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Federal Asian Carp Study Too Slow

Groups call on feds to speed study and focus on permanent prevention of invasive species like Asian carp

Public meeting being held from 2pm-8pm at:
Buffalo Conference Center 2 Fountain Plaza Buffalo, NY

(Buffalo, NY)- Today U.S. and Canadian environmental and conservation groups are calling on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to prioritize and speed up—from five years to 18 months—the Chicago area portion of its regional study to prevent the Asian carp from moving from the Mississippi River into the Great Lakes. They also urged the Corps to hold hearings in Canada and to focus on finding permanent solutions that will *prevent*—not just *reduce the risk* of—species invasions between the two basins.

The Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) is the only known continuous connection between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins, making it the primary pathway for transferring invasive species between North America's greatest freshwater ecosystems. DNA testing has repeatedly indicated the presence of Asian carp in the CAWS, and in June 2010, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources found a live Asian carp just six miles from Lake Michigan waters.

“An Asian carp on Lake Michigan's doorstep won't wait half a decade for the Corps to finish their study,” said Jennifer Nalbene, Director of Navigation and Invasive Species from Great Lakes United. “The Corps need to condense their time-line and produce actionable recommendations for the Chicago area within 18 months.”

The Corps is holding the second of 12 public meetings today in Buffalo, NY to hear from the public on the Great Lakes Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLMRIS) which Congress directed the Corps to undertake as part of 2007's Water Resources Development Act. The Act told the Corps to study options to "prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basins through the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and other pathways." The will of Congress was also communicated in May, 2010, when thirteen Great Lakes Senators sent an open letter to the Senate, calling on the Senate to direct the Corps to expedite a study of how to build a physical barrier between the Mississippi and Great Lakes. And last summer, when Great Lakes members of Congress introduced House and Senate bills to compel the Corps to complete such a study within 18 months (New York Senators Charles Schumer and Kristen Gillibrand cosponsored the Senate Bill).

“The will of Congress and the public must not be ignored. This is a *prevention* study and its results should be used to prevent Asian carp from invading the Great Lakes, otherwise it will be a 100% failure,” said Brian Smith from Citizens Campaign for the Environment. “The study must focus on permanent solutions such as restoration of the original hydrologic separation of the basins, before breeding populations of Asian carp establish in the Great Lakes.”

But while Congress directed the Corps only to study ways “*to prevent*” invasive species transfer, the Corps instead is describing the study's objective as “the prevention or *reduction of the risk*” of invasive

species transfer.

The inclusion of risk reduction expands the scope of the study beyond just physically separating the waterways to include legal and political controls (the Corps lists "*laws with fines for importing [invasive species]*" as an example), and controls to modify invasive species behavior, prompting them to avoid Lake Michigan (the Corps lists "*air bubble curtains, thermal barriers, electric barriers, chemical barriers, low dissolved oxygen barriers and predation*").

"Deplorably, the Corps has decided to spend precious time and resources to study ways to 'reduce the risk of,' not just prevent invasive species. This is not what was authorized by Congress and it won't ensure protection of our Great Lakes," said Thomas Marks, New York Director of the Great Lakes Sport Fishing Council.

"Canada's Department of Fisheries and Oceans said the Asian carp would be able to invade into every Canadian lake and river up to James Bay and that two years after these carp get into Lake Michigan at Chicago they will invade all of Lake Huron and Georgian Bay." said Mary Muter of the Sierra Club of Ontario. "The longer you wait the closer the carp get and the reality of this terrifying Great Lakes invasion begins."

An Asian carp invasion to the Great Lakes would impact both U.S. and Canadian waters. Canadian groups have been petitioning the U.S. Department of State for a public hearing in Canada to no avail. Today groups again are calling on the Corps to hold hearings in Canada, to hear from the Canadian public and to receive the most up to date information from Fisheries and Oceans researchers.

Severing the artificial connection between the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes would require modifications to the series of canals, locks and channels, collectively known as the CAWS, which was built more than 100 years ago to allow the city of Chicago to reverse the flow of the Chicago River and move sewage away from its drinking water source- Lake Michigan. The waterway system has allowed for the movement of goods through the city, and region. But it also diverted massive amounts of water away from the Great Lakes, allowed the city to postpone a sustainable solution to deal with its sewage, and is now serving as an expressway for invasive species.

Stopping invasive species is a tenet of Great Lakes restoration and Great Lakes regional economic recovery. The Brookings Institution found that a \$26 billion investment in Great Lakes restoration will lead to at least a \$50 billion in economic benefit for the region.

Today's meeting is the second of twelve public "scoping" meetings that the Corps will hold in cities throughout the Great Lakes region and beyond to refine its study plan and the list of topics it will study. Public comment on the Army Corps plan will end on March 31st. More information and the meeting agenda can be found here: <http://glmr.is.anl.gov/involve/pubschedule/index.cfm>.

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