

June 29, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States of America  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Washington, D.C.

President Obama:

On behalf of the undersigned organizations representing hundreds of thousands of people throughout the Great Lakes basin and beyond, we commend you for the interest you have taken in the health and safety of the Great Lakes and the unprecedented support your Administration has provided to them. But this progress is at risk of being overwhelmed by new invasive species – particularly, Asian carp. We write today to urge you to take direct Presidential control over the federal response to the threat to the Lakes presented by the Asian carp and their advance through our rivers and waterways, including the Chicago Waterway System, which the Asian carp crisis demonstrates to be a highway for invasive species into and out of the Great Lakes.

A host of invasive species have entered and established themselves in the Great Lakes ecosystem, causing damage to the economy and the ecology of these inland seas, which constitute twenty percent of the world's fresh surface water and ninety percent of the fresh surface water in North America. Protection of these irreplaceable assets is critical for the health, safety and welfare of our nation.

Fixing this problem requires fixing the infrastructure of the Chicago Waterway System that is exposing the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds to risk from invasive species transfers. The steady advance of invasive Asian carp from the Mississippi River into the Great Lakes via these canals is demonstrated by the capture of a live Asian carp last week in Lake Calumet beyond any barriers to Lake Michigan, and verified by the dozens of positive environmental DNA samples collected throughout the waterway system and Lake Michigan itself over the last year. The likelihood that Asian carp are moving toward the Lakes through other waters connected to the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers signals the immediate need to establish clear authority, responsibility, accountability, transparency and leadership for federal action in this crisis.

In light of the of the clear need for a focused and disciplined response that is commensurate to the urgency of the threat, we are alarmed by the lack of coordinated action and urgency shown by federal agencies in advancing real solutions to the Asian carp crisis, and particularly the lackadaisical approach of the US Army Corps of Engineers in moving forward with its Great Lakes Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLMRIS) of long-term solutions. Congress directed the Army Corps to undertake GLMRIS in the Water Resources Development Act of 2007, but the Army Corps has not yet even released an initial study plan or commenced the required National Environmental Policy Act process. And although the Army Corps had previously committed to completing the Chicago portion of this study by 2012, more recent statements from the Army Corps indicate that it now intends to take until at least 2013 to complete the critical Chicago analysis, not to mention even longer timelines for other study components. This delay is unacceptable. We need a plan for a real solution today, not years from now.

There is also a substantial need for greater transparency with regard to the federal government's Asian carp response efforts across the board. The Army Corps and other federal agencies have consistently failed to provide all relevant and useful data and information to the

public about the results of environmental DNA testing indicating the presence of Asian carp in Chicago waterways, or with regard to other evidence of the carp's advance in any meaningful timeframe. Existing Army Corps website reports are completely unsatisfactory and needlessly opaque. The Army Corps should release all of these details of the environmental DNA testing protocol and results, not just general summaries, so that every scientist, engineer, or interested member of the public who is concerned with the movement of Asian carp and other invasive species can have access to it and fully evaluate it. An open and transparent decision making process that meaningfully engages the public is critical to ensuring that all appropriate options are considered and finding the one that best protects the health, environment, and economy of both the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basins.

We are convinced that an appropriate, focused response requires your direct attention to this crisis. Direct Presidential involvement is required to lend sufficient urgency and leadership to the effort and ensure that it is based on the best available science. In short, it is time for a new sheriff in town.

Accordingly, we strongly support the call of Senator Richard Durbin, Senator Debbie Stabenow, and other Senators for the appointment of a "federal incident commander", reporting directly to you, to assure the appropriate coordination, focus and action required to fix the threats posed to our irreplaceable fresh water seas, the Great Lakes. Our nation cannot afford the loss of another great water resource.

Respectfully,

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