

Sibley Lake fish consumption advisory lifted

After more than 30 years of sampling lake sediments and fish, , the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality (LDEQ), the Louisiana Department of Health (LDH) and the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries (LDWF) have lifted the fish consumption advisory for Sibley Lake.

The last signature necessary to remove the advisory for the water body near Natchitoches was inked December 21, 2018. The fish consumption ban had been in place since 1989. No one currently involved with water quality at a state regulatory agency can recall another instance where a fish consumption advisory issued due to chemical contamination has been rescinded in Louisiana.

“I am proud to see one of our state’s impaired water bodies returned to its designated uses. This was no small feat. The long process to restore Sibley Lake demonstrates the care and commitment of the LDEQ, LDH and LDWF staffs to protecting the public from possible health risks of contamination, and making it safe for everyone to now enjoy,” Gov. John Bel Edwards said.

“This is a singular achievement. It is a victory for environmental remediation, a major battle we have won in the effort to clean all of Louisiana’s waterbodies,” LDEQ Secretary Dr. Chuck Carr Brown said.

“Thanks to a coordinated effort between multiple state agencies, our state, the Sportsman’s Paradise, now has one more body of water in which residents who enjoy fishing can also safely enjoy their catch,” said Dr. Jimmy Guidry, state health officer with the Louisiana Department of Health.

“This is a perfect example of this state’s dedication to cleaning up our waterways. It is a signature environmental achievement that Louisiana can show to the rest of the country,” LDWF Secretary Jack Montoucet said.

The decision to lift the fish consumption advisory came after decades of work by the state agencies along with extensive remediation work by Tennessee Gas Pipeline (TGP). Based on contamination first reported to LDEQ by TGP, LDEQ issued a Compliance Order to the company in August 1988. The order required TGP to cease discharge of wastewater containing polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) and eliminate PCBs from treated wastewater. The order also required TGP to submit a plan for analysis of PCBs in water, sediment and fish from Sibley Lake. The plan was submitted to LDEQ and was subsequently approved. Sampling of fish, water and sediments in the lake began in 1989. Fish sampling continued until April 2018, after which LDH, with concurrence from LDEQ and LDWF, concluded that concentrations of PCBs were no longer at harmful levels in the fish.

To reach that goal, TGP was required to submit a remediation plan to remove contaminated soil and sediment around the facility and in the lake. A final remediation plan was submitted to LDEQ by TGP’s consultants in September 1992. Following plan approval by LDEQ, work commenced on Oct. 29, 1992, to remove the contaminated soils near the facility, and sediment from an area in the lake closest to the facility.

The work involved the installation of a large water-filled cofferdam in the lake surrounding the contaminated area. This was followed by removal and safe disposal of all contaminated sediment, and

extensive sediment sampling to ensure the removal of contaminants. Remediation work in the lake was completed Feb. 10, 1993.

Prior to the remediation work, the presence of PCBs in sediment and fish prompted LDH and LDEQ to issue a fish consumption advisory in February 1989. The advisory was against the sale and consumption of fish taken from Sibley Lake. As new data was obtained, the advisory was updated in January 1996, placing limits on the quantity of fish recommended for safe consumption. The advisory for Sibley Lake was reviewed in June 1994, revised in January 1996, reviewed again in March 2000, and most recently reviewed in August 2018. Requirements of the fish tissue sampling program were also adjusted as new information regarding fish species and PCBs became available. Ultimately, three separate sample efforts within a two-year period, each including several species and many fish, were required of TGP in order to meet the requirements of Louisiana's fish advisory protocol. The protocol is a joint effort of LDEQ, LDH, LDWF and the Louisiana Department of Agriculture (LDAF).

"We are very pleased to reach the objective of removing the fish consumption advisory for the future generations of fisherman at Sibley Lake," said Kimberly Watson, president, Kinder Morgan Natural Gas Pipelines North Region, which includes TGP. "For 30 years, TGP has been committed to the environmental objectives of this project and appreciates the cooperation of LDEQ, LDH and the LDWF, to achieve this goal."