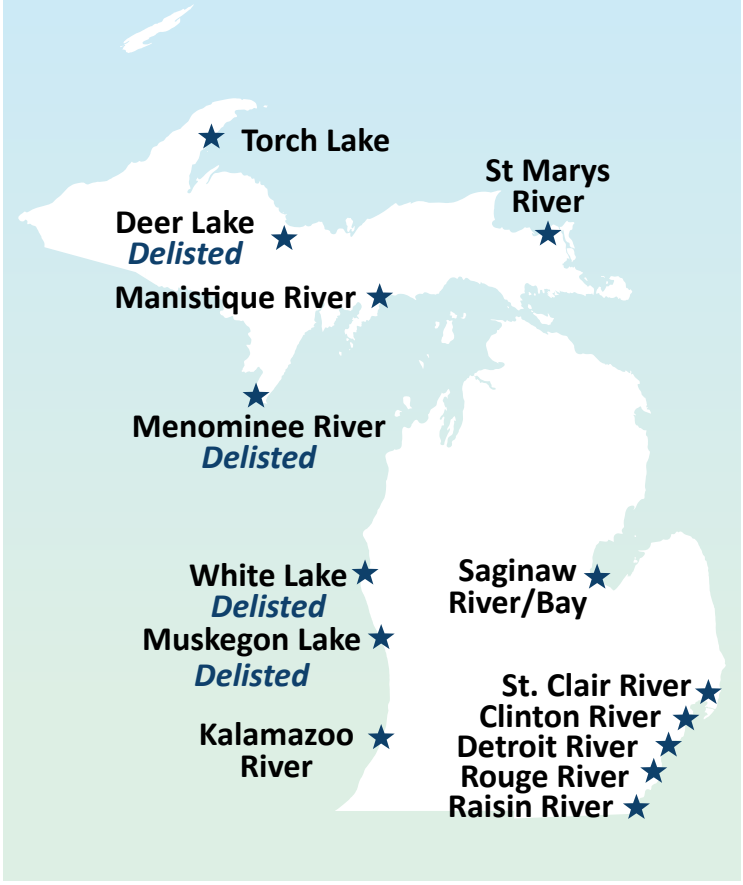
Eat Safe Fish from Michigan's Areas of Concern

Michigan's AOCs



Areas of Concern

An area of concern, or AOC, is a location in the Great Lakes Basin that has experienced high levels of pollution and needs to be cleaned up. Some AOCs in Michigan have been cleaned up and *delisted*, meaning that it is no longer an AOC. Today, there are 10 active AOCs in Michigan.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and other state and federal agencies are working to restore these areas. In order to successfully clean up these places, the area's beneficial use impairments, or BUIs, must be addressed.

Beneficial Use Impairments

An area's environmental problems are called *beneficial use impairments.* BUIs happen due to a change in the chemical, physical or biological integrity of the Great Lakes. There are 14 categories of BUIs outlined on the EPA Great Lakes BUI page. However, a place does not need to have all 14 problems to be called an AOC.

Each BUI has goals that need to be met in order to be removed from the AOC's list of problems. Once all BUIs are removed from the list, the AOC is considered to be no longer impaired and can be delisted.

Restrictions on Fish Consumption BUI

There are multiple AOCs in Michigan that have a ***Restrictions on Fish Consumption BUI***. If an AOC has a restrictions on fish consumption BUI, it means that the fish from the affected lake or river at one time had higher levels of chemicals than fish in similar lakes or rivers in the Great Lakes region.

The BUI can be removed from the AOC's list of problems when:

The fish consumption advisories within the AOC are **not more restrictive** than those in nearby, non-AOC comparison locations.

OR

The levels of chemicals in the fish within the AOC are the **same as or less** than the chemical levels found in fish from the Great Lakes or non-AOC comparison locations.

OR

The levels of chemicals in the fish from the AOC have **decreased over time**. This process is used if there isn't a similar enough location outside of the AOC to use as a comparison.

BUIs and Eat Safe Fish Guidelines are NOT the same.

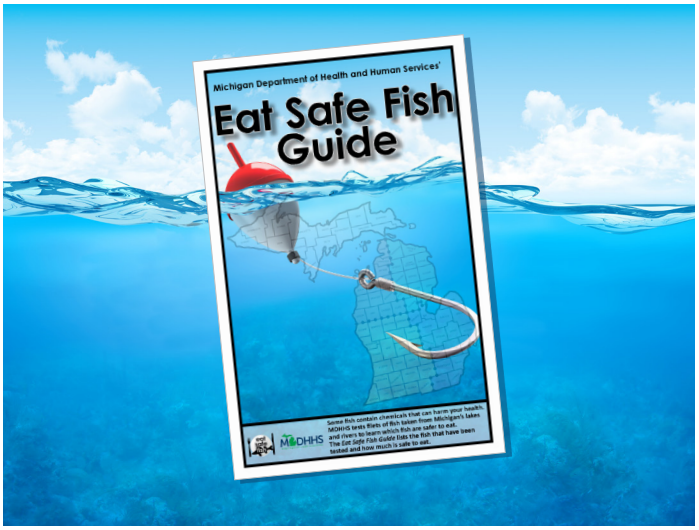
Fish Consumption BUIs compare fish consumption guidelines and **chemical levels in fish from the AOC to chemical levels in fish that are not in that AOC**. These BUIs are NOT advisories and do not tell you how much fish is safe to eat from a waterbody.

The ***Eat Safe Fish Guides*** list the fish that have been tested and how much is safe to eat from waterbodies across Michigan, not just AOCs. The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) tests the edible portions of fish for chemicals from waterbodies across the state.

When the Fish Consumption BUI is removed from an AOC's list of problems, fish from the lake or river will continue to be tested to determine fish consumption guidelines.

Fish Consumption BUIs were established for Michigan's AOCs due to historical levels of chemicals, like mercury, dioxins and polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) in fish. MDHHS Eat Safe Fish guidelines consider emerging chemicals of concern, such as per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), in addition to historical chemicals by testing the edible portions of fish, typically the filet. Emerging chemicals of concern are not part of the BUI evaluation process.

Eat Safe Fish from Michigan Waterbodies



The ***Eat Safe Fish Guides*** are released annually by MDHHS as a tool to help you find fish lower in chemicals across Michigan. The testing conducted for historical and emerging chemicals of concern are used to develop the guidelines printed in the ***Eat Safe Fish Guides***.

The guidelines found in the *Eat Safe Fish Guides* are set to be protective of everyone including children, those who are pregnant or breastfeeding and people with existing health problems.

You may choose to eat more fish than the ***Eat Safe Fish Guides*** recommend. These guidelines are not rules; it is your choice. The ***Eat Safe Fish Guides*** make it easy for you and your family to make informed decisions about the fish you are eating.

MDHHS
Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

For more information on eating safe fish across Michigan or to get a free copy of the *Eat Safe Fish Guides*, visit Michigan.gov/EatSafeFish or call MDHHS at 800-648-6942.

For more information on Areas of Concern in Michigan, visit the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy's (EGLE) Great Lakes Management Unit's Areas of Concern program.