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Corps of Engineers releases updated report on prevention controls at Eagle Marsh for aquatic nuisance species transfer

LOUISVILLE, Ky. -- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released the updated Eagle Marsh Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Controls Report, which identifies options and technologies to prevent the transfer via water of Asian carp and other ANS between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins at Eagle Marsh wetlands preserve, located in Fort Wayne, Ind.

The updated report was published Aug. 14, 2013, following a public comment period, and can be viewed at www.glmris.anl.gov.

“Based on the results of the public review and stakeholder meetings, the Corps and interested stakeholders are conducting further evaluations of variations of Alternatives H and I in the report that could be implemented independently of the Corps’ Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study,” said Nathan Moulder, community planner for the Corps’ Louisville District.

Alternatives H and I involve reconstructing an existing agricultural berm along the Graham-McCulloch Ditch at Eagle Marsh.

One option includes a reconstruction of the existing berm at Eagle Marsh to prevent flood water from passing between the Great Lakes Basin and the Mississippi River Basin during flood events. The reconstructed berm would be similar in height to the existing berm for much of its length, with existing low areas raised and high areas lowered to create a uniform berm.

This option is still undergoing evaluation due to complexities in engineering and hydrological analyses, real estate and funding. Additionally, compliance with environmental and other laws still need to be evaluated before a final decision is made.

In the draft report released Nov. 16, 2012, nine structural alternatives were compared and at least three – all hydrologic separation alternatives – were determined to have a “high” likelihood of preventing inter-basin transfer of ANS across Eagle Marsh. The draft was open to public review and comments for 60 days following its release, and a public meeting was held December 2012.

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The Natural Resources Conservation Services (NRCS) holds an easement on much of the property on which Eagle Marsh is located and is interested in taking the lead on design of the potential berm reconstruction and implementation of a solution to the potential ANS transfer at Eagle Marsh. The Eagle Marsh property is jointly owned by the Little River Wetlands Project (LRWP) and the Indiana Department of Natural Resources (DNR), and both organizations have been active in developing a solution.

“Stakeholder contributions significantly improved the quality of the report and reflect significant interest and capabilities that may be applied toward long-term prevention of the transfer of aquatic nuisance species across Eagle Marsh,” said Jack Drolet, program manager for the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLMRIS).

The Corps has actively coordinated with Indiana DNR, U.S. Geological Survey, NRCS, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Council on Environmental Quality, LRWP, Maumee River Basin Commission, Allen County Soil and Water Conservation District and Allen County Surveyor’s Office throughout the development of the report.

A GLMRIS report – due to Congress in December – will identify a range of options or technologies that are available to prevent the aquatic transfer of aquatic nuisance fish, algae, crustaceans and plants in all life stages between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins via the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS). The CAWS is the only continuous, direct connection between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins and is Focus Area 1 of the study.

The Corps’ GLMRIS team previously identified 18 pathways as potential intermittent ANS transfer sites during high-water events as part of Focus Area 2 of the study.

Of the 18 pathways studied in Focus Area 2, Eagle Marsh was the only one identified as having a high risk for potential transfer of ANS between basins, thus warranting its own ANS controls report. Even after a temporary fence was built in 2010 for Asian carp prevention, Eagle Marsh was still identified as high risk for transfer of viral hemorrhagic septicemia virus or VHS.

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