Great Lakes Basins

St. Joseph Basin

Eating your catch

Indiana Department of Health

Healthy fish consumption

Fish is a lean protein, low saturated fat food that acts as a major source of omega-3 fatty acids, vitamin D, selenium, and other vitamins and minerals. These vitamins, minerals, and other nutrients promote heart and brain health and can lower blood pressure, reducing the risk of a heart attack or stroke. However, some fish may contain chemicals at levels that may be harmful to your health.

Who you are:

Anyone can be affected by harmful chemicals found in certain fish; however, those most at risk for harmful health effects include pregnant people, people planning to become pregnant, those who are breast feeding as well as any individual under the age of 15. These chemicals may affect the development of young children, and pregnant people may have an increased risk of having children who are slower to develop and learn.

What to catch:

Some fish may have higher levels of chemicals than others. Chemicals that end up in lakes and rivers settle in the sediment and are eaten by small creatures as they dig for food. These small creatures are then eaten by minnows, minnows by medium-sized fish, and those fish are eaten by larger fish. Each of these fish bioaccumulate and store some of the chemicals in their bodies. This is why younger, smaller fish are generally less contaminated than older, larger fish of the same species.
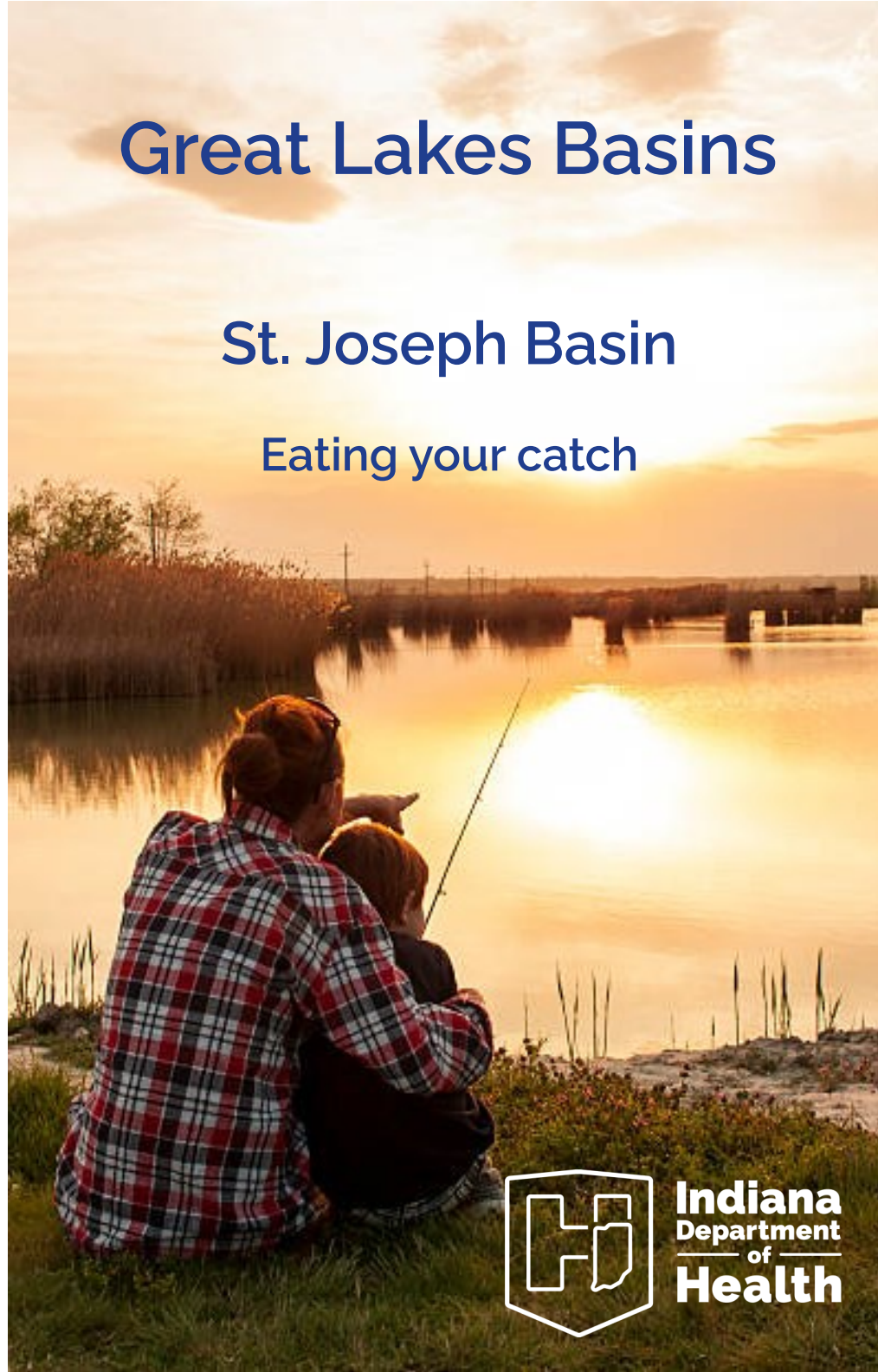
Where to fish:

You can protect yourself by fishing in tested waters. The Indiana Fish Consumption Advisory includes information about fish from lakes and rivers that have been tested for chemicals. If the waterbody you are fishing does not have an advisory, or the advisory does not include the fish species you plan to eat, follow the Indiana Statewide Safe Eating Guidelines.

Preparing and cooking your catch

When cleaning fish, trim away any fat you can see and remove the organs.

Cut away the fat along the back.

Cut away the fatty area along the side.

Cut away the belly fat.

Image provided by the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services

- Keep fish frozen until you are ready to cook it. If your fish is packaged, remove the packaging before thawing. Thaw until the fish is icy but no longer hard, and avoid thawing fish in the microwave as the fish may thaw unevenly.
- Fish should be cooked until it becomes flaky, opaque, and reaches 145°F to reduce the risk for foodborne illness. Use a calibrated meat thermometer to ensure proper cooking. Thicker fish will need to cook longer than thinner pieces.

Health risks

Two chemicals found within fish in this region are PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and mercury. These chemicals can build up in your body over time and may cause health effects that can range from small changes in health to birth defects and even cancer.

Store-bought fish

Store-bought or commercial fish can also be part of a healthy diet, but it is important to make smart choices about which fish you buy and consume.

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulates the sale of commercial fish in markets and has released advice on eating fish from stores and restaurants. The advice, specific to children and women who are or might become pregnant or breastfeeding, can be found at:

https://www.fda.gov/food/consumers/advice-about-eating-fish

For more information

Indiana Fish Consumption Guidelines: https://www.in.gov/health/eph/fish-consumption-advisory/

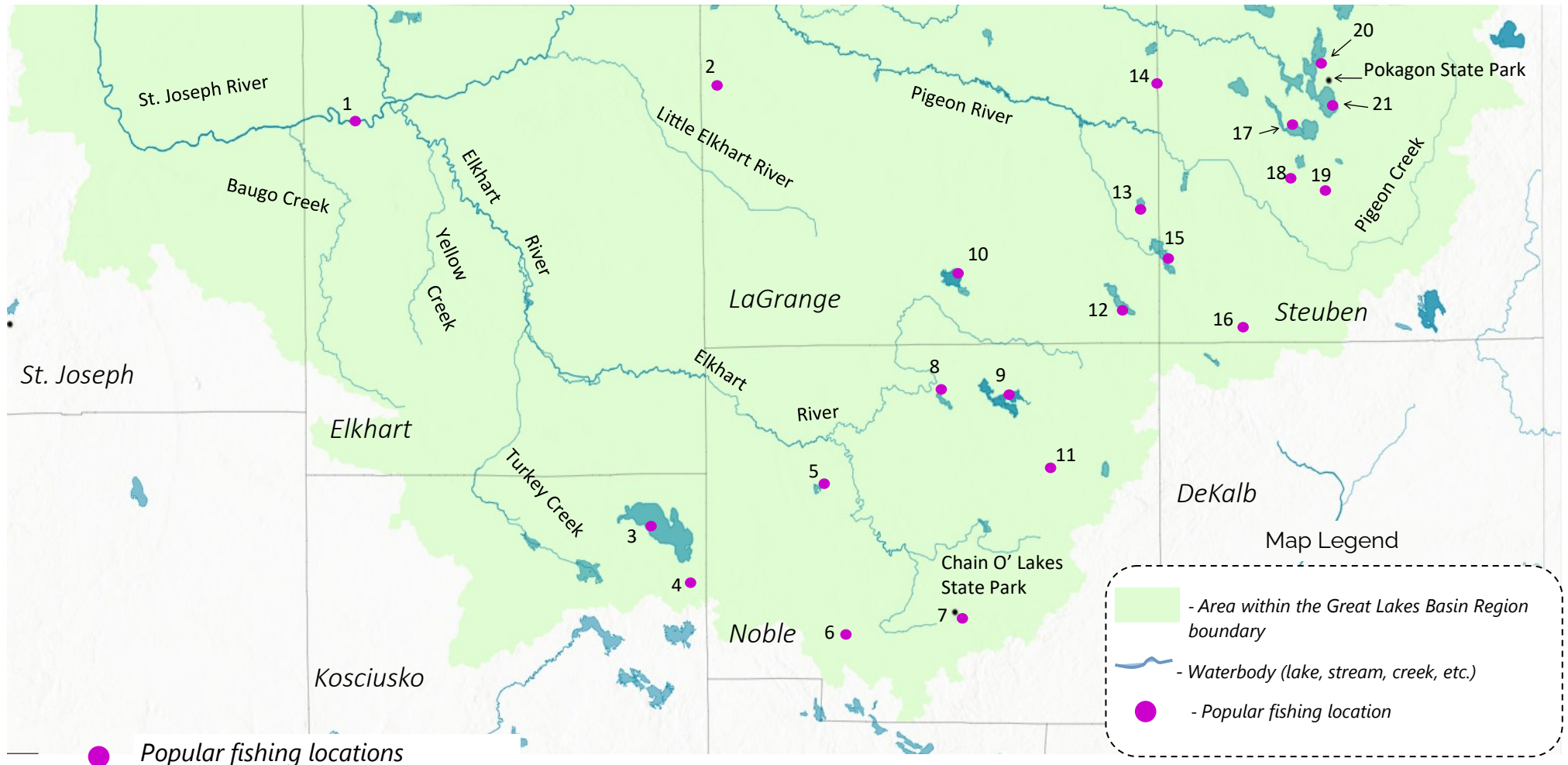**DNR Where to Fish Interactive Map:** https://secure.in.gov/dnr/fish-and-wildlife/fishing/where-to-fish-interactive-map/

Choose Your Fish: https://www.chooseyourfish.org/fish/recipe

St. Joseph Basin map

St. Joseph River

Baugo Creek

Elkhart River

Yellow Creek

Little Elkhart River

Pigeon River

Pigeon Creek

20

14

17

21

Pokagon State Park

18   19

13

15

10

12

16

Steuben

LaGrange

8

9

Elkhart River

5

11

DeKalb

St. Joseph

Elkhart

3

Turkey Creek

4

Chain O' Lakes State Park

7

Noble

6

Kosciusko

Map Legend

- Area within the Great Lakes Basin Region boundary

- Waterbody (lake, stream, creek, etc.)

- Popular fishing location

Popular fishing locations

1: St. Joseph River	6: Bear Lake	11: Sacarider Lake	16 Little Turkey Lake
2: Cass Lake	7: Chain O' Lakes State Park	12: Big Long Lake	17: Crooked Lake
3: Lake Wawasee	8: Steinbarger Lake	13: Appleman Lake	18: Silver Lake
4: Spear Lake	9: Sylvan Lake	14: Beaver Dam Lake	19: Fox Lake
5: Eagle Lake	10: Oliver Lake	15: Big Turkey Lake	20: Snow Lake
			21: Lake James

* For a complete list of waterbodies and fishing locations, please visit the DNR Where to Fish Interactive Map

Healthy fish choices in the St. Joseph River

St. Joseph River (Elkhart County)

Fish	Sensitive population guidelines	General population guidelines
Bullhead species	Unrestricted consumption	Unrestricted consumption
Crappie species	Unrestricted consumption	1 meal/ week
Northern hogsucker	Unrestricted consumption	1 meal/ week
Redhorse species	1 meal/ week	1 meal/ week
Rock bass	Unrestricted consumption	1 meal/ week
Smallmouth bass	Up to 17″: Unrestricted consumption 17″+ : 1 meal/ week	1 meal/ week
White sucker	Unrestricted consumption	Unrestricted consumption

St. Joseph River (Baugo Bay Area to the Twin Branch Dam)

Fish	Sensitive population guidelines	General population guidelines
Bullhead species	1 meal/ week	1 meal/ week
Crappie species	1 meal/ week	1 meal/week
Largemouth bass	Up to 13″: Unrestricted consumption 13″+ : 1 meal/week	1 meal/ week
Redhorse species	1 meal/week	1 meal/ week
Rock bass	Unrestricted consumption	1 meal/ week
Spotted sucker	Unrestricted consumption	Up to 15″: Unrestricted consumption 15″+ : 1 meal/week
Sunfish species	Unrestricted consumption	1 meal/ week
White Sucker	Unrestricted consumption	1 meal/ week

St. Joseph River (Twin Branch Dam to the Indiana/Michigan State Line)

Fish	Sensitive population guidelines	General population guidelines
Bullhead species	Unrestricted consumption	1 meal/ week
Crappie species	Unrestricted consumption	1 meal/ week
Largemouth bass	1 meal/ week	1 meal/ week
Rock bass	1 meal/ week	1 meal/ week
Rainbow trout/ Steelhead	1 meal/ week	1 meal/ week
Sunfish species	1 meal/ week	1 meal/ week

Follow the Lake Michigan advice for rainbow trout and coho salmon and consult the Fish Consumption Guidelines for a complete listing of guidelines in your region and state.

Common fish in the region

Common carp

Rainbow trout

Northern pike *

Redhorse

Channel catfish

Flathead catfish

Coho salmon *

Walleye

Rock bass

Sunfish

Crappie

Largemouth bass

Image credit: Rick Hill unless otherwise noted
* Fish illustrations by Virgil Beck