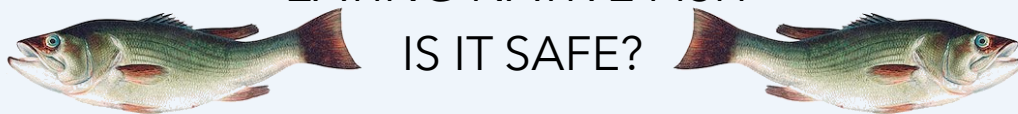




~EATING NATIVE FISH~ IS IT SAFE?



Finding a healthy escape from the daily hustle benefits one's mental health; fishing fulfills that need for many people. A sense of tranquility comes from being in nature waiting for a nibble on your line. There is also a level of satisfaction in eating the fruit of your labors and knowing where your food came from. "Is it safe to eat the fish out of here?" We are asked this question fairly often when we go out in the field to test and collect water from various creeks and streams in Cherokee County. Generally, it is documented that eating fish is a good source of protein, Omega-3 fatty acids, and low in saturated fats. Still, for some people, the lingering doubt of safety persists. This article hopes to address some of those concerns and relay some of the guidance the Georgia Department of Natural Resources (GaDNR) details on the subject in the "Guidelines for Eating Fish from Georgia Waters" document released in 2021. Anyone interested in reading the entire document can find it at <https://epd.georgia.gov/watershed-protection-branch/watershed-planning-and-monitoring-program/fish-consumption-guidelines>.

The document prefaces the guide with the statement, "It is important to keep in mind that the consumption recommendations are based on health-risk calculations for someone eating fish with similar contamination over a period of 30 years or more." In other words, the likelihood that someone will eat the same fish species consistently for the next 30 years is very low, but following these recommendations would help mitigate the health risk if they did.

1. There are two locations in Cherokee County where testing on native fish has been conducted: Lake Allatoona and the Etowah River upstream of the lake. See the two tables on the right for fish species that have been tested.

2. When reading the table, recommendations are made based on the length of the fish. This is measured from the tip of the nose to the end of the tailfin.

3. Fish were tested for 43 separate contaminants, including metals, organic chemicals, and pesticides. Many of these contaminants did not appear in any fish. However, four contaminants, arsenic, polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), mercury, and thallium, were frequently detected in significant amounts in a few species from some bodies of water in Georgia. Organic mercury, or methylmercury, was the only contaminant that some of the fish located in Cherokee County tested positive for. Methylmercury does not break down as it cycles between the land, water, and the air. It is unclear where the mercury in Georgia fish came from. Some possible sources are the mercury content of soils and rocks in the southeast, municipal and industrial sources, or fossil fuel use. It is not known to cause cancer but can potentially damage the nervous system in developing fetuses and small children. Additionally, the GaDNR put out a health advisory stating that pregnant women and children under the age of 6 should limit their fish intake to one meal per week due to the potential risk mercury could have in 2001.

4. Contaminates of any kind tend to be stored in the fatty tissue, skin, and organs of fish. We recommend the removal of these before consumption. (See diagram on the right)

5. Vary the species of fish you are eating. The tendency is to find more contaminants in larger bottom-feeding predators than in pan fish such as bream or crappie.

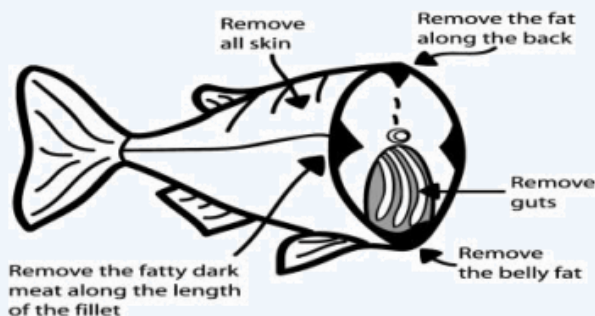
6. Keep smaller fish for eating. Larger, older fish may be more contaminated than younger, smaller fish. You can minimize your health risk by eating smaller fish (within legal size limits) and releasing the larger fish.

Etowah River (Above Lake Allatoona, Cherokee County) Coosa River Basin

Species	Site Tested	Recommendation	Chemical
Spotted Bass	SR 5 Spur	1 meal/week	Mercury
White Bass	SR 5 Spur	1 meal/week	Mercury

Lake Allatoona Coosa River Basin

Species	Less than 12"	12" – 16"	Over 16"	Chemical
Black Crappie	No Restrictions			
Bluegill Sunfish	No Restrictions			
Channel Catfish	No Restrictions	No Restrictions	No Restrictions	
Hybrid Bass		No Restrictions	1 meal/week	Mercury
Largemouth Bass	No Restrictions	No Restrictions	1 meal/week	Mercury
Spotted Bass	No Restrictions	1 meal/week	1 meal/week	Mercury
White Bass	No Restrictions	1 meal/week		Mercury



In conclusion, in this document, GaDNR states, "The quality of fish in Georgia is good." The recommendations are deliberately conservative to err on the side of caution regarding human health. These recommendations aim not to scare people from eating native fish but to advise them on how to consume it responsibly. The CCWSA invites you to come fishing at the Hollis Q. Latham Reservoir. It is a beautiful local resource to break from the daily grind. Check out our website for operating hours and Reservoir rules.

**Just as a reminder, if you have a particular topic or question
you would like us to address, please send it to ccwsaea@gmail.com.**