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NEWS RELEASE

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Agencies Take Emergency Action To Defend Against Asian Carp Invasion

Emergency Funds Made Available to Protect the Great Lakes From Large, Invasive Fish

CHICAGO, IL—Three United States federal agencies, the International Joint Commission, and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission have joined together to defend against an invasive species threat to the Great Lakes region by providing emergency funds to help prevent the spread of Asian carp. The funds were made available to supply backup power hardware for an electrical barrier on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. This barrier is the first—and currently, only—line of defense against the Asian carp. These fish are extremely prolific, rapidly advancing their way up the Mississippi River toward the Great Lakes via the canal and threatening the biological integrity of the Great Lakes. The hardware will ensure that a power outage will not allow these carp to invade the Great Lakes. This action marks an unprecedented level of speed and cooperation by agencies and stakeholders as they respond in real time to the migration of this invasive species.

“The Great Lakes benefit millions of Americans and Canadians who rely on them for food, water, recreation, and livelihoods,” said Ambassador Mary Beth West, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State. “If Asian carp migrate into the Great Lakes, they could significantly threaten this shared natural resource.” Purchase and installation of backup power hardware for the electrical barrier is expected to cost \$300,000. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency provided \$150,000 for this purpose and the Corps of Engineers contributed in-kind services

Photos

Photos of Asian carp and the electrical barrier, along with links to other carp resources, are available online at www.glfc.org/carp

amounting to \$50,000. Working through the International Joint Commission and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the United States Department of State provided \$170,000 last August to assist in efforts to combat the carp migration, \$100,000 of which will be applied to the purchase backup power hardware.

Asian carp are a significant threat to the Great Lakes because of their size, fecundity, and ability to consume large amounts of food. Asian carp can grow to 100 pounds and up to four feet long. They are well-suited to the climate of the Great Lakes region, which is similar to their native Eastern Hemisphere habitats. It is expected they would compete for food with the valuable sport and commercial fish. If they entered the system, they could become a dominant species in the Great Lakes.

Two species of Asian carp—the silver and the bighead carps—escaped into the Mississippi River from southern aquaculture facilities in the 1980s and significantly expanded their range during large floods in the early 1990s. Steadily, the carp have made their way northward, becoming the most abundant species in some areas of the Mississippi, out-competing native fish, and causing severe hardship to the people who fish the river. The Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal connects the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes. The canal feeds into the Des Plaines River; currently, the carp are in the Des Plaines River, approximately 50 miles from Lake Michigan.

G. Tracy Mehan, III, Assistant Administrator for Water at the Environmental Protection Agency, stated, “The specter of large, prolific Asian carp in the Great Lakes has motivated our coalition of government agencies to act swiftly. We have learned from hard experience the environmental and economic havoc caused in the Great Lakes by aquatic invasive species such as zebra mussels, sea lamprey, and round gobies. The latest threat from Asian carp underscores the serious problems posed by invasive species and the urgent need to prevent further introductions. The Great Lakes simply cannot afford another aquatic invasion.”

“Fortunately, we do have a first line of defense against the Asian carp invaders,” said Brigadier General Steven R. Hawkins, commander of the Great Lakes and Ohio River Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. “In April, 2002, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers completed construction of an electrical fish barrier. The barrier was designed as a demonstration project to study the effectiveness of preventing migration of species between the Mississippi and Great Lakes watersheds. The barrier uses electricity to repel fish and hopefully will prevent fish passage. Because the barrier relies on electricity, we were concerned that a simple power outage

could allow Asian carp to sneak past. The emergency funds from the federal and binational partners have allowed the Corps to purchase the backup generator we need to ensure an unbroken supply of power to the barrier.” To date, silver and bighead carp have not been sighted upstream of this barrier.

Agencies and stakeholders will continue to work to prevent the migration of Asian carp and other invasive species through the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal. Partners in this effort include: Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, Commonwealth Edison, the Council of Great Lakes Governors, the Dispersal Barrier Advisory Panel , the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, the Great Lakes Sportfishing Council, the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, the International Joint Commission, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, Midwest Generation, the Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association, the New York Department of Environmental Conservation, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Wisconsin Sea Grant, and other state, nongovernmental, and academic partners.