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Federal Officials Unveil Aggressive Strategy to Reduce Threat of Asian Carp in the Great Lakes

WASHINGTON – Federal officials from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of the Interior, and the U.S. Coast Guard today unveiled a strategy that outlines over 25 short and long-term actions and \$78.5 million in investments to combat the spread of Asian carp. The draft Asian Carp Control Strategy Framework (Framework) is an unparalleled effort to control the invasive species, unifying Federal, state, and local action, and introducing a multi-tiered defense of the Great Lakes to prevent Asian carp from developing self-sustaining populations while longer term biological controls are being developed.

“As with many great eco-systems across the country, invasive species have harmed the Great Lakes, and an invasion of Asian carp threatens to be particularly ecologically and economically damaging,” said Nancy Sutley, Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. “Today, we have an opportunity to work together to prevent environmental and economic damage before it happens. This Framework utilizes the best available science and its multi-tiered strategy will ensure coordination and the most effective response.”

“EPA has helped to develop this coordinated strategy on such an urgent issue and assisted in building a coalition to act to keep Asian carp from becoming established in the Great Lakes,” said EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson. “The combined resources and expertise of the interagency partnership are our best tools for protecting the Great Lakes ecosystem and economy.”

“The Army Corps of Engineers remains committed to aggressively using all available authorities to protect the Great Lakes from this invasive species,” said Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works. “We cannot do this alone. All parties must bring the full force of their resources to this challenge. We are working intensively with its Federal, State, provincial, bi-national, and municipal agency partners to achieve this goal.”

“Interior and its bureaus are committed to working in partnership with the States of Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin, the affected communities and other Federal agencies to tackle the complex threat posed by Asian carp to the ecological and economic health of the Great Lakes,” said Tom Strickland, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks. “We are providing immediate financial, technical and research assistance for Asian carp control efforts in South Chicago waterways, and will continue to do everything we can to keep carp out of Lake Michigan.”

In the near term, the Framework focuses on keeping carp from establishing populations in the Great Lakes. It calls for reduced openings of Chicago’s navigational locks to prevent carp movement. In addition, Federal agencies will deploy enlarged field crews for physical and sonar observation, electroshocking and netting operations within the waterway. Turnaround times on eDNA verification will be expedited and testing capacity will be doubled to 120 samples per week.

In March, 2010, a \$13.2 million contract will be awarded for construction of barriers between the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and Des Plaines River, which will prevent fish passage around the electric barrier in the event of flooding where the two water bodies mix. A \$10.5 million contract will also be awarded for construction and operation of a third electric barrier (IIB). The Framework expedites a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' study of the feasibility and impacts of permanent lock closure, the effectiveness of lock closings to block carp movement, the risks and costs associated with closure, and a discussion of alternatives.

The Framework identifies a variety of longer term Asian carp management techniques for the duration of 2010 and beyond. This includes \$3 million in funds for commercial market enhancements and \$5 million for additional chemical treatments in the case of barrier failure. It also puts forth over \$1.5 million in new research funding. Several research efforts will receive significant funding in the coming months to help inform decision makers of additional tools that might be available for Asian carp management, including development of biological controls like Asian carp-specific poisons, methods to disrupt spawning and egg viability, sonic barriers, and assessment of food sources and potential habitats.

The Framework also identifies educational and enforcement tools to prevent Asian carp from being sold or purposefully transferred, and an investigation of Asian carp transfer in ballast and bilge water. The Framework will be updated as new partners and new action options are identified to help stop the spread of Asian carp. Federal agencies will continue to work together and in collaboration with state and local agencies to fight the spread of Asian carp into the Great Lakes. The entire Framework is available at www.asiancarp.org.

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