

For immediate release

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New risk assessment validates threat from Asian carp and points to Chicago-area waterways as most likely pathway into the Great Lakes

Ann Arbor, Mich. – A new risk assessment led by the government of Canada on the threat posed to the Great Lakes by Asian carp heightens the urgent need for a permanent solution, such as hydrological separation of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds, said members of the Great Lakes Commission (GLC) today. Conducted by Canadian and U.S. fishery experts, the report concludes – with high certainty – that without prevention and control efforts, Asian carp are very likely to be introduced and will eventually spread to all five Great Lakes. It identifies the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS) as the most likely entry point into the Great Lakes.

The report notes that actions being taken now have slowed the Asian carp invasion, and that additional prevention and control efforts are critical to reduce the probability of establishment, spread and the subsequent ecological damage that would occur. The report emphasizes that preventing the “arrival, survival, establishment or spread is the most feasible and effective means to control the impact of bigheaded carp.” (The report refers to bighead and silver carp – the two Asian carp species threatening the Great Lakes – jointly as bigheaded carp.)

“This new scientific report confirms that Asian carp pose a real and imminent threat to the Great Lakes,” says Marc Miller, director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and GLC Commissioner. “It underscores the importance of our current efforts to monitor and thwart their advance as well as the need for a permanent solution to prevent Asian carp and other invasive species from passing through the Chicago Area Waterway System into the Great Lakes.”

The 16-month risk assessment by Fisheries and Oceans Canada, facilitated by the binational Great Lakes Fishery Commission, found that although there are numerous potential pathways for Asian carp to enter the Great Lakes, the CAWS poses the greatest and most imminent risk. The peer-reviewed report concluded that the Great Lakes provide suitable food and spawning habitat for Asian carp to survive, and that once introduced they will spread to all five lakes within 20 years and have high to moderate ecological impacts over a 20- to 50-year timeframe. The areas most favorable to the carp include Lake Erie, Lake St. Clair and embayments along lakes Superior, Michigan, Huron and Ontario.

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Great Lakes Commission

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The risk assessment follows the release in January of a comprehensive report by the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative that presents alternatives for permanently separating the Great Lakes and Mississippi River in the Chicago area, where a series of rivers and canals creates an artificial connection and the most likely pathway for Asian carp – and other invasive species – to enter the Great Lakes.

According to GLC Executive Director Tim Eder: “This new science is a sobering reminder of the serious threat to the Great Lakes from Asian carp and other invasive species, and is further evidence that permanent separation of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River is the best long-term solution.”

According to the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee, the leading edge of the carp invasion is 55 miles from downtown Chicago and less than 20 miles from an array of electric barriers that serves as the primary defense for preventing the fish from reaching Lake Michigan.

“The threat from Asian carp is validated by this binational research,” says Patricia Birkholz, GLC commissioner and director of Michigan’s Office of the Great Lakes. “This new research shows that we must move forward with plans for permanent separation.”

The full risk assessment report, *Binational Ecological Risk Assessment of the Bigheaded Carps* (*Hypophthalmichthys* spp.) *for the Great Lakes Basin*, is accessible online at www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/csas-sccs/Publications/ResDocs-DocRech/2011/2011_114-eng.html and a summary is available at www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/csas-sccs/Publications/SAR-AS/2011/2011_071-eng.html.

The Great Lakes Commission report, *Restoring the Natural Divide: Separating the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basins in the Chicago Area Waterway System*, can be accessed at www.glc.org/caws.

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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.