fish

at www.Ontario.ca/fishguide

or call 1-800-820-2716"

The date: October 10, 2020

There is still no (and I mean NO) mention of the highly contaminated "do not eat" fish to be found anywhere along the contaminated upper Welland River between the Airport and the Binbrook Dam. I was wondering if any of the contact information mentioned on the "Catch and Release" sign (above) would point to information about the highly contaminated "do not eat" fish.

The sign says to follow "all provincial fishing regulations" but does not give contact information. Even if it did, the "fishing regulations" (from the OMNRF) do not cover fish contamination levels (which are from the OMECP).

The contact information given on the sign is:

"For more information, visit www.npca/parks/binbrook"

I visited this website, and despite several references to fishing, there is NO mention of the highly contaminated "do not eat" fish. There is also NO mention of the dominant contaminant (PFOS), or either of its chemical group names (PFCs or PFAS).

I am particularly concerned for newcomers to the area who may be unaware of the unusual contamination that has occurred here. Many are likely to eat highly contaminated "do not eat" fish in the future UNLESS something is done to improve public education about this problem.

It has been over nine years since we were first told about the highly contaminated "do not eat" fish living downstream of the Hamilton International Airport. But people are still eating the fish.

Can we please do a better job of telling people about the highly contaminated "do not eat" fish downstream of the Hamilton International Airport?

Sincerely,

Joseph Minor, PhD