

Asian Carp Problem Must Be Dealt With Quickly, Effectively

**By John P. McCulloch
Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner**

Poison has been introduced into a five and a half mile stretch of an Illinois waterway in an attempt to kill Asian carp and keep them from getting into the Great Lakes. That's a drastic and desperate measure, but it must be done and it's one that I support. Up to this point, the carp have been kept at bay by an electrified barrier. But the \$9 million structure is scheduled to be taken down for several days for routine maintenance. The poison is intended to make sure the carp won't get passed the barrier once the power is cut.

As the Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner, the situation must be very dire before I would ever consider killing an entire fish population in any waterway. Unfortunately, the situation as it stands today is that dire. My greater fear, however, is that these drastic measures won't work. Significant numbers of the fish will be killed and their path to the Great Lakes temporarily disrupted, but it's not the final solution. If the carp cross the barrier, we will never get the genie back into the bottle. It's difficult to argue with those who say that it is no longer a question of "if" Asian carp will reach the Great Lakes; it's a question of "when."

Asian carp are a significant threat to the Great Lakes because they are large, multiply rapidly and are voracious eaters. They consume vast amounts of food, leaving little or nothing left for native species of fish. This invasive species can weigh up to 100 pounds and can grow to more than four feet long. In addition, the Environmental Protection Agency reports that Asian carp are well-suited to the climate of the Great Lakes because it is similar to their native Asian habitats. Once Asian carp disrupt the food chain and become a dominant species in the Great Lakes, they'll continue inland to Michigan's lakes, rivers and streams. Oakland County will not be exempt.

Inasmuch as Michigan is surrounded by the Great Lakes, it will be more adversely impacted than any other state. In addition to devastating the sport fishing industry, the financial and environmental affect will be no less than catastrophic. Ironically, Asian carp were imported for an economic benefit by catfish farmers in the 1970s to remove algae from their ponds. In the 1990s, catfish farm ponds overflowed to waterways of the Mississippi River basin. It didn't take long after that for the fish to find their way to the Mississippi River. Today, they are less than 10 miles away from Lake Michigan. When they reach the lake, it will be disastrous. If we concede defeat and do nothing further, they will become the dominant species in the lake. Any economic benefit they might have provided to catfish farmers has long since disappeared when juxtaposed against the economic nightmare on the horizon.

The US Army Corps of Engineers has been given the funding and the mission to address this challenge. They must not fail because it is Michigan that will pay the price. That

said, we can't simply rely on them to solve the problem. Similarly, we simply can't afford to be reactionary. We must be proactive. If the Corps fails their mission and these fish find their way to the Great Lakes, we must ensure that we are ready to react. Our game plan must cover all the bases. I'm glad to see that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources is lending a hand to the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in their effort to combat this problem. I'm encouraged by this cooperative effort. Michigan needs to be "front and center" in this effort because Michigan, with more fresh water coast line than any other state in the continental U.S. has the most to lose.

Until a comprehensive and long-term game plan is conceived, I endorse interim measures that call for the drastic measure of poisoning portions of Illinois channels leading to the Great Lakes.