



Fact Sheet

The Threat of Asian Carp

Our Great Lakes are in danger from invasive species

Our Great Lakes



Sandra Cobb

People come from far and wide to visit Ohio's Lake Erie shoreline. They come to fish, swim, boat, and admire nature's beauty. They also come to spend money. Tourism accounted for over \$10 billion in sales on Ohio's Lake Erie shore 2009, with \$300 million spent just on fishing. This economic infusion was responsible for 114,000 Ohio jobs in 2009—more than Wal-Mart, the Cleveland Clinic, and the Wright-Patterson Air Force Base combined.

The Great Lakes are a national treasure as well as an economic gold mine. They are the world's largest source of fresh water, and home to a \$7 billion sport and commercial fishing industry and a \$16 billion recreational boating industry. In Ohio alone, the recreational boating industry contributes the equivalent of 26,000 full-time jobs and \$3.5 billion in economic activity.

Over the past few decades, the Great Lakes have been ecologically traumatized by 185 invasive species, which have already cost the region over \$200 million in damage and control costs.

As just one example, facilities that draw in large amounts of water from Lake Erie have spent \$400,000 each year to remove invasive species such as zebra and quagga mussels from their intake pipes.

Lake Erie, the shallowest and warmest of the Great Lakes, is also the most biologically diverse and productive Lake. It is the walleye capital of the world, and produces more fish for human consumption than all of the other Great Lakes combined.

Because it is so biologically productive, Lake Erie has the most to gain from restoration efforts, and the most to lose from potential ecological devastation.

A New Threat

Spawning populations of Asian carp, also known as silver and bighead carp, are just miles from the Great Lakes, threatening to decimate the Great Lakes' ecology.

These voracious fish can weigh up to 40 lbs, about the size of a five-year-old child. Some even grow to 100 lbs, eating huge amounts of plankton each day.

Juvenile game fish such as trout, walleye, and salmon depend on this plankton, and

when these carp move in, the native game fish die out.

If Asian carp establish a foothold, recreational and commercial fishing in Lake Erie will be devastated. If these invaders make it past our barriers, the Great Lakes could suffer the same fate as parts of the Missouri river, where more than 90% of all fish are Asian carp.¹

(continued)

For more information contact:

Ohio Environmental Council
1207 Grandview Ave, Suite 201
Columbus, Ohio 43212

tel (614) 487-7506
fax (614) 487-7510
e-mail OEC@theOEC.org
web www.theOEC.org

A New Threat (con't)



These carp are known to leap up to 10 feet in the air when disturbed by the noise of a boat motor. Imagine boating in an area where 40-pound fish might hit a child in the head, breaking a nose or neck.

If this scenario comes to pass, many of 424,000 Ohioans who have registered boats on Lake Erie can expect physical injury and property damage.

Some experts once thought that Asian carp could not reproduce in the Great Lakes.

But scientists now agree that suitable Asian carp spawning conditions exists in many parts of the watershed.

Lake Erie is considered the most vulnerable of the Great Lakes, as Ohio's Maumee, Black, Vermillion, Huron, and Portage Rivers boast the right combination of factors to become fertile Asian Carp breeding grounds.

What Won't Work

The most direct path for the carp to enter the Great Lakes is through the Chicago Area Waterway System, a series of artificial canals that connect Lake Michigan to the Mississippi River.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has enacted temporary measures to block Asian carp from passing through the canals while it studies a more permanent solution.

These measures depend on three electric barriers along the Illinois River, which work by sending an electric current through the water to immobilize or kill the fish.

There are three main problems with the electric barriers:

- the barriers have proven ineffective on small fish, such as young Asian carp.
- the barrier is less effective when fish swim in the "electric shadow" that is

caused when a barge passes through the barrier and reduces the voltage in the area alongside the hull.

- electric barriers require maintenance and constant operation, and they are only effective under normal conditions.

If we rely on the electric barrier for long enough, it will fail. For example, it would not function properly in the event of a widespread power outage or a severe flood.

The Corps briefly experimented with increasing the voltage to try to stop smaller fish, but that experiment has been shelved indefinitely.

And no barrier that requires constant operation and maintenance can provide the kind of permanent, worry-free protection that is needed to ensure the safety of the Great Lakes.

¹ <http://www.jsonline.com/news/wisconsin/120417019.html>

² http://www.lrc.usace.army.mil/pao/Other_Pathways_Preliminary_Risk_Characterization.pdf

Not Just a Chicago Problem

As if the problems in the Chicago area waterway aren't enough, the Army Corps has released a preliminary risk assessment that identified other sites where there is a "high" or "acute" risk of carp crossing into the Great Lakes watershed.²

These sites include locations in Minnesota, Indiana, and Ohio. Although temporary band-aid measures have been taken in some of these areas, the Army Corps study on permanent separation, which represents the best hope to come up with a workable long-term solution, is not due for completion until 2015.

Asian carp do not just threaten the Great Lakes. They threaten all of Ohio's waterways and our fishing, boating, and tourism industries. The fish are not yet present in Ohio, but they are established downstream in the Ohio River and could move further north.

There is also a spawning population of silver carp in the Wabash River, which is a mile flood plain away from the Maumee River. Both of these rivers are known to occasionally flood and mix waters, putting the Great Lakes, Lake Erie, and all Ohioans who enjoy recreating on the water at risk.

Recommendation



Photo: Bonnie Curfess, 2004, "Life on Lake Erie" Award Winner

The only long-term solution to the threat of Asian carp and other invasive species is complete hydrological separation of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River water basins.

The Stop Asian Carp Act (House Resolution 892/Senate Bill 471) directs the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to speed up their study on how to achieve hydrological separation of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins.

It also calls on President Obama to appoint an individual to oversee the study to make sure it gets done quickly and to change the focus of the study from reducing the risk of species spreading to preventing the exchange of harmful species between the Mississippi basin and the Great Lakes.

Please contact your Congressional members by phone or email.

Congress Switchboard: (202) 224-3121

House Website: www.house.gov

Senate Website: www.senate.gov

Urge them to co-sponsor the Stop Asian Carp Act. In addition, ask them to request that leadership and their colleagues quickly enact this vital legislation.

Ohio Congressional members that are current co-sponsors of this legislation are Senator Brown and Representatives Fudge, Kaptur, LaTourette, and Sutton.

For more information please contact Kristy Meyer, Director of Agricultural & Clean Water Programs, at (614) 487-7506 or Kristy@theOEC.org.