

Stop the Spread of Another Invasive Freshwater Species

One example of invasive species is the Asian carp, which can grow up to seven feet and weigh 150 pounds. The Asian carp is but one example that applies to a number of invasive species. The fish eats 40 per cent of its body weight in food each day.

Currently the Asian Carp, a massive fish with a reputation of jumping into boats, injuring fisherman and endangering natural resource vital to the fishing, boating and tourism industry, only live a few miles from Lake Michigan in the Illinois and Mississippi Rivers. If allowed to migrate into the Great Lakes, wildlife experts believe the hyper-aggressive Asian Carp would breed quickly, dominate food supplies and push precious gaming fish into extinction. That's not a chance the business community is willing to take given the significant economic impact Asian Carp would have on a \$7 billion commercial fishing industry in the Great Lakes region and other areas across Canada, not to mention the trickle-down on tourism, boating and other related industries.

Ontario and several US states are home to one of the world's largest freshwater coastlines in the world, giving Ontario a unique competitive advantage in attracting jobs and investment. A lawsuit effort launched by the Michigan Attorney General to block the spread by closing the shipping lock at Chicago was defeated in the US Supreme Court in spring 2010. Ontario and neighbouring US states, including Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, had supported Michigan's efforts. The lawsuit had additionally asked for permanent separation between the invaded waters and the Great Lakes.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers fears closing the canal locks and dams could lead to flooding and affect water quality. To prevent the invasive migration, officials have at times poisoned more than five miles of the canal waters. Further, three electric fence grids are in place to turn-back the Asian carp before they reach the Chicago shipping lock.

Scientific studies have indicated that Asian Carp have been contained to date with only minor migration beyond the lock being identified. The Obama Administration has allocated \$13 million to block the migration, but the president has not supported closing the locks. A new US Asian Carp harvesting industry is also commencing and may help control the fish.

As a result of learned experiences from sea lampreys the Canadian Department of Fisheries and Oceans has provided expert science and staff resources to assist the US states to understand the invasive species and attempt to control the spread. They also are modeling what would be potential primary location sites should the species get past the physical barriers described above. Recently, rapid response strategies have also been developed by DFO to respond to new invasive species, but remain untested in Canadian waters to date. DFO is also concerned that live bait transportation and inadvertent or malicious importation of Asian Carp to any northern US state lake or directly in Canadian lakes and tributaries could create an enormous problem for any and all freshwater east and west of the Great Lakes and north to the Canadian Arctic.

The Ontario Ministry of Natural resources has acted quickly to assist the DFO in any capacity required. The province of Ontario has also passed an important deterrent to importing the species making it illegal to do so. It is believed that Ontario is the only province with such a statute. The DFO has subsequently trained border crossing agents at the Sarnia-Port Huron international bridge entry point on water tank camera operation and species recognition in trucks that haul live fish into Canada.

In the Sarnia Lambton area, a grass carp, a species of Asian carp, was recently caught by a commercial fishery. Action must take place now to improve success to stop the spread in the Great Lakes and beyond.

Recommendations

That the federal government:

1. Work with the US federal government and Canadian provinces and territories to stop the spread of invasive species like Asian Carp.
2. Obtain US government and Canadian territorial and provincial agreements on rapid response strategies in international waters like the St. Clair River, St. Lawrence Seaway and the Red River basin.
3. Encourage all provinces and territories to pass legislation to ban the importation of invasive fish species like Asian Carp.
4. Encourage all provinces and territories to create rapid response strategies to respond to invasive species in fresh waterways, including business and citizen education on species abatement.