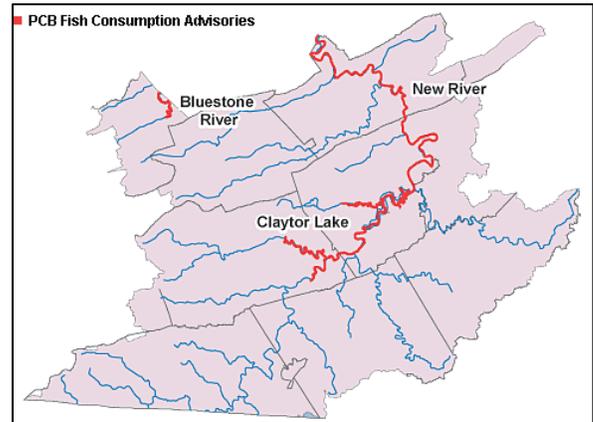


New River Watershed PCB Study

Polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) are chemicals that were used in electrical transformers and other equipment until the late 1970s and can remain in the environment for decades. To address this pollutant, a “total maximum daily load,” or TMDL study of PCBs, is kicking off in the New River watershed. A TMDL is the maximum amount of a pollutant a water body may contain and still meet water quality standards. To restore water quality, PCBs will have to be reduced to the amount specified by the TMDL plan. During several years of fish tissue collection in the watershed ranging from Wythe County to Montgomery County, DEQ has found fish tissue contaminated with PCBs.

These PCB levels led the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) to issue fish consumption advisories. VDH recommends that pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, nursing mothers, infants, and young children should avoid eating PCB-contaminated fish from advisory areas. A full list of waters and fish affected by the advisories is available on the health department’s website at:

www.vdh.virginia.gov/Epidemiology/dee/PublicHealthToxicology/Advisories/NewRiver.htm



A Technical Advisory Committee consisting of stakeholders representing local government, water discharge permit holders, and conservation groups will help develop the TMDL plan. The plan will focus on reducing the sources of PCBs contributing to contaminated fish tissue in the New River, Reed Creek, Claytor Lake, Peak Creek, Walker Creek and Stony Creek watersheds. Because the development of the PCB TMDL is in the beginning stages, pollution loads have not yet been assigned to any particular source or source category at this time. The study indicates that elevated PCBs exist during high flow events in lower Peak Creek, in the New River around Radford, Wolf Creek above Narrows, and Walker Creek near Pearisburg.

Sources of PCBs include, but are not limited to, point source dischargers including municipal stormwater discharges, stormwater runoff from areas of known contamination, atmospheric deposition, and existing contamination in river sediments. A source identification study in 2004 established the foundation for this current PCB TMDL study. Since 2004, analytical methods have improved and PCBs can now be detected at extremely low levels (parts per quadrillion). Additional water, sediment and fish tissue monitoring occurred from 2010 to 2015 to inform this current phase of the PCB TMDL study.

The public comment period closes May 3, 2016. Near the end of the New River PCB TMDL study, there will be a final public meeting to present findings, and a draft report of the study is scheduled for release later this year.

Stakeholders interested in serving on the technical advisory committee should contact DEQ. Participation on the committee is at the sole discretion of DEQ. For additional information, please contact Mark Richards at mark.richards@deq.virginia.gov, Mary Dail at mary.dail@deq.virginia.gov, or Martha Chapman at martha.chapman@deq.virginia.gov.

