

Emergency Action Needed to Prevent Asian Carp Invasion

There is an urgent threat of Asian Carp entering the first of the Great Lakes.

Alliance for the Great Lakes website – Oct. 14, 2009



The Alliance joins other Great Lakes conservation groups today in calling on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to **take immediate emergency action** to stop the invading Asian carp from moving into the first of the Great Lakes.

The powerful, leaping Asian carp, which could devastate the region's \$4.5 billion fishing industry and are known to knock recreational boaters and anglers from their boats, have reached the electrical barrier operating in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

Voltage at the barrier -- erected to keep the Asian carp out of Lake Michigan and the other Great Lakes -- was increased this fall from 1 volt to 2 volts, and experts monitoring the canal are confident the carp won't breach the barrier.

A new concern looms that could make the barrier irrelevant, however.

"There is an urgent threat of Asian carp entering Lake Michigan if the nearby waterways flood into the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal," said Joel Brammeier, acting president and CEO of the Alliance for the Great Lakes. "We are just one heavy rain away from this emergency becoming an epidemic."

Asian carp inhabiting the nearby Des Plaines River, **in some places less than 100 feet from the canal**, could make their way into Lake Michigan if floodwaters spill over the riverbanks during a heavy rain this fall, he said.

Another adjacent canal -- the Illinois and Michigan Canal -- is free of carp but presents a similar threat. Connected to the Sanitary and Ship Canal via small culverts, carp could invade the I&M Canal by navigating the culverts during heavy rains.

Asian carp are non-native fish that are already seriously damaging the environment and economy of the Mississippi River and threaten to do the same in the Great Lakes. The carp -- specifically the bighead and silver carp -- are voracious filter feeders that can grow to more than 3 feet long and quickly dominate a body of water.

The groups **issued a press release today** urging residents to contact their congressmen, senators and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, calling on them to immediately:



- Construct an emergency physical barrier (such as sandbags) between the Des Plaines River and the Sanitary and Ship Canal to prevent the river and live Asian carp from flooding into the canal past the electrical barrier.
- Install an additional barrier to stop the invading carp from migrating upstream into the Des Plaines River.
- Fill critical sections of the I&M Canal to prevent carp from swimming into the Sanitary and Ship Canal during floods.

If flooding occurs and the corps has failed to take action, Brammeier said all locks upstream of the electric barrier must be closed until it is determined that Asian carp haven't swept into the Great Lakes watershed along with the floodwaters.

The Alliance and its partners say the corps can't stop there, however.

"Stopping the carp and future invaders permanently will require complete separation of the Great Lakes from the Mississippi River to stop this emergency from becoming an epidemic," said Brammeier, whose **report on the subject last year** has been attracting support.

Once in the Great Lakes, the fish would cause irreversible harm by muscling out native fish populations and consuming large quantities of algae and zooplankton.

Graphic: Silver carp presence in Chicago waterways-October 2009 >>

Action Alert >>

Posted 10-14-09