

St. Marys River Area of Concern

NEWSLETTER

RESTRICTIONS ON FISH CONSUMPTION

WHAT IS AN AREA OF CONCERN? (AOC)

Areas of Concern (AOCs) are locations that were identified under the 1987 *Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement* as having experienced high levels of environmental harm.

WHAT IS A BENEFICIAL USE IMPAIRMENT? (BUI)

A list of 14 important indicators of ecosystem health. The impairment status of each of these BUIs reflects the ability of humans and other species to experience the Great Lakes without any negative effects. This month's newsletter focuses on the Restrictions on Fish Consumption BUI.

WHAT IS A REFERENCE SITE?

To obtain a better understanding of ecosystem health in the St. Marys River, we compare the data with nearby waterbodies which are referred to as "reference sites".

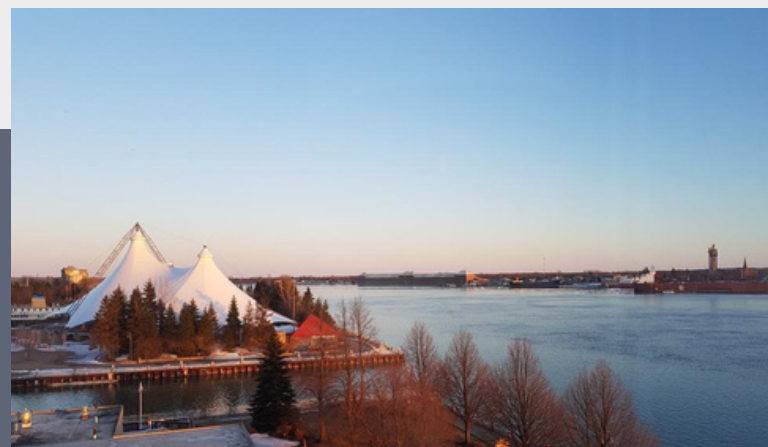
Why is the St. Marys River an Area of Concern?

Due to historical discharges of pollutants from local industry and municipalities the St. Marys River is one of 43 AOCs in the Great Lakes. There are 14 BUIs used to determine the health of the Area of Concern. Currently 6 of these BUIs remain impaired for the Canadian side of the St. Marys River. Restrictions on Fish Consumption have been considered *impaired* since its designation in the 1992 Remedial Action Plan (RAP) report. Mercury and polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) contamination resulted in elevated fish consumption advisories for a variety of local fish within the St. Marys River. A recent assessment of the *Restrictions*

on Fish Consumption BUI was published by the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks and the University of Toronto in 2020. This report outlined the monitoring of three contaminants of concern (mercury, PCB and furans) which showed substantial improvement over the past 30+ years. The results also highlighted that the current fish consumption restrictions are mild, and when compared to other non-AOC reference sites the restrictions are typically similar. These findings support the delisting criteria to re-designate the *Restrictions on fish consumption* BUI to unimpaired. Once all of the current impaired BUIs have been restored, the St. Marys River will no longer be considered an area of concern.

DELISTING CRITERIA:

The *Restrictions on Fish Consumption* BUI will no longer be considered impaired when the fish consumption advisories for the St. Marys River are no more restrictive than advisories in nearby reference sites.



COMMUNITY FISH CONSUMPTION SURVEY

Before the *Restrictions on Fish consumption* BUI can be re-designated the final step is to conduct a community fish consumption survey.

This Survey will help to better define what may be considered a "non-restrictive" diet of fish from the St. Marys River.

The survey data will be used by the St. Marys River Remedial Action Plan Committee to develop a report on the *Restriction of Fish Consumption* BUI and evaluate its status.

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*For more information on what fish are
safe to eat visit Ontario.ca/Fishguide*