



Great Lakes Fishery Commission

ESTABLISHED BY CONVENTION BETWEEN CANADA AND THE UNITED STATES TO IMPROVE AND PERPETUATE FISHERY RESOURCES

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GREAT LAKES FISHERY COMMISSION LAUDS CANADA'S PLAN TO ASSESS RISK OF ASIAN CARPS

Fisheries and Oceans Minister Gail Shea launches first binational Asian carp initiative

ANN ARBOR, MI—The Great Lakes Fishery Commission today praised Fisheries and Oceans Minister Gail Shea for launching a major initiative to assess the risk Asian carps pose to the Great Lakes. The risk assessment will be conducted jointly between scientists in Canada and the United States; the Great Lakes Fishery Commission will facilitate the project. This risk assessment will be the first binational effort to evaluate the likelihood of Asian carps spreading throughout the Great Lakes basin and to gauge the potential effect of the species on the Great Lakes ecosystem. The assessment will involve preeminent scientists in the field, will be peer-reviewed, and should take about eighteen months to complete.

The term “Asian carps” refers to several species of fish originating from Asia. Three species of Asian carps—the bighead, silver, and black—were imported into the southern United States in the early 1970s to keep aquaculture ponds clean and to provide fresh fish for markets. The fish escaped into the Mississippi River system in the 1980s and 1990s after large floods and have been expanding their range northward ever since. The impact of Asian carps on the Mississippi system has been quite profound: the fish reproduce in large numbers, consume vast quantities of food, and displace native species. The silver carp (often called the “flying carp”) leaps out of the water and has injured people and damaged property.

A non-natural connection—the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal—links the Mississippi basin to the Great Lakes and is the primary pathway of concern for the Asian carps. An electrical barrier on the waterway prevents carp migration, but sampling—and the capture of one live bighead carp in June, 2010—has raised concern that Asian carps might be on the Lake Michigan side of the barrier, though probably in small numbers. The Great Lakes Fishery Commission has joined other agencies in working together to support measures to monitor carp movement and prevent entry into the Great Lakes. (For more information see www.asiancarp.org)

“The Great Lakes Fishery Commission commends Canada for launching this initiative to better understand the potential for Asian carps to spread throughout the Great Lakes ecosystem,” said David Ullrich, the commission’s U.S. Section Chair. “With this risk assessment, we will have a vastly improved understanding about where Asian carps might establish a population within the basin, as well as important information about the probable impact of Asian carps on the fishery and environment, should they enter the lakes.”

Added Michael Hansen the commission’s vice chair and professor at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point: “Scientists in both Canada and the United States have each conducted separate risk assessments to evaluate Asian carps and their effect on the environment. This information, to date, has been instrumental in justifying the critical importance of preventing the migration of these fish into the Great Lakes. The commission is pleased that Minister Shea has committed Canada to conducting a rigorous risk assessment that will include active participation from American scientists. The product will be the first and only basin-level, peer-reviewed consensus among top scientists about the risks of Asian carps.”

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