



N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources

Release: Immediate
Date: Oct. 3, 2013

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Neuse and Tar-Pamlico Rivers seeing widespread fish kills

RALEIGH – State officials believe millions of dead and dying fish are turning up this week in the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico river basins due to extreme natural changes in physical and environmental conditions.

State officials believe menhaden fish are dying in the two eastern North Carolina river basins due to cooler water temperatures that promote the growth of a common water mold called *Aphanomyces invadens* and strong sunlight that sparks the growth of algal blooms. The algal blooms can cause oxygen levels in the water to fluctuate greatly.

Menhaden seem to be particularly sensitive to stressful estuarine conditions. These factors can combine to create stressful conditions in the Neuse and Tar-Pamlico estuaries.

Ninety-five percent of all fish kills in the estuaries are related to low oxygen in the water. There is no harm to human health from the water, mold, or the algal bloom.

The dead and dying fish are primarily Menhaden between three and five inches long. They have been seen during the past several days in the Neuse River from Union Park in New Bern downstream to where the river meets the mouth of Slocum Creek and in the Washington, Chocowinity, and Blounts Creek areas of the Tar-Pamlico river basin.

Samples of the fish have been collected by staff with the state N.C. Division of Water Resources for further analysis. Water samples indicate recent algal bloom activity in the watersheds.

A similar event happened almost a year ago in these same waters. At that time, staff from the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Association determined that the fish sores were Ulcerative Mycosis caused by the slime mold *Aphanomyces invadens*.

The fall season marks the end of the period that young fish mature in the rivers and begin to move to the sea. Fish that have not migrated by late September and October may be less hardy than those that migrate earlier. As a result, the fish migrating later in the year may be more susceptible to changes in water temperature or oxygen levels, invasive bacteria and other stress factors.

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