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## Officials look to build more permanent barrier

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**By Jonathan Lipman**  
*Staff writer*

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State and federal officials have decided an electronic barrier across the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal near Romeoville has proved so successful at keeping out invasive Asian carp that they are committing \$7 million to build a permanent one.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources will spend \$2 million on the project and the rest of the funding will come from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, state officials said.

"Everyone's agreed that something needed to be done for quite a while, but no one seemed to be coming up with the funds to do it," IDNR spokeswoman Carol Knowles said. "So, we reprioritized. ... My understanding is that (the temporary barrier) is working well, but people were worried it was not enough."

The huge Asian carp species — including bighead, silver and black carp — are native to China and have appeared in the Mississippi River and its tributaries over the last several years and are working their way upstream. Officials want to prevent their entrance into Lake Michigan, where the voracious fish could damage the local ecosystem by eating up everything in sight.

Asian carp can grow to more than 3 feet long and up to 60 pounds. They eat up to 40 percent of their body weight daily, officials said, and can drive local species into extinction.

The temporary electronic barrier, which at 60 feet long and 120 feet wide is the largest of its kind, will be replaced by a stronger structure of the same size designed to last 30 years, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers project manager Beldon McPheron said.

"The conductors will be railroad rails instead of cables," McPheron said. "It's likely to

have an added feature, which is an acoustical bubble screen. The control building will likely be masonry rather than the prefab metal building there now."

The bubble screen is another method of blocking the migration of invasive species.

Construction is to start in the spring and last six to eight months.

It hasn't been decided whether Illinois or the federal government will manage the facility once built, officials said. Both sides said they hoped the other would take over maintenance of the site, but the matter is still under negotiation.

The electronic barrier will be useful in blocking the migration of any invasive species that actively swims, such as the carp going upstream or the round goby going downstream.

"Unfortunately, it doesn't stop the zebra mussels, that's a mollusk and it doesn't swim, that could just float through," McPheron said. "But the canal is the choke point between the Mississippi River watershed and the Lake Michigan watershed. We're very fortunate that (a choke point) exists, that there's not many different avenues they can travel."

Invasive species traveling up and downstream have become more common in the last five years, McPheron said.

"Nobody could have forecast what we have now," McPheron said. "Before the Asian carp, the round goby was what caught everyone's attention."

IDNR officials said in a statement that the carp, which were spotted 55 miles from Lake Michigan this past summer, prompted the need for immediate action.

"The Great Lakes are a prime target for this monster fish," IDNR fisheries chief Mike Conlin said. "They will not be deterred by colder waters."

There's a more human and slightly spooky problem with the huge fish as well, Knowles said.

"I've heard some pretty wild stories of these things jumping into boats and freaking people out," Knowles said. "When you weigh 100 pounds and you flop into somebody, you can cause some serious damage. ... It's kind of like a bad 'Creature from the Black Lagoon.' "

Such acrobatic antics are not only disturbing, they could also be dangerous, Knowles said, as the fish could distract boat drivers.

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