

Poison dumped into Illinois river in latest battle against Asian carp

May 21 2010, By Joel Hood, Chicago Tribune

The Little Calumet River became the latest battleground against Asian carp Thursday as work crews dumped barrels of a deadly fish toxin in a desperate attempt to locate the elusive invasive species in Chicago's waterways.

"If there are [Asian carp](#) here we should get confirmation of that this week," John Rogner, assistant director of the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, said during a morning news conference along the canal.

Officials targeted this two-mile stretch of the Calumet-Sag Channel, about seven miles west of Lake Michigan, because numerous [DNA samples](#) collected here have indicated the presence of Asian carp. But no one has yet seen an Asian carp, alive or dead, making this an important staging area to not only test the validity of the DNA research, but also to gauge how imminent a threat the carp are to the Great Lakes.

Biologists dumped about 2,000 gallons of the organic fish poison Rotenone into the channel Thursday and are expected to search for Asian carp over the next several days as dead fish float to the surface. The federal government is picking up the estimated \$1.5 million price tag for the mission, which likely will kill thousands of fish and shut down a vital shipping corridor for about a week.

The steep costs, both economically and environmentally, underscore the importance of locating Asian carp if they are indeed on Lake Michigan's

doorstep, said Charlie Wooley, the Midwest deputy director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

"This is as good as an effort as we could possibly come up with," Wooley said. "If we don't find any Asian carp through this sampling I can assure you we've given it our best shot."

The recovery of even one Asian carp this close to Lake Michigan could have far-reaching implications for the legal and political fight around this issue. It would surely spark new calls to permanently close Chicago-area locks to seal off the most direct route for the [fish](#) into the Great Lakes.

It would also raise serious questions about the effectiveness of the underwater electric barriers near Romeoville, Ill., and could even trigger a new round of lawsuits and calls for action in Washington, D.C.

If biologists don't find a single Asian carp -- after failing to locate one during weeks of netting and electrofishing in the same area this year -- it would raise further questions about the DNA science already under scrutiny. It would also bolster claims by the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the Army Corps of Engineers and others that say methods to control the fish's movement are working.

Wooley said if no Asian carp surface this week it should effectively shift the entire battle 40 miles downriver to behind the electric barriers, where officials are working on new attack plans to eradicate them.

"It's our hope they come up empty here so we can move this (battle) down where it belongs," Wooley said.

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