



2805 South Industrial Hwy
Suite #100
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48104-6791

Chair: Mike Conlin, Illinois DNR
Vice-Chair: James Grazio, Pennsylvania DEP

January 19, 2007

Dr. Mamie Parker & Mr. Timothy R. E. Keeney
Co-Chairs
Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Mailstop 322
Arlington, VA 22203

Dear Co-Chairs:

On behalf of the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species, I am writing to convey to the ANS Task Force the urgency that many of the institutions represented by Great Lakes Panel members (<http://glc.org/about/taskforce/glpanel.html>) are voicing for stand-alone legislation that will immediately provide authority and funding to construct, operate and maintain the aquatic invasive species (AIS) dispersal barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal (Canal). Fail-safe operation of this dispersal barrier has been identified as a top regional priority by the Panel in efforts to reduce the risk of Asian carp invading the Great Lakes via the Canal. As Chair of the Great Lakes Panel, I recommend that the ANS Task Force support the advancement of fail-safe operation of the dispersal barrier system, utilizing available resources of member agencies. This recommendation is being offered based on the following Panel responsibilities set forth under federal legislation, the Nonindigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act (Public Law 101-646):

- Identify priorities for activities in the Great Lakes states with respect to aquatic nuisance species;
- Coordinate aquatic nuisance/invasive species program activities in the Great Lakes;
- Assist the ANS Task Force in coordinating Federal aquatic nuisance species program activities in the Great Lakes;
- Provide advice to public and private individuals and entities concerning methods of controlling aquatic nuisance species; and
- Develop and submit recommendations to the national Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force.

It is timely for us to reflect upon the original purpose of the AIS dispersal barrier, namely to reduce the risk of invasion of the round goby into the Illinois River from Lake Michigan. In this case, funding delays prevented expedient construction of the barrier and the window of opportunity was lost to prevent the round goby invasion into the Illinois River system and beyond. We are in danger of letting history repeat itself with the invasion of the Asian carp into the Great Lakes from the Illinois River.

In response to this high priority issue, Representative Judy Biggert (R-IL) and Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) have introduced stand-alone legislation, the Great Lakes Asian Carp Barrier Act, that addresses key needs associated with the dispersal barrier to protect the Great Lakes from harmful aquatic invaders. This legislation authorizes the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to:

- Complete construction on a permanent dispersal barrier;
- Upgrade and make permanent the original demonstration barrier;
- Operate both barriers as a single system to optimize effectiveness;
- Credit the states for their contributions to this project; and
- Study options and technologies to prevent the spread of invasive species.

January 19, 2007

Page 2

As of this writing, Asian carp are dangerously close to the Canal, underscoring the urgency to block this invasion pathway through enactment of the aforementioned legislation. If Asian carp enter the Great Lakes, then there will be devastating impacts to those species in the food web and certain commercial and recreational uses of the Lakes. In the Mississippi River, Asian carp have become more than 95 percent of the biomass in some areas and are significantly damaging a valuable sport fishery, and may be competing with native species for limited food and habitat resources. Of particular concern is the Asian carp species, silver carp which is known to leap high out of the water when startled, posing a serious injury risk to recreational boaters.

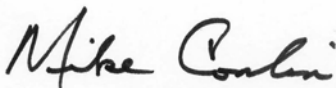
Operation of the first electrical barrier (Barrier I) in the Canal was activated in spring of 2002. This barrier system was designed as a demonstration barrier instead of a permanent barrier for a maximum life of 2-5 years. Parts of Barrier I are beginning to fail, so authorization is needed to convert it to a permanent barrier. A second barrier is currently under construction in two phases ("Barrier IIA" and "Barrier IIB"), though construction is currently stalled due to a lack of funds. Barrier IIA has been completed and activation will depend on the results of pending safety testing, authorization, and appropriations. Barrier IIB, the second half of the new two-barrier array, will be completed only after funds are authorized and appropriated. Together, Barriers I and II will create a robust, more-effective barrier system on the canal.

Legislative provisions to authorize construction, maintenance, and operations of Barriers I and II have previously been included in bills such as the *Water Resources Development Act* (WRDA). Although WRDA passed both houses in the 109th Congress, it was not reconciled before Congress adjourned last session, and will have to be taken up anew in the 110th Congress. Because WRDA is not expected to pass in the near future, stand-alone legislation is required to authorize the barrier immediately and avoid tying the fate of this important project to WRDA.

As Great Lakes scientists, resource managers and policy analysts, we cannot overemphasize the unprecedented need for Congress to pass stand-alone legislation authorizing the AIS dispersal barrier system to be completed in the Canal. Immediate authorization for the dispersal barrier project is needed followed by appropriations in fiscal years 2007 and 2008 to complete construction and provide for operations and maintenance of the dispersal barrier system. These actions, strongly supported by many institutions and individuals serving on the Panel, should be accomplished expeditiously to best prevent Asian carp from invading the Great Lakes along with other aquatic invaders that are sure to follow the same migration path between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins. Barrier I could fail in the very near future, so immediate action is needed.

Authorization and appropriations for the Canal barrier system is critically urgent to protect the environmental and economic health of the Great Lakes region and beyond. The Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species urges the immediate attention of the ANS Task Force to help ensure operation of a fail-safe dispersal barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to protect the Great Lakes from the Asian Carp and other harmful aquatic invaders. This recommendation also reflects the broad consensus of the Aquatic Invasive Species Strategy Team convened under the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration (GLRC), as conveyed in the final GLRC Strategy document.

Sincerely,



Mike Conlin
Chair, Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species
Director, Office of Resource Conservation-Illinois Department of Natural Resources

