



States and cities launch initiative to modernize the Chicago area waterway system and protect the Great Lakes from Asian carp

For Information, Contact:

Tim Eder, Executive Director, Great Lakes Commission
734-971-9135 or 734-604-7281 (cell); teder@glc.org

OR

David Ullrich, Executive Director, Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative
312-201-4516 or 312-480-6501 (cell); David.ullrich@glslcities.org

For Immediate Release: July 22, 2010. Today, Great Lakes states and cities joined together to announce an initiative that seeks to transform water management and transportation in the Chicago region for the 21st Century, while safeguarding the Great Lakes from economic and ecological damage caused by Asian carp and other biological invasions from the Mississippi River basin.

The initiative will seize upon one of the greatest challenges in the region from Asian carp as an opportunity to develop options to protect both basins while significantly advancing water quality, flood control, transportation, and the economy in the Chicago area.

A team led by the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative, organizations representing governors, state officials and mayors, will convene users, stakeholders and technical experts to identify the best economic and environmental solutions for separating the Mississippi River basin from the Great Lakes in the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS), the connection between the two watersheds created in 1900.

Titled *Envisioning a Chicago Area Waterway System for the 21st Century*, the 18-month initiative will assess modernization and improvements to the Waterway System in a way that enhances commercial, recreational and environmental benefits, while preventing the transfer of damaging invasive species. The collaborative received initial funding from two Chicago-based funders: the Joyce Foundation and the Great Lakes Protection Fund. Other funders across the Great Lakes region are being approached to contribute to this \$2 million project.

Through the project's intensive stakeholder outreach process, all key interests—shippers, water managers, government agencies, citizen groups, recreational and commercial boaters, tribes, and others—will be engaged by the team leaders to explore and evaluate options for separating the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins. The natural barriers between these two watersheds were artificially removed during the last century. The recent confirmation of Asian carp on the Lake Michigan side of the dispersal barrier increases the importance of designing permanent, long-term solutions.

“This study is a critical step in finding the best solution to the problem of invasive species moving through the Chicago Area Waterway System between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds,” said **Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley**, founding U.S. Chairman of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative. “At the same time, it can help identify ways to improve transportation, water quality, and water management for the residents of the City of Chicago and the entire region.”

Residents and leaders of the Great Lakes region fear that the voracious Asian carp could decimate the lakes’ ecosystem, including the region’s \$7 billion annual sport fishing industry. Despite control measures, including electric barriers on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, Asian carp have been detected in numerous locations around Chicago. Last month a live Asian carp was caught in Lake Calumet, above the barriers and just six miles from Lake Michigan. Last week, the state of Illinois announced steps to reduce the population of carp downstream from the barrier through a commercial fishing venture.

“We recently announced a first-of-its-kind partnership between the state of Illinois, Beijing Zhuochen Animal Husbandry Company and Big River Fisheries to harvest and process 30 million pounds of Asian carp from Illinois rivers. This agreement is a great step toward controlling the carp population while giving Illinois’ economy a boost,” said **Illinois Governor Pat Quinn**, chairman of the Great Lakes Commission. “We must continue working together to develop innovative solutions to prevent Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes—one of our most precious natural resources.”

“The recent discovery of an Asian carp so close to Lake Michigan was a wake-up call that we need to do more and we need to do it quickly,” said **U.S. Senator Dick Durbin** (D-IL). “We also need to develop a long-term solution to deal with this serious threat to the Great Lakes. While separating the waterways would require a complex feat of engineering, we need to understand the costs and benefits and whether this method offers the best hope for a long-term solution for containing not only the carp, but other invasive species.”

“The best permanent solution to protecting the Great Lakes from damaging aquatic invasive species is to separate the two watersheds by closing the artificial connection in the Chicago area,” said **U.S. Senator Debbie Stabenow** (D-MI).

“I applaud this joint initiative to study a comprehensive ecological separation plan. Shielding the Great Lakes’ ecosystem and its \$7 billion fishing industry from the threat of Asian carp will require the coordinated efforts of state, regional, and federal authorities. The findings of this study, similar to the one my legislation calls for, will be essential to achieving a permanent solution. I thank the Great Lakes Commission and the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative for doing their part,” said **U.S. Representative Dave Camp** (R-MI).

“This project is not meant to displace the essential and urgent work of other institutions and governmental entities,” said **Michigan Governor Jennifer M. Granholm**. “Their responsibility for immediate action to prevent the spread of the Asian carp remains. This study tackles the larger, longer-term task of redesigning the waterways for sustainability. Both jobs need to be done, and both need to succeed.”

“As Governor, I have provided state funding, resources and staff to support ongoing work to stop the spread of Asian carp, and increased state funding for combating aquatic invasive species,” said **Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle**. “But Asian carp pose a threat to the Great Lakes that reaches beyond state borders and it is important to work together—across traditional interests, and political boundaries—to fight their spread. The support of the Great Lakes Protection Fund will play an important role in this effort.”

“The Great Lakes fishery and entire ecosystem have been threatened by the sea lampreys, zebra mussels, and many other invasive species over the years, but the Asian carp present one of the greatest challenges” said **Mayor George Heartwell of Grand Rapids**, immediate past chair of the Cities Initiative. “I am pleased this work is going forward to find a solution to the invasive species problem while significantly improving the waterway system.”

“We’re talking about a problem that goes beyond Asian carp,” said **Tim Eder, Great Lakes Commission executive director**. “This is about protecting the ecological and commercial vitality of the Great Lakes, and it is bigger than any one organization can solve alone. Our work will complement that of the Army Corps of Engineers and the many other federal and state organizations that are committed to finding solutions to the problems facing the Great Lakes.”

“With leadership from the Great Lakes states and cities, we can provide a unique perspective and focus attention on the most critical challenges associated with the Chicago Area Waterway System,” said **Dave Ullrich, executive director of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative**. “Our plan is to serve as a catalyst and supplement to the federal process to make sure we get a long term solution as soon as possible.”

“The Joyce Foundation has had a long-standing commitment to protecting and restoring the Great Lakes,” said Ellen S. Alberding, president of the Chicago-based foundation. “We look forward to continuing our work with environmental groups, businesses, and policy makers to craft a new vision for Chicago's waterways that will allow our region to thrive in the years ahead.”

30

The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Gov. Patrick Quinn (Ill.), is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors' appointees, state legislators, and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a "Declaration of Partnership." The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan. Learn more at www.glc.org.

The Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Cities Initiative is a U.S. and Canadian coalition of over 70 mayors and other local officials representing over 13 million people that works actively with federal, state, tribal, first nation and provincial governments and other stakeholders to advance the

restoration and promotion of the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River basin. For more information on the Cities Initiative, visit www.gslcities.org.

Based in Chicago, the Joyce Foundation supports efforts to protect the Great Lakes, to reduce poverty and violence in the region, and to ensure its residents good schools, decent jobs, a strong democracy, and a diverse and thriving culture. Learn more at www.joycefdn.org.

The Great Lakes Protection Fund is a publicly capitalized, private corporation created in 1989 by the Governors of the states surrounding the Great Lakes. The Fund invests a one-time contribution of public funds and uses the investment income for two purposes: to test new regional actions that improve the health of the Great Lakes, and to provide resources for states to support their individual Great Lakes priorities. Since inception, the fund has supported 230 regional projects, awarding more than \$57 million to regional project teams. The Fund welcomes innovative ideas on how to improve the health of the Great Lakes at any time. Funding guidelines can be found at www.glpf.org.