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RESTORING THE RIVER

Official Newsletter of The St. Marys River Remedial Action Plan

Part 6: Restrictions on Fish Consumption BUI

Traditional Cooking Methods

For many generations, communities around the Great Lakes region have relied on native fish species like lake whitefish, walleye, trout, and perch for sustenance and different cultural traditions. This is also the case when it comes to the St. Marys River rapids located in Sault Ste. Marie, a historical location essential for travel, trade, and life. Indigenous peoples harvested these fish using spears, and nets. Fish would often gather in large numbers at the rapids during spawning runs.

Traditional preparation methods vary depending on location, types of fish caught, and who caught them. The most popular method would be smoking them over cedarwood fires, roasting over open flames, or drying them out for winter storage. Fish would also be incorporated into other meals such as stews with wild rice and fresh herbs, reflecting connections between natural cycles, seasons and traditional diets.

Over time, a European influence was introduced, which impacted how fish was prepared. The European influence introduced baking, frying, and methods like fish boils, which became quite common across the Great Lakes region. Today, regional favourites include smoked whitefish and grilled walleye. Though cooking styles have evolved, fish remain central to the identity, health, and heritage of local communities.



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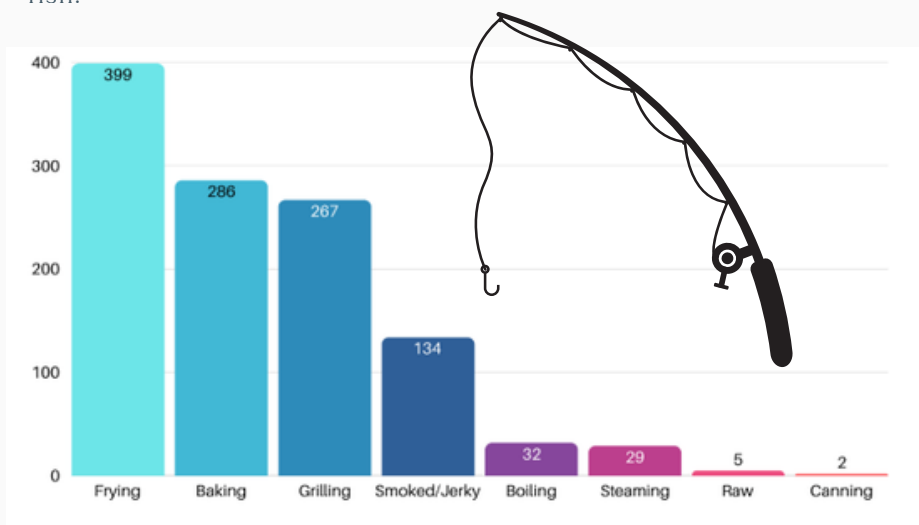
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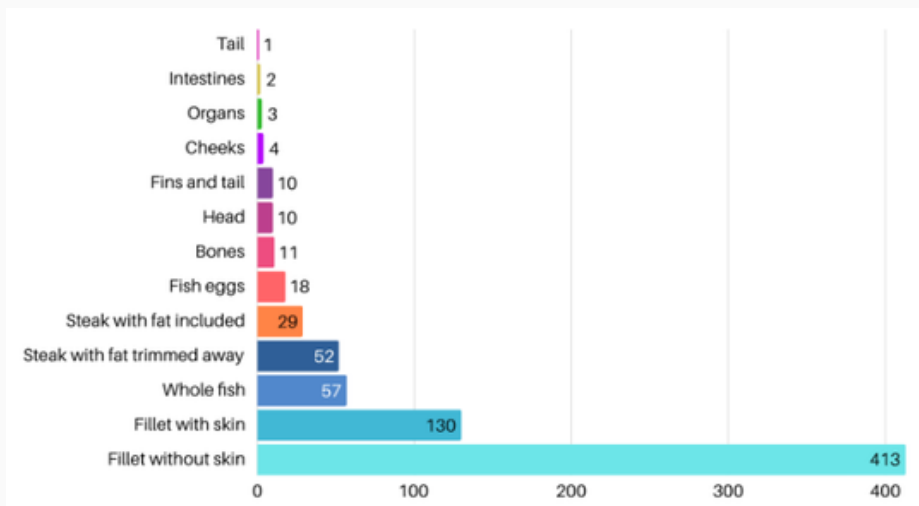
Community Fish Consumption Survey

How do people in Algoma cook their fish?

The majority of survey respondents (N=399, 59%) prefer to fry their fish. Certain toxins – including PCBs and dioxins and furans that drive advisories for the St. Marys River – accumulate in the fat of fish.



The graph below reveals which parts of the fish are most commonly consumed by survey respondents, from fillets to whole catches. Understanding eating habits helps us better connect food traditions with health advisories and environmental restoration.



What Are The Most Consumed Fish?



Based on the Fish Consumption Survey, the most commonly consumed species from the St. Marys River include Lake Whitefish, Walleye, and Rainbow Trout, all of which hold cultural, culinary, and recreational value in the region.

While these species are highly sought after, the majority of respondents reported eating them infrequently, with most consuming fewer than four meals per month. These patterns reflect both personal preferences and the influence of past consumption advisories. To explore more detailed findings, check out Part 5 of our newsletter series.



Guide to Eating Ontario Fish

In order to minimize exposure to harmful toxins it is important to make informed decisions by following consumption advice provided in the MECP's Guide to Eating Ontario Fish. The guide provides information on the type and amount of fish that are safe to eat.

Nearly 60% of survey respondents (N=399) reported frying as their preferred method of preparing fish. However, the Guide to Eating Ontario Fish acknowledges that contaminants such as PCBs, dioxins, and furans (which have influenced fish consumption advisories in the St. Marys River) tend to accumulate in fatty tissue. Choosing cooking techniques that allow fat to drain away, like grilling or broiling, can help reduce exposure to these toxins

Beyond how fish is cooked, preparation techniques also play a key role in lowering contaminant exposure. Removing the skin and carefully trimming away fatty areas before cooking can significantly reduce the levels of toxins like PCBs and dioxins, which tend to concentrate in those tissues.

Herb-Crusted Baked Fish Recipe

Ingredients

- 4 skinless, fat-trimmed fish fillets (lake whitefish, walleye, or rainbow trout)
- 2 tbsp olive oil or canola oil
- 1 tbsp lemon juice
- 1 tsp garlic powder
- 1 tsp dried dill or parsley
- ½ tsp black pepper
- ¼ tsp salt (optional)
- Lemon wedges for serving



Preparation

1. Preheat oven to 400°F (200°C).
2. Place fish fillets on a wire rack over a baking sheet.
3. In a small bowl, mix oil, lemon juice, and seasonings.
4. Brush mixture over fillets.
5. Bake 12–15 minutes or until fish flakes easily with fork.
6. Serve with steamed veggies or wild rice.





Upcoming Projects

Now that we've explored the traditional cooking methods , top cooking methods from people within our community, and the top cooking methods as suggested by the Guide to Eating Ontario Fish we're looking ahead to what comes next.

Our upcoming newsletter will be the final one in this Fish Consumption BUI Series! This episode will define what “delisting” for a BUI means, and why it’s important. Along with what still needs to happen before the Fish Consumption BUI can be officially redesignated.

We’ve got community events on the way! Keep an eye out for dates, and if you have a local event you’d like us to attend, we’d love to be part of it.



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