

VHS found in Lake Superior fish

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Contact(s): **Contacts:** Mary Dettloff (Michigan DNRE) (517) 335-3014 or Mike Staggs (Wisconsin DNR) (608) 267-0796

Michigan, Wisconsin not planning regulation changes in Lake Superior based on findings of Cornell University

The Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources today said the recent finding by a Cornell University research team of traces of Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia virus (VHS) in fish inhabiting Lake Superior would not lead to any immediate regulation changes for anglers or boaters.

Cornell University reported in a press release today that they had found trace amounts of VHS virus in organ samples taken from a small number of healthy fish in four sites in Lake Superior. The [news release \[exit DNR\]](#) is available on Cornell University's Web site.

“We appreciate the efforts of Cornell University to help better understand this disease, but we also want to caution anglers and others who enjoy Lake Superior that this does not mean there has been a widespread outbreak of VHS in those waters,” said Michigan DNRE Director Rebecca Humphries. “What this study does indicate is that VHS has been observed in four locations in Lake Superior, but it is not everywhere. Based on this limited finding, Michigan is not planning to make any changes in its regulations at this time.”

Wisconsin DNR Secretary Matt Frank said that Wisconsin’s strong VHS protections were already set with Lake Superior in mind. “We’re disappointed with Cornell’s finding, but not surprised. The good news is that our VHS rules for boaters and anglers stay the same and will continue to protect our inland waters. We included Lake Superior when we originally passed regulations in 2007 because it’s directly connected to waters that already had the virus present. We appreciate the efforts of Wisconsin boaters and anglers who comply.”

The Cornell University-led research team spent several days in June collecting and sampling healthy fish in Lake Superior. Nearly 900 fish were collected from the lake, and a new screening tool used by the team found a preliminary positive result for VHS in a small number of fish collected from four points in the Lake Superior basin – Paradise/Whitefish Point, Chippewa County, Michigan; Skanee in Huron Bay in Baraga County, Michigan; Superior Bay near Duluth, Minnesota; and St. Louis Bay, also near Duluth. The only location that had a VHS sample confirmed as positive was at Paradise/Whitefish Point where VHS was confirmed in one sample

from a yellow perch. Not all of the samples from this site, however, were confirmed to have VHS.

Humphries said the finding is not surprising, adding that finding a VHS-positive fish at the east end of the Lake Superior basin is where biologists have long thought a positive would be found first -- near the St. Mary's River, which connects the basin to Lake Huron, a VHS-affected lake.

"VHS remains a threat to all the Great Lakes, and we will increase our efforts to slow the spread through public awareness of the simple things boaters and anglers can do to help," Humphries said.

Frank said that the result underscores the importance of anglers and boaters taking required and appropriate steps to stop the further spread of VHS within Lake Superior itself, and to inland waters. "VHS has not gone away - whether you are boating or fishing in Wisconsin or Michigan, you should drain all water from your bilge, live well or bait bucket, and never take live fish away from any water," said Frank.

Humphries and Frank said their agencies will continue collecting and testing fish for VHS in Lake Superior. Both states have been collecting samples of fish from Lake Superior for the last 3 years, and neither state has yet found any fish positive for VHS using rigorous, confirmatory testing procedures.

Anglers and boaters who recreate on Lake Superior can help both the Michigan DNRE and Wisconsin DNR by reporting any significant fish kills they encounter on Lake Superior to the agencies. Also, anglers and boaters should drain their livewells and bilge as they exit a lake. Boats should regularly be cleaned and disinfected after use, as well as any boating and fishing equipment.

Both states prohibit release of unused minnows back into the water. Unused bait should be disposed of on land or in a trash can. Also, both states prohibit the transfer of live fish from one lake to another without appropriate permits. Wisconsin has additional rules relating to the movement of live fish and the use and possession of live minnows.

For more information on VHS, please visit [Keep Our Waters Great! \[exit DNR\]](#) or [VHS and You: Keeping Wisconsin's Waters Healthy](#).