

Educational efforts that start with the anglers themselves, utilize existing community assets such as leaders in the angling community, minority organizations, and other community resources, are likely to be more effective than efforts originating from and driven by outside institutions.

We feel that fish consumption and broader water education efforts, in other words, are likely to be more effective if they are based on “bottom-up” or community-driven approaches. Community-based approaches that begin with anglers’ and fish consumers’ local contexts and perspectives, tap into what they care about in their local communities, and give them some say in decisions about these issues, will be more likely to motivate them to learn about and address the issues in meaningful ways. Once empowered and trained as effective leaders, subsistence anglers and local community groups will be better prepared to address fish contamination and water quality issues in their community themselves.

BURNING PLASTIC FOR FUEL - "NOWHERE ELSE IN THE US"

Local coal-burning power plants burning plastic to produce electricity? Concerned? We are too.

We’ve looked all over the country and haven’t found another utility doing this.

More on this soon.

AIR POLLUTION - "NOT AS BAD AS MILWAUKEE"

Madison and Dane County have the distinction of not having air quality as bad as Milwaukee, which is a “severe nonattainment area” in regards to federal air quality standards.

However, our community has had increasing air pollution as our population grows and one of the highest asthma rates in the nation.

There are numerous air health advisories and “clean air action days” (which are actually severe ozone pollution warnings!) in Madison and Dane County throughout the year; and we are approaching the same “nonattainment” air pollution levels as Milwaukee and others severely polluted cities.

More on this soon.

Join MEJO!

Membership is only \$10 - \$25 (sliding scale).
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Madison Environmental
Justice Organization

Madison Environmental Justice Organization



Our local air and water pollution has disproportionate impacts on minorities and poor, which are not being addressed by our institutions or our community as a whole.

MEJO aims to change this.

The Madison Environmental Justice Organization educates the community about environmental justice issues, works to address them, and supports environmental justice for the benefit of the general public.

MADISON FISH PROJECT

We aim to build community capacity to address the public health and water quality issues related to the consumption of contaminated fish among people of color and the poor, focusing on both Madison's Northside and Monona Bay.

Background

The broader Madison area includes a chain of four freshwater lakes in Dane County called the Yahara Lakes. Madison lakes are heavily fished by thousands of recreational, subsistence, and ice anglers from Madison and surrounding areas. While beach use is declining in the lakes because of high algal levels and bacterial counts, according to government agencies, fishing in the lakes has increased in recent years. However, like all Wisconsin lakes, the Yahara lakes are on mercury advisory, and monitoring data suggests that Yahara lakes' fish also have levels of PCBs that could be of concern. Pesticides and other contaminants are also likely to be in Yahara lakes' fish, given that Dane County is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the country.

Lake Mendota, the first of the four lakes, is surrounded by the cities of Madison and Middleton. The Northside of Madison is along the north edge of Lake Mendota, and is one of the more ethnically and economically diverse parts of Madison. The Northside is also directly adjacent to the Yahara River (which feeds into the four lakes) and Cherokee Marsh (a large wetland area that surrounds the river where it enters the lake). The Yahara River and Cherokee Marsh, before they enter Lake Mendota, flow through an intensively agricultural area, and Cherokee Marsh is slowly filling in with agricultural sediment. Northside residents, particularly Hmong and Southeast Asians, African Americans, and Latinos regularly fish in Cherokee Marsh, the Yahara River, and Lake Mendota's well as in other Yahara lakes and lakes/streams in the surrounding area.

The potential risks related to the consumption of contaminated fresh-water fish are well documented. Contaminants such as mercury, PCBs, PAHs, lead, cadmium, and pesticides--which can accumulate to harmful levels in fish tissues--are associated with developmental, neurological, immune system, reproductive, and a variety of other long-term human health problems. Subsistence anglers, who are often minority and/or low-income, may be particularly at risk for these health problems because they depend on fish as a source of food and/or fishing/fish consumption are culturally important activities.

Fish advisories are less likely to reach minorities and poor.

Unfortunately, although advocacy groups, public agencies, and university extension programs in the U.S. and in the Madison

area have created a variety of excellent fish advisory materials, and some of these materials are translated into Hmong and Spanish, research and outreach indicate that these materials are not reaching many people, particularly people of color and poor. Recent research shows that awareness about limiting fish because of mercury content is lower among people of color, lower income, and less educated people.

Although very little is known about fish consumption and fishing practices among minority and poor subsistence anglers in the region, past research on fishing and fish consumption in the Madison area suggests that various racial/ethnic groups have very different cultural traditions related to fishing and fish consumption, and that the reasons they eat and catch fish and the contexts in which they engage in these activities can be very different. These issues could be barriers to effective education and outreach in these groups.

Communication strategies for healthier fish consumption, cleaner fish, and environmental justice

MEJO argues that to be more successful than they have been to date, fish advisory outreach efforts need to be more connected to the locally-based knowledge and perspectives of subsistence anglers, and more importantly, sensitive to the social, economic, and cultural contexts of fishing and fish-consumption among these groups. Healthier relationships among anglers with different backgrounds will help build capacity among these anglers to address fish consumption and water quality problems together.