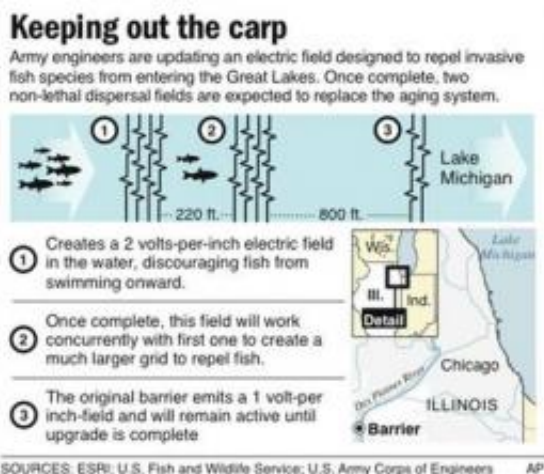


Lawmakers seek emergency steps to halt Asian carp

December 12 2009, By JOHN FLESHER , AP Environmental Writer



Graphic locates and describes the electric barrier used to prevent Asian carp from reaching Lake Michigan.

(AP) -- Members of Congress are demanding emergency action to prevent Asian carp from invading the Great Lakes and devastating their \$7 billion fishery.

Democratic Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand of New York urged the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on Friday to close two locks near Chicago that could provide a pathway for the carp to reach Lake Michigan and eventually spread to the other [Great Lakes](#).

"I believe that temporarily sealing this waterway as we analyze the

situation at hand and decide on a long-term management strategy is a reasonable course of action," Gillibrand said in a letter to federal agencies working to limit the carp's migration.

Other lawmakers were seeking money for further steps, including more testing in areas where [Asian carp](#) DNA has been detected in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and the Calumet-Sag Channel. Both are part of a 300-mile linkage between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River.

Bighead and silver carp, both Asian species, have been moving up the waterway since escaping from Deep South fish farms and sewage lagoons in the 1970s. Recent DNA sampling suggests at least some may have gotten past an electrical barrier on the ship canal designed to halt their advance, and could be within 6 miles of the lake.

Scientists say if they reach the lakes and multiply, they could outcompete native species for plankton and disrupt the food chain, decimating popular sport and commercial varieties such as salmon and whitefish.

Army Corps officials told members of Congress on Thursday they needed \$13.5 million during the 2010 fiscal year for immediate measures, said Rep. Dave Camp, a Michigan Republican.

Those could include sealing off culverts, constructing berms and otherwise attempting to block off the Sanitary and Ship Canal from the nearby Des Plaines River, already infested with Asian carp. Scientists fear carp could be washed from the river to the canal during flooding.

The Army Corps plans to construct a third segment of the [electrical barrier](#) and says it will consider long-term solutions that could include severing the link between the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River basin, as environmentalists have requested.

Such a proposal would draw opposition from shippers who haul millions of tons of iron ore, coal and other cargo on the waterway.

Michigan's attorney general is drawing up a lawsuit to demand at least temporary closure of the navigational locks, as Gillibrand proposed. Camp said he wouldn't support that idea without further study of the locks' importance to commerce and flood control.

"If we shut them down and flood homes, that's not a good step forward," he said.

During the meeting Thursday, federal agencies pledged to develop a plan for fighting the Asian carp over the next year, said Cameron Davis, senior Great Lakes adviser with the Environmental Protection Agency.

"The agencies are moving very quickly to identify what needs to happen, by whom, when and how it will be funded," Davis said.

The Senate Environment and Public Works Committee approved a bill Thursday sponsored by Sen. Carl Levin, a Michigan Democrat, that would require a permit for further imports of bighead carp - a requirement already on the books for silver [carp](#).

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