

# THE BAY CITY TIMES

## Researcher finds no dioxin impact on animal population

Wednesday, August 3, 2005

By Jeremiah Stettler  
TIMES NEWS SERVICE

So far, so good.

That's what Michigan State University researchers say about initial results from an animal reproduction study along the Tittabawassee River.

MSU scientists have undertaken a \$5 million study to determine whether dioxin contamination downstream of Dow Chemical Co. has caused low fertility or higher rates of embryo death in animals that feed along the river.

Lead researcher Matthew Zwiernik, an assistant professor for MSU's Aquatic Toxicology Laboratory, said his first year of research has yielded nothing unusual.

He hasn't found birds with club feet, extended stomachs or beaks that don't line up - birth defects that some studies have linked to dioxin. Neither has he noticed much difference in reproductive success in populations upstream and downstream of Dow.

But with three to four years remaining in the study, Zwiernik said it is way too early to draw any conclusions about reproductive success along the river. Things could change next year.

"To answer the question now would be premature," he said.

The state Department of Environmental Quality commissioned a smaller-scale study in 2003 that suggested that elevated dioxin levels in fish could cause reproduction problems in the birds, mink and river otters that feast on them.

The researcher, Hector Galbraith, will discuss his findings and other ecological studies related to the Tittabawassee River in a meeting at 7 p.m. today at the Visitors Center of Bay City State Recreation Center. Admission is free.

Zwiernik hopes to determine whether river-dwelling predators indeed are affected by dioxin in their diet.

So far, he has banded more than 500 song birds, studied eight great horn owl nests, monitored 10 king fisher burrows and banded five blue herons as part of the study. Zwiernik also has sampled wood duck and merganser eggs.

"The only thing we can say is that given the habitat, the animals that should be here are here," he said. "From what we've seen, there are no catastrophic reproductive failures."

pasted from: <http://www.mlive.com/news/bctimes/index.ssf?base/news-5/112308212257970.xml&coll=4>

*[Tittabawassee River Voice](#)*