

Asian Carp and the Great Lakes

Asian carp were brought to the United States for the purpose of fish farming because of their aggressive nature and propensity to grow large rapidly even in the winter months when most other fish go into a form of half-awake hibernation. These attributes that made them ideal stock for fish farms, has plagued the Mississippi and Ohio River Basins now with an invasive species capable of exhausting an area's food supply completely as they must consume up to twenty percent of their bodyweight per day.¹ Released through accident and natural disaster, Asian Carp have moved upriver through the Mississippi to the system of shipping canals entering Lake Michigan at Chicago where they appear to have been halted for the moment.

The ramification for the Great Lakes if Asian Carp successfully enter its waters, and at great enough numbers in order to reproduce, is their threat to devastate the seven billion dollars-a-year fishing industries earned in perch, walleye, and whitefish alone.² Through their aggressiveness, Asian Carp have proven a problem throughout American waters in which they reside. Exhausting planktonic organisms and the small plankton-eating fish, both being prime prey to Asian Carp, the Great Lakes face a real possibility of a massive species die-off as the fish species the fishing industry depends upon starves from this new competition for food. Without any natural predators of their own, Asian Carp have spread unimpeded through the rivers and waterways of the central United States. The potential loss in wildlife could amount into tens of billions of dollars at the very least in the entire area affected.

In the Great Lakes, though, the economic costs Asian Carp will bring if they invade and come to dominate will be the most visible. The western shore of Michigan, between Ludington and Manistee, largely persists upon tourism through charter fishing companies and outdoor recreation. It is, therefore, not only the fishing industry that will suffer. There are very real questions on whether water and eco-tourism will be greatly diminished by an Asian Carp invasion. Asian Carp are known to jump out of the water from the sound, vibration, and electric field of engines, individuals in motorboats or jet skis could be injured by these fish-projectiles. Inland rivers could also face possible damages to their environment and the eco-tourism related to them, as Asian Carp may venture into these waterways or lay eggs in as many fish species do. Native fish species, consequently, could be forced out of both the Great Lakes and the Great Lakes River Basins affecting multiple states in both the United States and within Canada.

Efforts to prevent this possible outcome have encountered debate. The most assured way to prevent Asian Carp from entering the Great Lakes is closing the shipping channels through Chicago to the Mississippi River, but this could cost billions of dollars. The United States Congress in 2007 laid out plans to seal off the Great Lakes in a plan that "could cost up to \$18.4

¹ "Asian Carp Threat to the Great Lakes," National Wildlife Federation, <https://www.nwf.org/Wildlife/Threats-to-Wildlife/Invasive-Species/Asian-Carp.aspx>.

² Michael Wines, "Bracing for Carp in Great Lakes, but Debating Their Presence," *The New York Times*, Jan. 5, 2014, <http://www.proquest.com>.

billion and take 25 years to put in place, the federal Army Corps of Engineers concluded.”³ Approximately forty years since Asian Carp were introduced into the Mississippi River Basin, they have come to dominate that environment with just concerns that by the time the Army Corps of Engineers complete any stage of the plans set forth by Congress that Asian Carp may too dominate the Great Lakes.

Works Cited

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³ Michael Wines, “\$18 Billion Price Put on Effort to Block Carp,” *The New York Times*, Jan. 7, 2014, <http://www.proquest.com>.