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Contact: Tim Eder

734-604-7281 (cell)

734-971-9135 (office)

teder@glc.org

Great Lakes Commission welcomes legislation aimed at protecting the Great Lakes from Asian carp

Ann Arbor, Mich. – The Great Lakes Commission supports legislation introduced yesterday by Rep. Dave Camp (R-Mich.) and Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), supported by a bipartisan group of members of Congress, that would reduce the risk of Asian carp entering the Great Lakes by implementing control measures at the Brandon Road lock and dam on the Des Plaines River in Joliet, Ill.

The Brandon Road site provides a strategic “choke point” to reduce the risk of upstream movement of Asian carp and other invasive species into Chicago-area waterways that connect to Lake Michigan. The “Guarding Our Great Lakes Act” directs federal agencies to develop measures at the existing lock such as a specially engineered approach channel with new electric barriers, and to use the site to test new technologies to prevent the movement of Asian carp and other aquatic invasive species. The plan would maintain efficient navigation in the river for barges and recreational boats.

“It’s critical that we take quick action to reduce the risk of Asian carp invading the Great Lakes while we develop a long-term solution to permanently prevent the transfer of all aquatic invasive species between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds,” said Great Lakes Commission Chairman Kelly Burch, with the Pennsylvania Dept. of Environmental Protection. “We applaud Rep. Camp and Sen. Stabenow for introducing this legislation, which responds to calls from the Great Lakes Commission and other regional leaders for swift action to strengthen protections against Asian carp,” he added.

The original co-sponsors of the bill include Sens. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), Sherrod Brown (D-Ohio) and Tammy Baldwin (D-Wis.); and Reps. Candice Miller (R-Mich.), Tim Walberg (R-Mich.), John Dingell (D-Mich.), Fred Upton (R-Mich.), Bill Huizenga (R-Mich.), Dan Benishek (R-Mich.), Gary Peters (D-Mich.), Louise Slaughter (D-N.Y.), Brian Higgins (D-N.Y.), Mike Kelly (R-Pa.) and Glenn Thompson (R-Pa.).

In March the Commission unanimously adopted a detailed policy resolution calling for immediate action on a suite of near-term measures to reduce the risk of movement of Asian carp through the Chicago Area Waterway System, including to

- “Within three years, design, engineer and construct modifications to the Brandon Road lock and dam structure to reduce the risk of one-way transfer (into Lake Michigan), including additional electric

-more-

Great Lakes Commission

Kelvin Burch (PA), Chair; Tim A. Eder, Executive Director

Eisenhower Corporate Park • 2805 S. Industrial Hwy. Suite 100 • Ann Arbor, Michigan • 48104-6791

734-971-9135 • Fax: 734-971-9150 • Web: www.glc.org

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barriers at the entrance and exit of the lock, use of fish deterrents, modifications to the gates on the dam, and other technologies”; and

- “Design, engineer and test the ‘GLMRIS lock,’ as a national demonstration project, to determine its viability and effectiveness at stopping both one- and two-way transfer and cost.”

In November the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced that it will evaluate technologies to implement at Brandon Road to assess the site’s viability as a single point to control the one-way, upstream movement of aquatic invasive species from the Mississippi River. This builds on the Corps’ Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLMRIS), released in January, which identified eight alternatives for preventing invasive species movement between the two basins. Many of the technologies to be evaluated were identified in GLMRIS.

“This is important work that will develop solutions that can be applied elsewhere in the Chicago waterway system – and throughout the Great Lakes and the nation as a whole – to prevent damaging aquatic species from expanding into other water bodies,” said Jon Allan, the Commission’s vice chair and director of the Michigan Office of the Great Lakes.

The new legislation also calls for continued efforts to develop a long-term solution. Consistent with the Commission’s resolution, the legislation will support investigation of permanent measures to prevent the movement of species threatening both the Mississippi River system and the Great Lakes. It directs the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, acting through the federal Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, to work with the state of Illinois, the city of Chicago and a host of other interests to address impacts to water quality, flooding and transportation, resulting from actions to prevent aquatic invasive species transfer.

Important to these efforts is the Advisory Committee for the Chicago Area Waterway System, representing more than 30 stakeholder groups, that is working to develop consensus recommendations on short- and long-term solutions to prevent the interbasin transfer of aquatic invasive species, while also maintaining or enhancing transportation, maritime commerce, water quality, recreation and flood protection in the region. The Commission, through its resolution, recognized the significant role for the committee in providing recommendations on feasible near-term actions and identifying the best long-term solution. The Commission is committed to working with the other members of the committee and using the committee as a forum to refine next steps and identify a long-term solution as this new legislation and other efforts move forward.

[This statement is released on behalf of the Great Lakes Commission and not the Advisory Committee for the Chicago Area Waterway System.]

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Kelly Burch, executive director of oil and gas operations for the Pennsylvania Dept. of Environmental Protection, 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. Learn more at www.glc.org.