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Action on Asian carp highlights Great Lakes Commission Semiannual Meeting

Washington, D.C. – The Great Lakes Commission has called on Congress and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to embrace a clear goal of ecological separation of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds as the key, permanent strategy in the war against Asian carp and their threatened invasion of the Great Lakes.

The resolution, approved today by the Commission, asks Congress to provide the Corps with authority and substantial resources to complete the study of ecological separation – defined as prevention of the movement of invasive species between the watersheds – and to accelerate completion of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal portion of the study to September 2011.

The resolution also calls for accelerating the timetable for full operation of the Asian carp barrier system on the Chicago Ship and Sanitary Canal and to establish structural measures to prevent the inadvertent introduction of Asian carp from floodwaters of the Des Plaines River into the canal, and ultimately the Great Lakes.

The action took place at the Commission's 2010 Semiannual Meeting in Washington, D.C. where the eight member states of the Commission, along with associate Canadian member provinces of Ontario and Québec, voiced consensus on the need to inhibit further movement of Asian carp northward to the Great Lakes.

In other Commission business, implementation and ongoing support for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) were key focal points of the Great Lakes Commission's federal legislative priorities for FY 2011, formally released today at the meeting in Washington, D.C.

Enacted by Congress with full funding of \$475 million for FY 2010, the GLRI is planned as a five-year program to restore and protect the Great Lakes. The Administration has proposed funding at a level of \$300 million for FY 2011.

“This important funding will allow the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative to continue to protect our water and conserve the natural resources in the Great Lakes Basin,” said Illinois Governor and GLC Chair Pat Quinn of the Initiative currently in its first year. “I want to thank President Obama and Congress for helping us ensure that we can provide clean, safe drinking water for generations to come.”

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Great Lakes Commission

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The Commission's federal priorities, outlined in the publication "Fulfilling the Promise for the Great Lakes: Advancing Great Lakes Restoration and Economic Revitalization," are largely driven by the GLRI's five focus areas: aquatic invasive species, contaminated sediments, nonpoint source pollution, degraded wetlands and threatened fish and wildlife resources.

In addressing invasive species, the document specifically calls for funding for increased monitoring and response actions to prevent Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes, including completion of the electric barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and expediting the study of options for separating the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds.

Also included in the Commission's 2011 legislative program are priorities shared by a number of other Great Lakes entities such as fixing failing sewers and drinking water infrastructure, strengthening science-based conservation efforts, and enhancing regional collaboration.

"We applaud the leadership of President Obama and Congress in bringing us to this historic point, said Todd Ambs, Administrator of the Wisconsin DNR Division of Water and GLC Vice Chair. "There has never been as comprehensive a plan, and as broad a support base for Great Lakes restoration, and as we move forward in FY 2011 we hope to keep the momentum strong in Washington."

The release of the Commission's legislative priorities comes on the heels of the announcement Sunday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency of a \$2.2 billion action plan to fund the GLRI over a five-year period. Among GLC priorities is support for reauthorization of the EPA's Great Lakes program.

The complete GLC 2011 legislation program can be accessed at the Commission's website at www.glc.org/restore.

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Illinois Gov. Patrick Quinn, is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors' appointees, state legislators and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a "Declaration of Partnership." The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan.