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Great Lakes Commission endorses legislation to accelerate efforts to keep Asian carp from invading the Great Lakes

Ann Arbor, Mich. – The Great Lakes Commission calls on Congress to adopt legislation introduced today that would accelerate efforts to prevent the movement of aquatic invasive species – especially Asian carp – between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds.

The *Stop Asian Carp Act of 2011*, first introduced in Congress last year following discovery of a live Asian carp in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) six miles from Lake Michigan, requires the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to complete a study on hydrological separation of the two watersheds within 18 months.

The bills, introduced by Sens. Debbie Stabenow (D-MI) and Richard Durbin (D-IL), and Rep. Dave Camp (R-MI), would require evaluation of the environmental benefits and costs of measures to separate the Great Lakes from the Mississippi River watershed.

In a resolution adopted last February, the Great Lakes Commission, representing all eight Great Lakes states as well as the Canadian provinces of Ontario and Québec, called on Congress and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to embrace ecological separation as the best permanent solution for preventing the movement of aquatic invasive species and the best approach for safeguarding the health of both the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes.

The State of Illinois joined with the seven other Great Lakes states in calling for the legislation. “We support the study of separation as a long-term, sustainable solution to the spread of aquatic invasive species between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River. However any study of separation must incorporate current uses of Chicago area waterways,” said Marc Miller, director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources.

In a parallel effort, the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative are leading an accelerated, privately funded study, *Envisioning a Chicago Area Waterways System for the 21st Century*, that will develop and evaluate options for hydrological separation. This effort will be completed by January 2012.

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Great Lakes Commission

James Tierney (NY), Chair; Tim A. Eder, Executive Director

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The Stabenow-Durbin-Camp bill would provide the Corps with authority and resources to accelerate completion of a study of hydrological separation in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, the key artificial connection between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River.

“The stakes are just too high and require urgency on the part of the Corps of Engineers,” said Patty Birkholz, director of Michigan’s Office of the Great Lakes. “Michigan and the other Great Lakes states rely heavily on the sport and commercial fisheries that would be put at risk by Asian carp. The potential environmental and economic damages are catastrophic.”

The Corps has already initiated a study on interbasin movement of invasive species, including Asian carp, known as the *Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study* (GLMRIS). However, its projected five-year timeline has been criticized as taking too long, given the proximity of Asian carp to Lake Michigan.

“We applaud this legislation,” said Great Lakes Commission Executive Director Tim Eder, adding “it reflects a level of concern that more closely matches that of our member states and our Canadian partners.”

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by James Tierney, assistant commissioner for water resources at the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, 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.