

Arlington Anglers

Asian Carp Pushing Into Lake Michigan



Bob Diebold
Arlington Anglers Fishing Club

There are eight species collectively known as Asian carp. They have been cultivated in aquaculture in China for over 1,000 years. Bighead and silver carp are the most important fish, worldwide, in terms of total aquaculture production. Why are we suddenly interested in these carp now?

Sun-Times writer Dale Bowman has been following the events and on January 19th shared his knowledge and insight with the Arlington Anglers. Bighead, silver, and grass carp are known to be well-established in the Mississippi River basin (including tributaries) of the United States, where they at times reach extremely high abundances, especially in the case of the bighead and silver carp.

These fish are thought to be highly detrimental to the environment in the USA where they are established. Because of these concerns, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service convened stakeholders to develop a national plan in 2007 for the management and control of invasive Asian carp (referring to bighead, silver, black and grass carp).

The common carp was brought to the U.S. in 1831, and has been widespread for a long time. In the late 1800's they were distributed widely throughout the United States by the government as a food fish. They are often known to uproot vegetation and muddy water through their habit of rooting in the mud for food. They are thought to often have detrimental effects on native species. However, common carp are prized in Europe as a sportfish and angling for common carp is enjoying increased popularity in the United States. (Check out caranglersgroup.com).

Bighead and silver carp feed by filtering plankton from the water. The extremely high abundance of bighead and silver carp in the Mississippi and now the Illinois River has caused great concern because of the potential for competition with native species for food and living space. Because of their filter-feeding habits, they are difficult to capture by normal angling methods.

The United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has been concerned about the possibility of Asian carp migrating to the Great Lakes. In 2002, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed an electric fish barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, the only aquatic link between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River drainage basins. Following positive results, construction began on a second, permanent barrier in 2004.

In November, 2009, carp genetic material was detected beyond the two electric barriers, leaving only a single lock/dam on the Calumet River between the detected presence and Lake Michigan. The reaction by the media and various groups like the Alliance for the Great Lakes, was resounding (see more at asiancarp.org/rapidresponse). Some called for the immediate closing of the lock. In the first week of December, 2009, the Army Corps made plans to shut down one of the



Dale Bowman, Outdoors Writer for the Chicago Sun-Times, provide Asian Carp details to the Arlington Anglers at their Jan. 19th meeting.

PHOTO BY: ARLINGTON ANGLERS

electric barriers for maintenance, and the Illinois Department of Natural Resources responded by dumping 2,200 gallons of the toxin Rotenone into the canal. The chemical is deadly for fish but not harmful to humans, animals or most other aquatic life. While "scores" of fish were killed, only one carp was found. The fish kill cost \$3 million and produced 90 tons of dead fish.

On December 21, 2009, Michigan State Attorney General Mike Cox, who is a Republican running for Governor of the State of Michigan, filed a lawsuit with the U. S. Supreme Court seeking the immediate closure of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to keep the Asian Carp out of Lake Michigan.

In response to the Michigan lawsuit, on January 5, 2010, Illinois State Attorney General Lisa Madigan filed a counter-suit with the U.S. Supreme

Arlington Anglers

Asian Carp Pushing Into Lake Michigan



Court requesting that it reject Michigan's claims. Siding with the State of Illinois, both the Illinois Chamber of Commerce and The American Waterways Operators have filed affidavits, arguing that closing the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal would upset the movement of millions of tons of vital shipments of iron ore, coal, grain and other cargo, totaling more than \$1.5 billion a year, and contribute to the loss of hundreds, perhaps thousands of jobs. On January 19, 2010 the U.S. Supreme Court rejected the Michigan injunction request.

Dale is convinced that it is only a matter of time before these carp reach Lake Michigan. Genetic material has been found in Calumet Harbor. Some Asian Carp have been found in Chicago park ponds. Flooding on the Des Plaines River may have allowed additional access. The Chicago River and the downtown locks are next.

Asian carps can consume 40 percent of their body weight in food daily. Great abundance of Asian carps in the Great Lakes would result in competition for food with native species including cisco, bloater, yellow perch, which are fed on by predator species including lake trout, small-mouth, and walleye; but Lake Michigan and the other Great Lakes are a far more sterile environment compared to the sewage-laden Sanitary Canal flowing into the Illinois River.

It's Dale's opinion that the Asian Carp after an initial spurt, will move into some rivers and harbors similar to the carp that have been in the GLsystem for many years and not have that catastrophic effect as forecasted by some. Time will tell. (Dale can be contacted via his *Stray Casts Web Blog*: blogs.suntimes.com/bowman/).

February is a great time to seek out and try out a new club after you hit the big fishing shows. You have a no-risk opportunity to see first hand what a club can do for you. Attend our Arlington Angler's meeting on February 16th. Our speaker will be Steve New of Anglers International. Steve will talk about new tackle products for 2010 and some local fishing opportunities.

Dates to remember: February 16-Meeting and Speaker Steve New: New Tackle Products for 2010 & Techniques; March 13 - Club Booth at the Fishing Flea Market at Rolling Meadows HS; March 16 - Meeting and Speaker Richard Burton, Water Critters Guide Service.

Come to one of our meetings to find out more about our club, activities and outings.

Meetings are held on the third Tuesday of every month from 7:00 to 9:00 PM. We meet at Dick's Sports Store (Flr.1-NW) near Woodfield Shopping Center in Schaumburg, IL, .5 miles north of Higgins, on Martingale Road. Door prizes, speaker, raffles, fishing reports: Give it a try!

For further information call our President Tom Curtin at 847-639-7858 or visit our website at <http://arlingtonanglers.com>