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Opinion

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The Asian carp is no ordinary fish

November 10, 2003

■ **Species:** Two types, silver and bighead, most threaten the lakes. At least three other types of Asian carp are also loose in the United States.

■ **Maximum size:** Four feet, 50 to 100 pounds.

■ **What they eat:** Algae, plankton, insect larvae -- the small matter that all young fish and many native adult fish depend on.

■ **Where they're from:** East Asian rivers such as the Yangtze and Amur.

■ **How they traveled:** Southern fish farmers imported them to help keep their ponds clean. The carp escaped into the Mississippi River, probably during floods in the 1980s and '90s. They have traveled north along the Mississippi and into tributaries including the Illinois River, which connects into Lake Michigan via the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

■ **Where they are now:** About 50 miles from Lake Michigan.

■ **What's in their way:** An underwater electric barrier 28 miles before the lake. It was designed primarily to keep the round goby from going the other way, from Lake Michigan into the Mississippi River watershed, but the goby was already past by the time it started up in 2002.

■ **Other plans to stop them:** The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers will build a second barrier, perhaps with multiple technologies, next year. However, there is no budget for upgrading the first barrier, maintaining either barrier or any additional steps.

■ **You can help:** Never ever release a live nonnative species -- from an aquarium, a bait shop or a food store -- on your own; destroy it or return it to the store.

■ **See a carp video:** Go to <http://www.glfcc.org/fishmgmt/carp.asp>

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