

In the Jan. 6, 2010 edition of the Detroit Free Press, it was reported that the Obama administration opposes Michigan and other states that want to close shipping locks near Chicago to prevent Asian carp from invading the Great Lakes.

As the Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner, I would be hard pressed to find a more short-sighted approach to what is potentially a catastrophic problem. The \$475 million that the federal government is making available in stimulus dollars aimed at Great Lakes Basin restoration work would be anemic when compared to the cost of rehabilitating the Great Lakes if Asian carp reach those treasured waters. In fact, many believe that restoring the health of the Great Lakes after such an invasion would be all but impossible – regardless of how much money is thrown at the problem.

The issue before the U.S. Supreme Court represents a balancing test between two opposing positions. On the one hand, those in the Obama administration contend that closing the locks would endanger public safety while disrupting cargo and passenger vessel traffic. Although the administration acknowledges the threat posed by the voracious fish, they claim it is unclear whether closing the locks immediately is necessary. They're wrong.

Oakland County, like many local units of governments, has invested millions of dollars reclaiming our precious water resources by removing sewage sources, managing storm water and restoring habitat. We cannot sit by idly, as our investment is thrown away by a short-sighted decision made in Washington.

Asian carp already have wreaked havoc in the Mississippi River and the waterways near Chicago that lead to Lake Michigan. Unless the locks, which provide a link between the Mississippi River and the Great Lakes, are closed, the fish likely will destroy the multi-billion dollar Great Lakes fishing industry. Asian carp threaten native fish in 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. In fact, this invasive species can weigh up to 100 pounds and can grow to more than four feet long. 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.

We can't afford to let that happen.

John P. McCulloch
Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner