

Southeast Region

Largemouth bass and yellow bullhead catfish contaminated with methyl mercury have been found in Everglades NP. Sampling conducted by the park, in cooperation with the USFWS and the Florida Department of Health and Rehabilitative Services (HRS), revealed that bass from Shark Slough were well above the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) safety limits for human consumption. Levels of mercury in bass from the Taylor Slough drainage were lower but are still cause for concern. Mercury concentrations in bullheads also were elevated, though not as high as in bass. The park is now acting on the recommendations of the Florida HRS that human consumption of bass be prohibited for the Shark Slough drainage and limited in the Taylor Slough area.

In addition, more extensive fish sampling is being carried out in the marine and estuarine areas of the park downstream from the Shark Slough, where thousands of visitors each year harvest game and food fishes. The same sampling also is being applied to freshwater panfish in the park. As a precaution, fish sampling efforts in the adjoining Big Cypress National Preserve are also underway. No point source of contamination has been identified. Several theories, ranging from agricultural runoff, to air pollution, to natural biological occurrence in peat soils, have been advanced. There is, however, no real consensus at this time.