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### **TDEC EXTENDS PRECAUTIONARY FISH CONSUMPTION ADVISORY TO CHEROKEE RESERVOIR**

NASHVILLE – The Tennessee Department of Environment and Conservation (TDEC) today announced the extension of the existing precautionary fish consumption advisory on the Holston River due to mercury to also include Cherokee Reservoir.

In August 2007, the department issued a precautionary advisory on the Holston River in East Tennessee which included the upper portion of Cherokee Reservoir, the John Sevier Detention Reservoir, and the Holston River. The advisory extended from the Poor Valley Creek Embayment on Cherokee Reservoir upstream to the confluence of the North Holston River near Kingsport. The advisory was due to mercury levels in various bass species that exceeded the new trigger point for mercury in fish tissue (0.3 mg/kg). In the press release announcing the advisory, the department acknowledged that mercury levels in the remainder of Cherokee Reservoir did not currently exceed the trigger, but needed to be watched in the future.

Today's action, which is the result of additional studies by TDEC and the Tennessee Valley Authority, expands the advisory to the entirety of Cherokee Reservoir. The advisory on Cherokee Reservoir will include both black bass and catfish species. The advisory for the Holston River upstream of Cherokee Reservoir will continue to be for all fish species.

TDEC advises that pregnant or nursing mothers and children avoid eating the fish species included in the advisory and that all others limit consumption to one meal per month. Other recreational activities such as boating, swimming, wading, and catch and release fishing carry no risk.

"We provide these advisories so the community can make informed decisions about whether or not to consume the fish they catch," TDEC Deputy Commissioner Greg Young said. "Unlike 'do not consume' advisories that warn the general population to avoid eating fish from a particular body of water altogether, precautionary fish consumption advisories are specifically directed to sensitive populations such as children, pregnant women, nursing mothers and those who may eat fish frequently from the same body of water."

Both the department and TVA sampled fish at two locations: the lake forebay near the dam at river mile 55 and at U.S. Hwy 25E at mile 76. TVA collected fish in 2010, 2012, 2015, and 2018. The department collected additional fish in 2009.

These studies documented that in black bass species – which include smallmouth, largemouth and spotted bass – and in catfish, mercury levels were above the trigger

currently used by the department. This trigger, 0.3 mg/kg (parts per million), was jointly recommended by both the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

TDEC considers there to be two plausible sources of mercury in the Holston River and Cherokee Reservoir. According to the EPA, atmospheric deposition due to the global burning of coal is the most frequent reason for elevated levels of mercury in fish. Additionally, significant amounts of mercury were lost during the 1960s and 1970s at the Olin Chlor Alkali plant in Saltville, Va. This site discharged to the North Fork Holston River, a tributary to the Holston near Kingsport.

TDEC will post warning signs at public access points and will work with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to communicate this information to the public.

### **About Fish Consumption Advisories**

The Tennessee Water Quality Control Act identifies the commissioner of the Department of Environment and Conservation as having the authority and responsibility to issue advisories for either water contact hazards like pathogens or excessive health risks due to the accumulation of contaminants in fish or shellfish. Tennessee's General Water Quality Criteria provide additional guidance regarding the conditions under which advisories may be warranted.

There are two types of fish consumption advisories issued by TDEC based on the levels of contaminants present in fish tissue. "Do not consume" fishing advisories are issued when levels of contaminants in fish tissue would represent a threat to the general population. Precautionary advisories are issued when contaminant levels are lower, but would still pose a risk to sensitive populations such as children, pregnant women, nursing mothers and those who eat fish frequently from the same body of water.

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, mercury is a naturally occurring element that can be found throughout the environment. Human activities have caused the amount of mercury in some areas to increase. The primary way people in the United States are exposed to mercury is by eating fish containing methylmercury, a toxic form of mercury that accumulates easily in organisms.

Where new advisories have been issued, TDEC will immediately begin the process of putting up signs at primary public access points. TDEC works in partnership with the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency to communicate information about fishing advisories.

For a complete listing of Tennessee's current fishing advisories plus additional information about the advisory issuance process, visit

[https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/environment/water/planning-and-standards/wr\\_wq\\_fish-advisories.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/environment/water/planning-and-standards/wr_wq_fish-advisories.pdf)

An EPA website has additional information about mercury at <http://www2.epa.gov/fish-tech/epa-fda-advisory-mercury-fish-and-shellfish>.

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