WCS

Healthy Ecosystems Healthy Fish

Mercury and PFAS in Waterbodies along the Dalton Highway

What was tested?

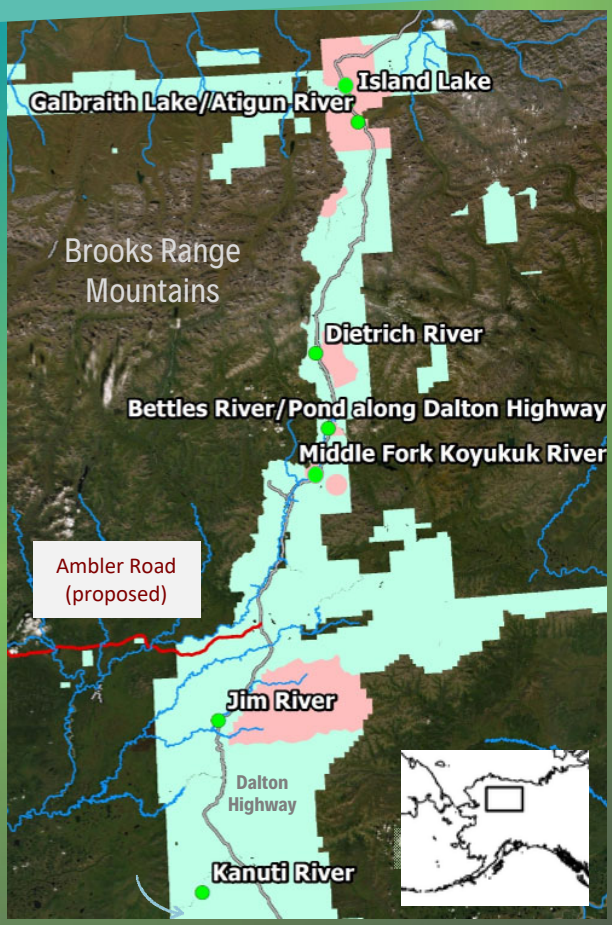
Filets from various fish species including Arctic grayling, slimy sculpin, and longnose suckers were collected in 2023 by the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and analyzed to see the current levels of heavy metals (including mercury) and PFAS (artificially produced chemicals found in fire fighting foam). River sediment, aquatic vegetation, and invertebrates were also tested.

Checking a net for fish along the Dalton

These were assessed to get an idea of the current amount of contaminants in aquatic ecosystems, in case of future development, such as mines, roads or infrastructure. A secondary goal was to inform people about the health of the fish they are eating.

Dalton Highway lake trout

Which locations were studied?



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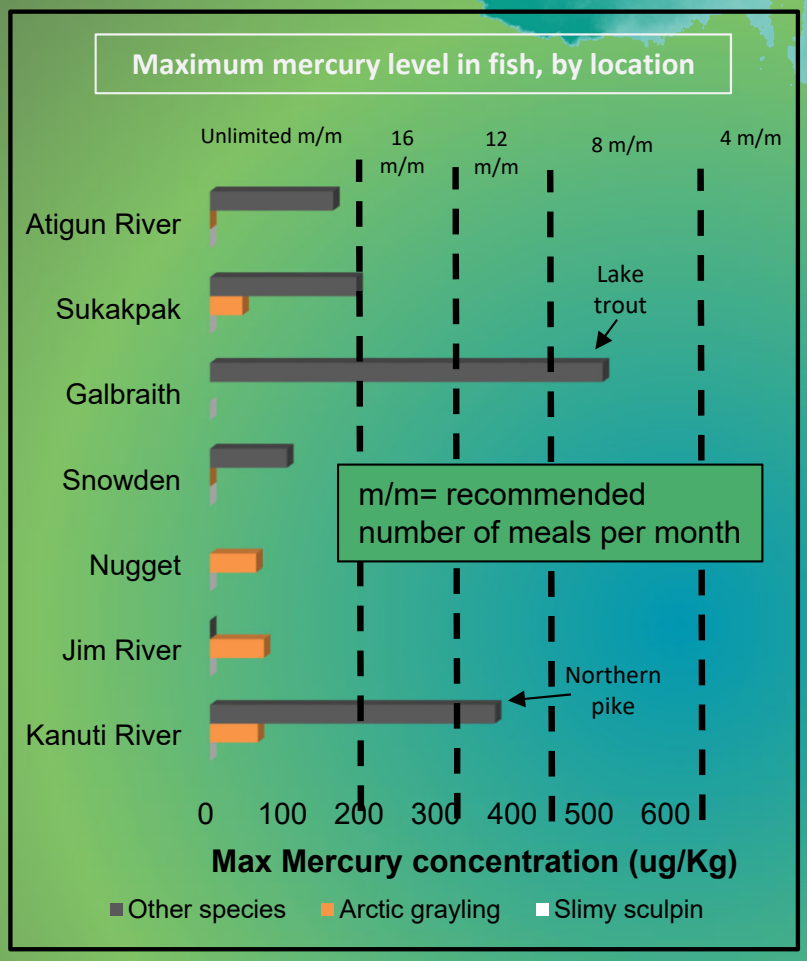
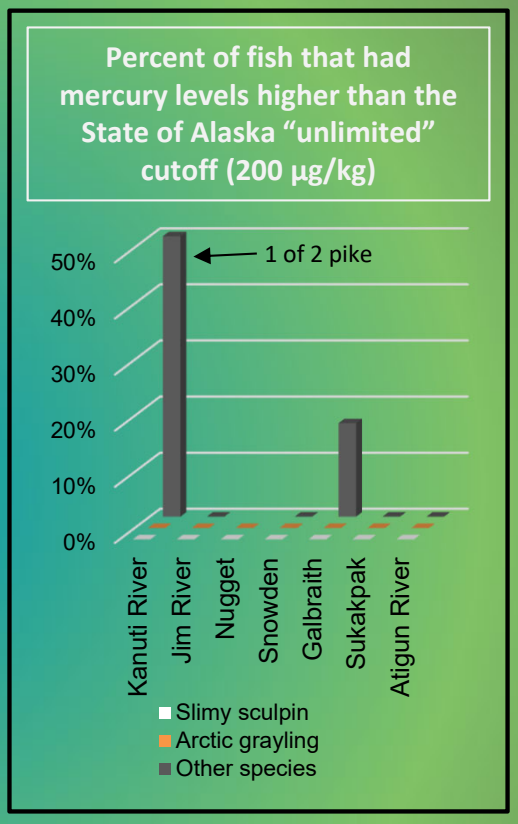
What were the results?





***Most waterbodies:* PFAS were <1.5 µg/kg for all fish = Very low**

***Tea Lake (near Atigun River):* PFAS were 20–40 µg/kg for fish = elevated!**

Read more about the study and see detailed findings

What does this mean for people who eat fish from these locations?

Most fish tested appear to be very healthy to eat, but pregnant women and children should limit their number of meals per month of northern pike and lake trout, to minimize intake of mercury. Because of elevated PFAS levels, eating fish caught in Tea Lake is not recommended.

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