

For immediate release

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Great Lakes Commission applauds new legislation expediting studies on separating the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds

Ann Arbor, Mich. – The Great Lakes Commission is voicing strong support for legislation introduced today by Senators Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Richard Durbin (D-IL), Carl Levin (D-MI) and other senators, and a companion bill introduced in the House by Congressman Dave Camp (R-MI). Titled the *Permanent Prevention of Asian Carp Act*, the bills require the Army Corps of Engineers to expedite studies on separating the Great Lakes from the Mississippi River watershed in Chicago to prevent the introduction of Asian carp and other aquatic invasive species. This approach, termed hydrological separation, is widely considered the best permanent solution to keeping Asian carp from invading the Great Lakes from the Mississippi River watershed via man-made waterways in the Chicago area.

The new legislation comes on the heels of the discovery of an Asian carp in Lake Calumet, beyond the electric dispersal barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and only six miles from Lake Michigan. This discovery—the first capture of a live Asian carp beyond the dispersal barrier—has alarmed Great Lakes leaders and elevated the urgency of control efforts.

“We face a crisis in the Great Lakes and we must act with urgency,” said Todd Ambs, vice chair of the Great Lakes Commission. “It is imperative that we take the near-term actions needed to push back against the forward movement of Asian carp. We applaud Senators Stabenow and Durbin for their leadership in advancing a long-term solution that permanently protects the economic and ecological health of the Great Lakes,” Ambs added.

In 2007, Congress authorized the Corps of Engineers to study options and technologies available to prevent the spread of aquatic nuisance species between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins. Progress under the study has been slow, however, and the Corps now projects that the first phase of the study will not be completed until late 2012, with the full study completed in 2014.

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Great Lakes Commission

Gov. Patrick Quinn (IL), Chair; Tim A. Eder, Executive Director

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The new legislation requires the Corps to complete a new study focused on the Chicago area within 18 months, with several reports due in the intervening months. The legislation would also focus the Corps' study on the feasibility of hydrologic separation rather than a range of options. It would also direct the Corps to examine other modes of transportation for shipping and create engineering designs to move canal traffic from one water body to the other without transferring aquatic species, and it will detail the environmental benefits, costs and construction time estimates of each option. It will also address flooding threats, wastewater needs, emergency response operations and barge and recreational vessel traffic alternatives.

“Now, more than ever, we need leadership from the federal government and an aggressive timetable for action that matches the urgency of this crisis,” said Tim Eder, executive director of the Great Lakes Commission. “This legislation will help assure that long-term solutions move forward quickly.”

The Great Lakes Commission went on record earlier this year with a resolution urging Congress to “implement any measures necessary to prevent further migration of any Asian carp...” and recognizing that “the best permanent solution for the health of both the Mississippi River and Great Lakes watersheds is ecological separation...” The resolution was adopted unanimously by the Commission's eight member states, including Illinois, at their semiannual meeting in February in Washington, D.C.

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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.