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Corps Interbasin Study Comment Period to End March 31st

CINCINNATI, OH – In Fall of 2010 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers unveiled its strategy for undertaking a comprehensive study of ways to prevent aquatic nuisance species, such as Asian carp, from transferring between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basins (GLMRIS) and invited the public to provide comment on that strategy. Opportunity to provide public comment during this initial public scoping period is available through March 31, 2011. The last opportunity to attend a public scoping meeting will be in Ypsalanti, MI, March 8, at the Ann Arbor Marriott, at 2 p.m. and 5:30 p.m.

Anyone wanting to view or comment on the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLMRIS) program management plan can do so online at www.GLMRIS.anl.gov.

In the GLMRIS, the Corps is addressing the entire region and studying ways to prevent transit by aquatic nuisance species along all potential aquatic pathways between the basins. The scope of GLMRIS is massive, dealing with 1,500 miles of hydrologically complex topography and dozens of aquatic nuisance species. The Chicago Area Waterway system is particularly challenging given the multiple uses of a continuously flowing channel in heavily urbanized terrain. Those uses include flood risk management, storm water management and wastewater discharge, commercial and recreational navigation, industrial water supply, and transit by public safety vessels. As a result of these complexities, the study must develop a comprehensive grasp of the potential consequences of making changes to any part of this system.

The deliberate and thorough process that Corps feasibility studies, such as GLMRIS, follow ensures that comprehensive and scientifically-based facts and relevant data are developed in order to formulate recommended alternatives. As a result of its great scope and complexity, and because the Corps must abide by various laws and policies, including the National Environmental Policy Act, responsibly executing this study will require considerable time, energy, and resources. This structured approach is essential for determining the most effective permanent solution.

Although the final GLMRIS study is not expected to be completed until 2015 at the earliest, the Corps intends to release interim products as they are developed. In the meantime, the Corps and its partners in the multi-agency Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee (ACRCC) will continue to pursue the effective actions the agencies have underway, as outlined in the multi-tiered strategic framework document (www.asiancarp.org). These actions include operating and improving the fish barrier, aggressive monitoring, rapid response and various research efforts, all aimed at containing the Asian carp threat.

GLMRIS has produced on-the-ground results already. In 2010 the study team found a near-term risk for Asian carp migration into Lake Erie from Eagle Marsh, in northeast Indiana. As a result of this finding, the Indiana Department of Natural Resources completed a temporary barrier to impede Asian carp movement in September 2010.

Active participation by all stakeholders to provide relevant data and research information for the GLMRIS is welcomed by the Corps and will help inform, and assist us to achieve the study purpose. If we are going to keep Asian carp from the Great Lakes, we need the active support of any state or local agency, academic, or scientific institution that has information or capabilities to help develop recommendations.

The Corps' efforts to contain Asian carp include the continuous operation of a highly effective electric barrier to prevent fish passage via the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal (CSSC), construction of a 13-mile barrier that prevents fish bypass during flooding, participation in monitoring efforts, and applying a variety of tools including intensive netting, electro-fishing and environmental DNA sampling. USACE expedited the design and construction of a third electric barrier that was completed a full year ahead of schedule, and will soon go into full-time operation.

All available laboratory research and field evidence shows that the electric barrier system effectively deters Asian carp that could be challenging the barriers. The Corps anticipates releasing a report summarizing research relevant to the operating parameters of the electric fish barriers in March. Despite recovery of over 130,000 pounds of fish from a single stretch of waterway and over 3200 hours of intensive and focused fishing efforts in the last year, only a single Asian carp has been found above the fish barrier. As a result, the multi-agency team has concluded that any Asian carp that may be present above the fish barrier are in such low numbers that they are not positioned to develop a sustainable population.

"Because of the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee's effective actions, we have the time to do this enormous and complex study thoroughly and properly. An effective solution must, by law, take into account all potential impacts of proposed alternatives, and because of this the solution cannot be pre-determined. Executing a study quickly does not mean it would result in an effective plan. An approach with a pre-set timetable or that is designed for speed, is almost certain to result in unknown and unintended consequences, excessive cost, and ultimately inadequate solutions," said Major General John Peabody, commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Great Lakes and Ohio River Division.

For more information on the ACRCC visit www.asiancarp.org.

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