

Congresswoman Louise Slaughter (NY-28) said that action is necessary to stop Asian carp from infiltrating the Great Lakes after a 20-pound Bighead Asian carp was discovered approaching Lake Michigan last week. In a letter sent to President Obama today, Slaughter urged the immediate strengthening of the barrier meant to keep the invasive species out of the Great Lakes. She also urged the pursuit of an aggressive strategy for permanent hydrologic separation between the Great Lakes and the waterways linked to the Mississippi River, where Asian carp have taken over in recent decades.

“In Western New York we rely on the Great Lakes for fishing, shipping and recreation and the introduction of Asian carp could be devastating to the lakes’ ecosystem and regional economy,” said Slaughter, a co-chair of the Congressional Great Lakes Task Force. “We’ve stood by for too long as invasive species have cost us of billions of dollars. Now we have to clean this up and keep the carp out.”

Slaughter noted that, once an invasive species such as Asian carp is allowed to take hold in any part of the Great Lakes system, it is only a matter of time until the species spreads to the rest of the lakes.

Last week a Bighead Asian carp was discovered near Chicago above the electric barriers built by the Army Corps of Engineers meant to keep them out. The 34.6 inch long carp weighed nearly 20 pounds and was caught in Lake Calumet approximately 6 miles from Lake Michigan. This is the first time the invasive species has been found past the electronic barrier.

Asian carp were brought to the U.S. in the 1960s and 70s to clean out algae in American ponds. Flooding in the 1990s allowed some of the carp to find their way into local waterways which linked to the Mississippi River basin and beyond. Last week’s discovery is the most threatening yet to the domestic ecosystem.

Asian carp, which weigh up to 100 pounds, can eat up to 40 percent of their body weight daily. They have no natural predators in North America.

Slaughter has been a long-time advocate for the Great Lakes which contain 20 percent of the world's freshwater and are one of Western New York's greatest resources.

Slaughter has spoken with Obama's top advisor on the Great Lakes, EPA Senior Advisor Cameron Davis about the threat of Asian carp and has worked closely with the Environmental Protection Agency, Coast Guard, Fish and Wildlife Services and the Army Corps of Engineers.

A copy of the letter sent to President Obama is included below.

June 29, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama

The President of the United States

The White House

Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

It is with deep regret that we write you today. On Tuesday, June 22, 2010, the first Asian carp was captured in the Chicago area waterway system above the electric barriers. Unfortunately, the physical confirmation of Asian carp beyond the barriers comes as little surprise as we have long been asking for more aggressive action to stop the carp. In light of this discovery, it is our hope that the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee will take more urgent steps to protect the Great Lakes from this serious threat.

Although this fish could theoretically have been released into the waterway system above the barrier on the Lake Michigan side, we should err on the side of caution and assume the carp was able to bypass the barrier. This is especially prudent in light of the months of positive environmental DNA tests. In addition to increasing efforts to find and remove existing carp, we urge you to speed up efforts to immediately strengthen the barrier and implement all other measures necessary to stop the carp from migrating into the Great Lakes, including pursuing an aggressive strategy for permanent hydrologic separation.

We cannot afford to allow Asian carp to enter the Great Lakes. We look forward to working with you to combat this potentially devastating invasion.

Sincerely,

Rep. Louise M. Slaughter, Co-Chair Congressional Great Lakes Task Force

Rep. Vernon J. Ehlers, Co-Chair Congressional Great Lakes Task Force

Rep. John Dingell, Co-Chair Congressional Great Lakes Task Force

Sen. George V. Voinovich, Co-Chair Congressional Great Lakes Task Force

Sen. Carl Levin, Co-Chair Congressional Great Lakes Task Force

Sen. Robert Casey

Sen. Debbie Stabenow

Sen. Al Franken

Sen. Amy Klobuchar

Sen. Charles Schumer

Rep. Tammy Baldwin

Rep. Dave Camp

Rep. Brian Higgins

Rep. Pete Hoekstra

Rep. Steve Kagen

Rep. Marcy Kaptur

Rep. Dale Kildee

Rep. Bob Latta

Rep. Steven LaTourette

Rep. Chris Lee

Rep. Sander Levin

Rep. Candice Miller

Rep. Gwen Moore

Rep. Gary Peters

Rep. Mike Quigley

Rep. Mike Rogers

Rep. Bart Stupak

Rep. Fred Upton

cc: The Honorable Jo-Ellen Darcy, Assistant Secretary of the Army for Civil Works

Admiral Robert J. Papp, Jr., Commandant, U.S. Coast Guard

The Honorable Lisa Jackson, Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Mr. Rowan W. Gould, Acting Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency