Great Lakes Fishery Commission

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

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ASIAN CARP THREAT HIGHLIGHTS URGENCY FOR ACTION AS NEW STUDY CHARTS COURSE TO PREVENT ECOLOGICAL DANGER

Blueprint for action—released today by the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes and Saint Lawrence Cities Initiative—provides key options to pre-empt Asian carp establishment

ANN ARBOR, MI—The Great Lakes Fishery Commission today strongly reiterated the serious threat Asian carps pose to the Great Lakes as the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes and Saint Lawrence Cities Initiative release their much-anticipated study on how to thwart the movement of invasive species between the Mississippi and Great Lakes basins. The study, which presents possible ways in which the Mississippi River and Great Lakes basins can be re-separated, is the first major effort to provide failsafe solutions to preventing the movement of aquatic invasive species between the two watersheds. Scientific evidence indicates that bighead and silver carps—the two species most threatening establishment in the Great Lakes—would find portions of the basin to be suitable places to live and reproduce, likely causing ecosystem disruption, and loss of valuable fishery resources. Science behind the Asian carp threat adds pointed urgency for action on the separation study released today.

The Great Lakes are a valuable resource for both Canada and the United States. The Great Lakes' commercial, recreational, and tribal fisheries are valued at more than $7 billion annually. The lakes provide drinking water for 40 million people and are a rich tourist draw. They are a way of life for the people of the region and a healthy, vibrant Great Lakes ecosystem is immeasurable in economic terms alone.

"Asian carps have the ability to spread rapidly, reproduce in large numbers, and become the dominant species in an ecosystem, threatening the significant economic and ecological value these lakes provide," said Robert Lambe, chair of the Great Lakes Fishery Commission. "Science indicates that, like the sea lamprey and zebra mussel, bighead and silver carps are likely to become permanent components of the Great Lakes if they become established in the system. We simply must not let new species—particularly ones as large and prolific as the silver and bighead carps—into the Great Lakes."

Dr. Michael Hansen, the commission's vice-chair, added: "The science to date, and observing the carp as they migrate throughout the Mississippi River and Illinois River systems, should give scientists, fishery managers, policy makers, and the public more than ample reason to be extremely concerned about these species. Actions, like those proposed by the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes and Saint Lawrence Cities initiative, are particularly urgent given what we know about the bighead and silver carps and their likely impact on the Great Lakes."

Hansen continued: "Recent models of food consumption by bighead and silver carps indicate that some areas of the Great Lakes have sufficient food to support populations of these fish. Regions of particular risk include Green Bay and western Lake Erie, but all five Great Lakes will likely provide some habitat for Asian carps. The Great Lakes appear to be suitable environments for bighead and silver carps, particularly in tributary rivers and shallower more-productive areas, where losses of native fish production would be likely be greatest."

Hansen continued: "Risk assessments have shown that nearly two dozen tributaries in U.S. waters alone are potentially suitable for Asian carp spawning. Moreover, a recent analysis of U.S. tributaries to Lake Erie, conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey, indicates that the Maumee, Sandusky, and Grand Rivers are most likely to support successful spawning of bighead and silver carps. Establishment of Asian carps in Lake Erie would risk the future of our most productive Great Lake."

"The Great Lakes—and the way of life they support—are under assault from invasive species," stressed Lambe. "Invasive species are not a local or even a regional problem—they are a national issue for both the United States and Canada—indeed, they are a global problem. Invasive species spread readily from region to region, so species introduced into one part of the continent will, in all likelihood, eventually make it to other parts of the continent. The Great Lakes Commission and Great Lakes and Saint Lawrence Cities Initiative study addresses the Chicago Area Waterway System as a conduit for invasive species transfer. We know that the Great Lakes can be both a source and a recipient of invasive species to the United States and Canada. By addressing the problem in the Chicago area, we address the problem continent-wide."

Lambe concluded: "We in the Great Lakes basin are indebted to the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes and Saint Lawrence Cities Initiative for their leadership and proactive efforts to find foolproof solutions to this major problem."

Below is a bibliography of major scientific reports about the behavior and risk of Asian carps.

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