

1 **Using carbon, nitrogen, and mercury isotope values to distinguish**
2 **mercury sources to Alaskan lake trout**

3 *Ryan F. Lepak^{1,2*}, Jacob M. Ogorek³, Krista K. Bartz^{4*}, Sarah E. Janssen³, Michael T. Tate³, Yin
4 Runsheng⁵, James P. Hurley^{1,6,7}, Daniel B. Young⁸, Collin A. Eagles-Smith⁹, and David P.
5 Krabbenhoft³*

6 ¹Environmental Chemistry and Technology Program, University of Wisconsin-Madison,
7 Madison, WI 53706, USA

8 ²U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Office of Research and Development, Center for
9 Computational Toxicology and Exposure, Great Lakes Toxicology and Ecology Division,
10 6201 Congdon Blvd, Duluth, MN 55804, USA

11 ³U.S. Geological Survey, Upper Midwest Water Science Center, Mercury Research
12 Laboratory, 1 Gifford Pinchot Dr, Madison, WI 53726, USA

14 ⁴National Park Service, Southwest Alaska Inventory and Monitoring Network, 240 West
15 5th Avenue, Anchorage, AK, 99501, USA

16 ⁵State Key Laboratory of Ore Deposit Geochemistry, Institute of Geochemistry, Chinese
17 Academy of Sciences, Guiyang 550081, China

18 ⁶Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering,
19 University of Wisconsin-Madison, Madison, WI 53706, USA

20 ⁷University of Wisconsin Aquatic Sciences Center, Madison, WI 53706, USA

21 ⁸National Park Service, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, 240 West 5th Avenue,
22 Anchorage, AK, 99501, USA

23 ⁹U.S. Geological Survey, Forest and Rangeland Ecosystem Science Center, Corvallis, OR
24 97330, USA

25

26 *Denotes corresponding authors

27

28 **ABSTRACT**

29 Lake trout (*Salvelinus namaycush*), collected from 13 remote lakes located in
30 southwestern Alaska, were analyzed for carbon, nitrogen, and mercury (Hg) stable isotope
31 values to assess the importance of migrating oceanic salmon, volcanic activity, and atmospheric
32 deposition to fish Hg burden. Methylmercury (MeHg) bioaccumulation in phytoplankton (5.0 –
33 6.9 kg L⁻¹) was also measured to quantify the basal uptake of MeHg to these aquatic food webs.
34 Hg isotope values in lake trout revealed that while the extent of precipitation-delivered Hg was
35 similar across the entire study area, volcanic Hg is likely an important additional source to lake
36 trout in proximate lakes. In contrast, migratory salmon (*Oncorhynchus nerka*) deliver little MeHg
37 to lake trout directly, although indirect delivery processes via decay could exist. A high level of
38 variability in carbon, nitrogen, and Hg isotope values indicate niche partitioning in lake trout
39 populations within each lake and that a complex suite of ecological interactions is occurring,
40 complicating the conceptually linear assessment of contaminant source to receiving organism.
41 Without connecting energy and contaminant isotope axes, we would not have understood why
42 lake trout from these pristine lakes have highly variable Hg burdens despite consistently low
43 water Hg and comparable age-length dynamics.

44 **Keywords**

45 Mercury, isotopes, fish, volcanos, salmon, lake trout, Minamata Convention

46 **Synopsis**

47 Mercury, carbon and nitrogen isotope values in lake trout revealed that in remote southwestern
48 Alaska, resident lake trout in lakes proximate to local volcanic activity had higher mercury

49 burden and for lakes receiving migratory salmon, no direct evidence of oceanic mercury could
50 be found though indirect exposure routes surely exist and warrant further investigation.

51 **INTRODUCTION**

52 Mercury (Hg) concentrations in fish result from both ecosystem-scale and individual-
53 scale factors. Ecosystem-scale variables include productivity,^{1, 2} land use or land cover (e.g.
54 glaciation),³ sources of Hg, favorable conditions for methylmercury (MeHg) production⁴ or
55 removal (e.g. reduction),⁵⁻⁷ and the susceptibility of Hg to methylation or demethylation.^{4, 8, 9}
56 Individual-scale factors include foraging habits, trophic position, and growth rates¹⁰. The
57 confounding effects of variables at both scales can complicate the interpretation of Hg
58 concentrations in fish across heterogenous ecosystems.

59 Stable isotope ratios of carbon and nitrogen on bulk tissue are a useful tool used to
60 predict trophic positions and energy pathways. Carbon stable isotopes values ($\delta^{13}\text{C}$) change very
61 little through trophic linkages and act as indices of foraging behavior and fish habitat.¹¹ Stable
62 isotopes values of nitrogen ($\delta^{15}\text{N}$) undergo predictable trophic enrichment from prey to
63 predators, allowing us to estimate trophic position.^{12, 13} While information regarding MeHg
64 bioaccumulation and biomagnification can be inferred from $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ analyses, the
65 connection of Hg sources through dietary pathways is best assessed by including Hg stable
66 isotope analyses.^{1, 12, 14, 15}

67 Combining $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ with Hg stable isotope values facilitates determination of Hg
68 sources and energy pathways to fish, but less commonly tested is the connection between fish
69 habitat use and Hg sources in ecosystems where heterogeneity of Hg sources exists.¹² Mass-
70 dependent fractionation (MDF) of Hg isotopes (represented as $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$) enables inferences about
71 Hg sources¹⁶⁻¹⁸ and reaction processes^{5, 16, 19-22}. In contrast, mass-independent fractionation

72 (MIF) of Hg isotopes (represented by $\Delta^{###}\text{Hg}$) is observed in odd-isotopes and, by separate
73 mechanisms, even-isotopes. In aquatic settings, odd-isotope fractionation (odd-MIF, reported as
74 $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$) results from near-surface photoreduction or oxidation and has been leveraged as an
75 indicator for depth.^{5, 16, 23, 24} Even-isotope fractionation (even-MIF, reported as $\Delta^{200}\text{Hg}$) occurs in
76 the upper atmosphere, and in fish marks the importance of precipitation-delivered Hg.^{1, 12, 17, 18,}
77 ²⁵⁻²⁸ MeHg biomagnification processes conserve $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$, $\Delta^{200}\text{Hg}$, and to some extent $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$
78 values through the food web.²⁹⁻³¹ Thus, Hg isotope values measured in fish provide information
79 on the MeHg that enters at the base of the food web, and when heterogeneity in Hg isotope
80 values exists between habitats (e.g., littoral, pelagic, and benthic zones) of an ecosystem, we can
81 link fish habitats using Hg and carbon.^{1, 12, 32} These multidimensional isotope values
82 simultaneously allow us to track Hg reactionary processes^{5-7, 16, 23} and sources^{1, 3, 21, 25, 29, 33-38} as
83 well as fish habitat preference¹¹ and trophic placement.^{12, 13}

84 The pristine and rugged landscape of southwest Alaska is characterized by a marked
85 spectrum of topography, glaciation, wetland cover, and connectivity to the ocean, all of which
86 potentially influence how Hg inputs that are both shared (e.g., global Hg sources) and regional
87 (e.g., proximity to volcanoes and prevalence of salmon) are received by lakes and the resident
88 fish therein. To assess the relative importance of these variables, we selected 13 lakes and
89 performed limnological measurements, assessment of watershed features, Hg concentration
90 analyses in water, and biological sample collections (seston [plankton], lake trout [*Salvelinus*
91 *namaycush*], and sockeye salmon [*Oncorhynchus nerka*]) for Hg concentration and isotopic
92 analyses. Since direct deposition of long-range atmospheric Hg is uniform across the study area,
93 we hypothesized that isotope values in lake trout inhabiting lakes that receive anadromous
94 sockeye salmon (representing incoming flux of oceanic MeHg) and those located near volcanic
95 Hg sources (deposited as inorganic Hg from particles and fumaroles^{39, 40}) would be isotopically

96 distinct. We also hypothesized that variability in carbon isotope values of bulk tissue within a
97 lake would be attributable to lake trout habitat preference and that this habitat partitioning⁴¹
98 would result in variation in Hg isotope values, provided that differences in the Hg isoscape exist
99 as shown previously¹².

100 **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

101 *Site description*

102 The study lakes are in southwest Alaska within the boundaries of two national parks and
103 preserves (Lake Clark – LACL and Katmai – KATM), span three level III ecoregions, and feature
104 landscapes shaped by glaciation and volcanism. Eighteen volcanoes exist within the study area,
105 with 16 of them located in KATM. We selected 13 lakes according to four criteria: resident lake
106 trout, quantified migratory salmon estimates, existing water quality monitoring efforts, and
107 representative gradients in glacier and wetland cover. Lakes in these parks are oligotrophic and
108 have low to moderate acid buffering capacity. Summertime measurements show that most of
109 these lakes only weakly stratify. Further description of the lakes can be found in Table S1.

110 *Field collections and preservation*

111 In July of 2016, surface water samples⁴² were collected from various open water depths
112 using a Niskin sampler. Sample depth layers were chosen using a water quality profile measured
113 by sonde upon arrival. Samples were temporarily held on ice in new Hg-clean 2-liter bottles,
114 filtered, acidified, and measured for total Hg (HgT, filter-passing as FHgT) and MeHg (FMeHg).
115 Unacidified filter-passing water was collected, refrigerated, and analyzed for dissolved organic
116 carbon (DOC; Tables S2-S3).³² Details of ancillary water analyses and associated quality control
117 procedures can be found on the U.S. Geological Survey Mercury Research Laboratory (USGS-

118 MRL) website.^{3, 43, 44} Seston were collected by vertical tows in the surficial 20 meters with a 52
119 µm Nitex mesh net and subsequently size sieved (Table S4).⁴⁴

120 Ten adult lake trout and three adult sockeye salmon (where present) were collected per
121 lake by angling or gill net between 2011 and 2016. Sex, weight, and length were measured at
122 capture, and sagittal otoliths and axial muscle tissue were removed from the carcass for age
123 determination (Figure S1, Table S5)⁴⁵ and constituent analyses, respectively. All biological tissues
124 were stored frozen, lyophilized, and homogenized prior to analysis.

125 *Constituent analyses*

126 Fish tissue HgT concentrations were determined using direct combustion combined with
127 atomic absorbance spectroscopy (Table S5).³⁴ A triplicate and standard reference material (SRM)
128 analysis was performed once every 10 samples, with acceptable triplicate data achieving a
129 relative standard deviation of less than 10% and an average SRM recovery of IAEA 407 (fish
130 homogenate) measured at $100\% \pm 6\%$. Plankton MeHg concentrations were determined using
131 4.5 M nitric acid extraction, sodium tetraethylborate ethylation, gaseous purge and trap,
132 thermal desorption, and atomic fluorescence spectroscopy (AFS). After successful MeHg
133 analysis, plankton extracts were oxidized with bromine monochloride and analyzed for HgT
134 concentration by AFS. For plankton analyses, SRM IAEA 452 (Scallop - *Pecten. Maximus*)
135 recoveries were consistently within 10% of reported values, reagent blanks were negligible, and
136 an in-house secondary standard to verify ongoing instrument calibration was within 10% of
137 expected concentration.⁴⁴

138 For HgT stable isotope analysis, approximately 0.1 g of fish tissue was digested in 5 mL
139 of concentrated nitric acid (95°C) overnight, oxidized with 5% bromine monochloride, and then
140 heated for 4 hours. Extracts were diluted to a 10% acid concentration, measured for HgT by AFS

141 to assess recovery, and then analyzed for HgT stable isotopes.^{1, 46} IAEA 407 was used as the
142 isotopic Hg SRM and UM-Almadén was used as a secondary standard (Table S6).

143 Carbon and nitrogen stable isotopes values in fish and plankton were analyzed by the
144 University of California-Davis Stable Isotope Facility and reference material results met lab
145 standards. Triplicates were added to determine precision (Table S7). To account for the $\delta^{13}\text{C}$
146 fractionation associated with lipid formation in fish, mathematical lipid corrections (lipid content
147 approximated from molar C:N_{ratio}) were performed on lake trout $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and labeled as $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$.⁴⁷
148 Fatty acid content in zooplankton also fractionates $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ so mathematical corrections
149 approximated from sample C:N_{ratio} were also applied to >118- μm size-sieved plankton $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ and
150 labeled as $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$.⁴⁸

151 **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

152 *Hg in lake water, the lower food web, and lake trout*

153 Analyzed constituents in filter-passing waters were among the lowest reported for
154 surface waters in the literature. FHgT (0.18 ± 0.04 and $0.22 \pm 0.11 \text{ ng L}^{-1}$ for KATM and LACL,
155 respectively; Table S2) in surface waters was similar between parks and lower, on average, than
156 both the pelagic Pacific Ocean and Laurentian Great Lakes.^{1, 43, 49} The FMeHg (often at or below
157 method detection limits of 0.010 ng L^{-1}) and DOC (0.89 ± 0.39 and $0.62 \pm 0.71 \text{ mg L}^{-1}$ for KATM
158 and LACL respectively) concentrations were extremely low, often lower than the open Pacific
159 Ocean and Upper Great Lakes.^{43, 44, 49}

160 The uptake of MeHg from water into plankton marks the baseline for MeHg entry into
161 the food web in freshwater and marine systems and can be measured as the bioaccumulation
162 factor (BAF [kg L^{-1}]). Bulk plankton, size-sieved at the 63 – 118 μm size fraction, was composed
163 primarily of algae and contained very few zooplankton, as indicated by low $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values and high

164 C:N ratios (Table S4).⁴⁴ Focusing on bioaccumulation in phytoplankton allows us to estimate
165 MeHg bioavailability while avoiding the complexities of biomagnification through higher trophic
166 level zooplankton. BAFs, while commonly utilized in the literature to compare MeHg
167 bioaccumulation across various water qualities and spatiotemporal ranges, are uncommonly
168 measured in Alaska. We compared BAFs here to analogous oligotrophic systems with existing
169 data, such as the open ocean and the Laurentian Great Lakes.^{2, 44} Although the 63–118- μm size
170 fraction was consistently low in MeHg ($6.1 \pm 4.4 \text{ ng g}^{-1}$; Table S4) when compared to the larger
171 size fractions collected here and algae reported elsewhere,^{43, 44} average BAFs are higher in these
172 lakes ($\log 5.8 \pm 0.5 \text{ L kg}^{-1}$) than typically found globally ($\log 2.4$ to 5.9 in marine systems and \log
173 5.5 to 6.0 in the Laurentian Great Lakes L kg^{-1}),^{44, 50} indicating more efficient MeHg
174 bioaccumulation.

175 Lake trout HgT concentrations were widely variable within and across lakes (Figure 1),
176 with fish from KATM often having higher HgT than fish from LACL. Variation in HgT
177 concentrations within lakes were in part due to fish age and size differences, but systematic
178 relationships were only present for some lakes which prevented us from performing corrections
179 across the study. Great Lakes work⁴⁴ showed a significant and positive relationship between
180 MeHg BAFs in phytoplankton and lake trout HgT, but here no relationship existed. This is likely
181 because our seston-water data represents a single temporal snapshot and lake trout were not
182 size-age standardized.⁵¹ However, C, N, and Hg isotope values in fish capture longer biological
183 timespans that better integrate fish habitat, diet and Hg content.

184 *Hg isotopes reveal Hg sources to lake trout*

185 Lake trout spanned a large range in $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ and $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ values (-0.42 to 2.06‰ and 1.13
186 to 7.59‰, respectively; Figure 2). These ranges were similar to those reported from the Great

187 Lakes, where Hg isotope variability is primarily driven by trophic status and water clarity, and
188 secondarily by the localized influence of anthropogenic inputs.¹ Although the Alaskan lakes are
189 similarly oligotrophic to the least productive of the Great Lakes (like lake Superior), they lack a
190 localized source of anthropogenic Hg and nutrient inputs (like lake Erie) that would drive
191 variation in $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$, so another mechanism, besides water clarity, must drive $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ variability.
192 The $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}:\Delta^{201}\text{Hg}$ ^{5, 16, 23} slopes (KATM = 1.27 ± 0.01 , $r^2 = 1.0$; and LACL = 1.22 ± 0.01 , $r^2 = 0.99$)
193 measured in lake trout are indicative of photochemical demethylation⁵⁻⁷, so variability in lake
194 trout $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ values within a lake did not originate in the Hg source but rather from the extent of
195 *in situ* photochemical processing. Secchi depth generally increased with mean lake trout $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$
196 across lakes, with some exceptions (Figures S3), in part supporting these conclusions. But some
197 lakes had very low Secchi depth accompanied by high $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ values, and we postulate that is
198 related to the depth of chlorophyll maxima which for some lakes was proximate to the surface.
199 Vertical placement of phytoplankton is important because phytoplankton are the entry point for
200 MeHg, where pelagic $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ values are captured initially. Phytoplankton can enhance
201 photochemical demethylation when exposed to UV light,⁵² which likely exacerbates $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$
202 formation in those anomalous lakes, and we propose vertical phytoplankton positioning might
203 be influenced by unrealized variables (like glacial till shading) and should be investigated in the
204 future.

205 The collection of $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}:\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ values between the two parks is also offset by roughly
206 0.5‰ (Figure 2 left) likely due to differing proportions of distinct Hg sources between parks. The
207 $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}:\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ slope in LACL lake trout (2.28 ± 0.09 , $r^2 = 0.97$) was like laboratory-derived
208 photochemical demethylation in low DOC conditions (slope = 2.4),^{3,6,7,29} indicating a similar Hg
209 source among LACL lakes that is photochemically fractionated to varying degrees. In contrast,
210 the $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}:\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ slope for KATM lake trout (3.48 ± 0.33 , $r^2 = 0.90$) was substantially higher than

211 LACL, indicating that KATM lakes receive differing proportions of distinct Hg sources that were
212 also photochemically demethylated to dissimilar extents (Figure S5). Finally, the lake trout
213 $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}:\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ values do not overlap with the anadromous salmon values (except at Crescent
214 Lake, where later we will also rule out direct salmon consumption) indicating that direct
215 consumption of salmon is not a dominant MeHg source.

216 Photochemical demethylation also changes $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ values, but $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ can be used to
217 estimate this fractionation.³ The extent of photochemical demethylation (reflected by $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$
218 magnitude) differed among lakes making it challenging to compare $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ values between lakes.
219 DOC and FHgT concentrations can influence $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ corrections, but here they are similar among
220 lakes (Table S2), reducing concerns. We correct $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ using lake trout $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$, the laboratory-
221 derived $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}:\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ slope (2.4) specific to these DOC and FHgT conditions, and the assumption
222 that $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ values of incoming inorganic Hg are near-zero.^{16, 53, 54} Although sources of Hg with
223 non-zero $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ values are typical from precipitation, we postulate that wet Hg deposition is
224 relatively similar across all lakes and this is supported by low $\Delta^{200}\text{Hg}$ variability among lake
225 trout.^{16, 25, 27, 33, 36, 55} Furthermore, the lack of increased particulate or dissolved Hg below the
226 thermocline indicate the sediments were not an appreciable Hg source to fish^{1, 12, 42} (Table S2).
227 Together, these factors and assumptions allowed us to estimate a $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}_{\text{corr.}}$ for each fish, which
228 we then compared across lakes.

229 We observed decreasing $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}_{\text{corr.}}$ values and increasing lake trout HgT concentrations
230 (Figure S6 - Pearson's $r = -0.55$ and $p < 0.001$ – Figure S6) as proximity to volcanoes increased
231 (Figures 1B and 2 left). Isotope values from gaseous elemental Hg and fumarole-reactive Hg
232 released from volcanoes are low in $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ (-0.1 and -0.1 to 0.2‰, respectively) and $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ (-1.7
233 and -1.1 to -0.2‰ respectively) when compared to background gaseous elemental and

234 precipitation-delivered Hg isotope values ($\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$; -0.3 to -0.1 and 0.2 to 0.6‰ are the
235 interquartile ranges respectively and $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$; 0.0 to 0.7 and -1.1 to 0.0‰ are the interquartile
236 ranges respectively).^{33, 36, 53, 56, 57} Because the $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ values for fumarole-released Hg are lower
237 than background measurements in precipitation and gaseous elemental Hg, and because we
238 observed decreased $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}_{\text{corr.}}$ values in lakes proximate to volcanoes, we have concluded that
239 the southern KATM lake trout receive additional Hg from volcanism, likely as fumarole
240 deposition directly to lakes or to the watershed.³⁹

241 *Determining the importance of salmon to lake trout Hg accumulation*

242 We found little evidence of direct contribution of salmon-derived Hg to lake trout. Lake
243 trout $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}_{\text{corr.}}$ values did not overlap with salmon $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}_{\text{corr.}}$ values (Figure 2 left) in any lakes
244 except Turquoise (which lacks salmon migration). Crescent Lake trout overlapped with salmon
245 for paired $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ and $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ values, but only when uncorrected $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ values are used. Our
246 study design does not account for indirect routes of Hg exposure from salmon. For example,
247 lake trout may consume oceanic salmon MeHg through salmon eggs and newly hatched fry.
248 Also, salmon decay as an exposure route was not considered. Decay results in the simultaneous
249 liberation of Hg and a considerable influx of nutrients to these oligotrophic ecosystems.^{10, 58-61}

250 Although plankton would be the preferred sentinel to capture a $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$ or
251 Hg signal from decaying salmon, plankton collections slightly preceded salmon migration. So, we
252 can only conclude that plankton $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$ values do not differ between lakes with and
253 without salmon migrations despite our assumption that salmon migrations would alter each
254 lake's $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}$ baseline over timescales exceeding a year. We expected to observe a $\delta^{15}\text{N}$
255 and $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$ or Hg shift in the lake trout too because migrating salmon deliver, *en masse*, large
256 amounts of isotopically distinct sources of C, N, and Hg to relatively nutrient and Hg poor lake

257 ecosystems.^{58, 59, 62} C, N, and Hg half-lives in long-lived lake trout are expected to extend beyond
258 one year, allowing them to serve as sentinels to capture salmon migrations if salmon tissue is of
259 direct and important sustenance.^{12, 63-65} While C and Hg isotope axes in lake trout were not
260 distinguishable between lakes with and without salmon migrations, $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ values were higher in
261 salmon-run lakes (T-test; $t = 9.06$, $p \leq 0.001$ and Figure S2). Elevated $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ indicate that
262 senescent salmon might alter the nitrogen baselines, however our study was not designed to
263 accurately characterize this result in detail. Direct and indirect routes of trout exposure to
264 salmon Hg warrant focused study, including a mass-balance approach using specimens collected
265 over more frequent intervals, to better understand the influence of migratory salmon as a
266 source of MeHg to resident fish in lakes and rivers.

267 *The importance of habitat uses by lake trout*

268 Using Hg stable isotope values to delineate Hg sources to fish can be complex when
269 species undergo changes in life cycle¹⁴ or dietary niche partitioning.¹³ We propose that these
270 lake trout niche-partition among preferred foraging habitats. In lakes where the largest
271 observable differences in Hg and C isotope values exist between habitats, we can explore this
272 partitioning. Trophic modifications and *in situ* reactions complicate interpreting $\delta^{15}\text{N}$ and $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$
273 directly.^{12, 18, 66} $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$ values are conserved along trophic processes, allowing us
274 to trace foraging habits along axes of depth (via $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$)^{1, 12, 32} and pelagic-versus littoral habitat
275 types (via $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$)¹¹. When we subtract the lake-specific lake trout mean $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$
276 values from each individual lake trout, we can compare $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ and $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$ values between
277 lakes with differing baselines (Figure 2 right). We found many lakes where lake trout foraging
278 habitat preferences exist. Some lake trout used relatively more littoral areas of the lake ($\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$
279 decreased and $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$ increased) and others used deep pelagic areas ($\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$ increased and

280 $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$ decreased; Figure 2 right). More work would be useful to clarify whether this
281 influences fish nutrition or Hg burden.¹² Together these tools provide yet another line of
282 evidence supporting the use of multi-isotope values to better understand energy pathways,
283 contaminant sources, contaminant burdens, and variance therein.

284 *Supporting information*

285 The Supporting Information is available free of charge at: [ES&T Enter DOI](#)
286 This document covers supplementary text on the research approach, site description, biological
287 analyses and factors and, the soil collections performed. Following are a series of figures that
288 support points of discussion in the main manuscript as well as a diagram that helps
289 communicate the process of correcting $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ for mass dependent fractionation attributed to
290 photochemical demethylation. Next are the supporting data tables for the figures presented this
291 manuscript. Those tables can also be found at <https://doi.org/10.5066/P9UEP9C5>. Finally, we
292 conclude with the citations pertinent to the supporting information.

293 *Acknowledgements*

294 This work was supported by the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Toxic Substances
295 Hydrology Program, USGS Contaminant Biology Program, and the USGS - NPS Natural Resources
296 Preservation Program. The views expressed in this paper represent the views solely of the
297 authors from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency but do represent the views of the U.S.
298 Geological Survey. Any use of trade, firm, or product names in this publication is for descriptive
299 purposes only and does not imply endorsement by the U.S. Government. All animals were
300 collected following the protocols in the approved National Park Service Institutional Animal Care
301 and Use Committee plan, under protocol number (AKR_SWAN_Bartz_Fish_2019.A3). Partial

302 graduate student support was provided by the Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundation through
303 the University of Wisconsin-Madison Graduate School (award no. MSN165161), and the
304 University of Wisconsin Water Resources Institute through a USGS-NIWR fellowship (award no.
305 MSN197848). Postdoctoral support was provided by the National Science Foundation
306 Postdoctoral Fellowships for Research in Biology – Collection Program 2018 (award no.
307 1812211). We thank Dr. Jessica Brandt and Dr. Sarah Laske, who both contributed a volunteer
308 peer review of this work, and Evan Booher, Katie Junghans, and Jeff Nelson who provided critical
309 field support. Data collected for this study are available at <https://doi.org/10.5066/P9UEP9C5>.

310 Author contributions

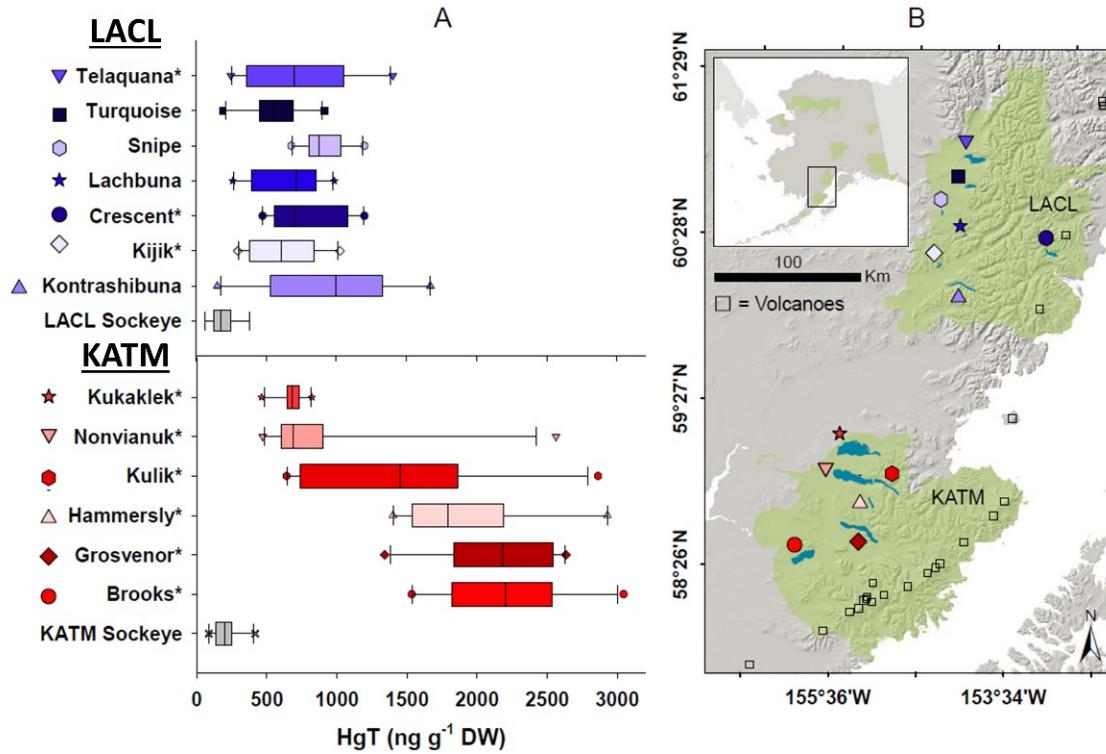
311 K.K.B., C.A.E. and D.P.K. designed the study. R.F.L., J.M.O., and K.K.B. wrote this manuscript.
312 C.A.E., D.P.K., J.P.H., Y.R., S.E.J. and D.B.Y. provided editorial input. R.F.L., K.K.B., J.M.O. collected
313 samples. R.F.L., M.T.T., S.E.J. and J.M.O. provided substantial analytical support.

314 Declaration of conflict

315 The authors declare no conflict of interest.

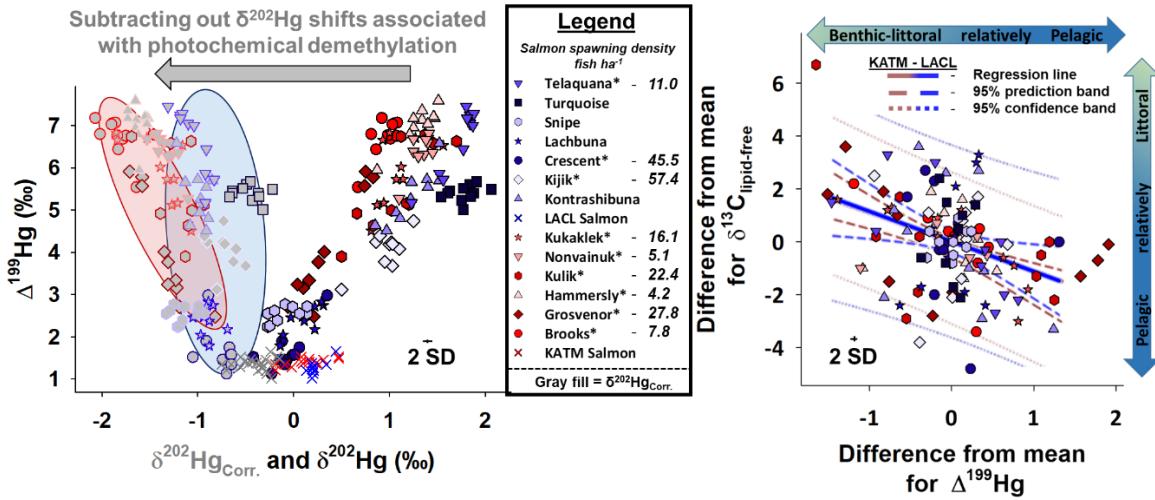
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Figure 1: A) Total mercury concentrations ($\text{HgT ng g}^{-1} \text{ DW}$) in lake trout and sockeye salmon sampled from 13 lakes spanning two National Parks, Lake Clark (LACL) and Katmai (KATM). Box plots are distinguished by color (park), symbol (lake), and shading (water clarity, with lighter tones representing greater water clarity). Lakes are displayed along a latitudinal gradient, from north-most at the top to south-most at the bottom. Asterisks indicates the presence of sockeye salmon in lakes. Each red or blue box represents a collection of 10 – 11 lake trout, and each gray box includes all the sockeye salmon measured in a park (Table S1 and S5). Whiskers mark the 25th and 75th quartiles, the center line the mean, and the symbols outliers. B) Map of lake locations relative to nearby volcanoes (open squares on map). National Parks are depicted in green.



319

320 Figure 2: Left – Hg stable isotope values of $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}$ (colored) $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}_{\text{corr.}}$ (gray-filled) versus $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$
 321 in individual lake trout and anadromous sockeye salmon from 13 lakes in two parks (Table S1
 322 and S5). $\delta^{202}\text{Hg}_{\text{corr.}}$ derivation is detailed in SI, but represents a term corrected for the MDF
 323 produced during photochemical demethylation. Right - Datapoints represent individual lake trout
 324 that have been corrected to the lake population mean for $\delta^{13}\text{C}_{\text{lipid-free}}$ and $\Delta^{199}\text{Hg}$. Solid, medium
 325 hashed, and dotted lines are color-coded and represent parks-specific regression lines, 95%
 326 prediction bands, and 95% confidence bands, respectively. Legend - Color formatting follows
 327 Figure 1A except for the gray filled boxes. Asterisks indicates the presence of sockeye salmon in
 328 lakes. The legend is ordered by decreasing latitude from top to bottom. When italicized numbers
 329 are listed, those indicate that lakes' salmon spawning density (fish ha^{-1}).

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