



Asian Carp Facts

1. What are Asian carp?

“Asian carp” is a generic term referring to four species of non-native fish: bighead, silver, black, and grass carp. Depending on the variety, they can weigh up to 70 kg and grow up to 1.5 metres long. The bighead and silver carp are most concerning as they would have the greatest impact on the Great Lakes.

2. Where did Asian carp come from?

Asian carp were imported from Asia in the 1970s to control algae in southern U.S. fish farms. During periods of flooding in the early 1990s, carp escaped into the Mississippi River system. They have been relentlessly travelling northward ever since, now composing as much as 95 per cent of the fish in some Illinois rivers.

3. Why are Asian carp a threat to the Great Lakes?

Asian carp could harm the health of the Great Lakes ecosystem, and the boating and tourism industries.

Once established in a waterway, bighead and silver carp can rapidly dominate an ecosystem. Because they breed like crazy, have no natural predators, and can consume as much as 20 per cent of their body weight in a day, they can monopolize food sources and push out native species. Asian carp essentially have the ability remake an aquatic ecosystem by altering food webs to meet their needs.

Silver carp, in particular, could be catastrophic to the Great Lakes' \$16 billion boating and tourism industries. These fish pose a physical threat to boaters because they can leap out of the water, creating a hazard as the fish crash into boats, hitting people and damaging equipment. If people stop gravitating to the lakes, it would undermine the 125,000 jobs that are vulnerable to the impacts of aquatic invasive species, including Asian carp.

4. How is the Great Lakes industry at stake?

- \$7 billion US: value of binational Great Lakes fishery
- \$16 billion US: value of recreational boating industry on the Great Lakes
- \$600 million: amount Ontario anglers spend on equipment, food, and lodging
- 73 million tourists spent \$12.3 billion while visiting the region in 2010

4. How could Asian carp find their way into the Great Lakes?

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers identified the most likely point of entry to be the Chicago Area Waterway System (CAWS), a series of canals and channels connecting the Mississippi River and Great Lakes basins. A series of electric fences are currently in place to shock and deter fish from swimming across the barrier.



Asian carp could also enter the lakes through baitfish and live fish markets. U.S. fish sellers harvest Asian carp and truck them on ice to markets in Ontario. If there was a spill, the fish could find their way into lakes or rivers where they could reproduce.

5. Have Asian carp been found in the Great Lakes yet?

Recent studies suggest that Asian carp have not yet established reproducing populations in the Great Lakes, although a few fish have been found in the lakes.

Water samples taken from the Great Lakes have tested positive for Asian carp environmental DNA (eDNA), suggesting, but not concluding, that some of the invasive fish are present in the Great Lakes.

While a few grass carp have been found in Ontario in recent years, including one in the Grand River in May 2013, they have so far not been able to reproduce. It is still concerning because no one can say where they came from. The good news is that there is still time to stop the dreaded invaders.

6. What can our governments do to stop an Asian carp invasion?

On this side of the border, the Ontario Government can ensure carp are dead before crossing the border by requiring them to be gutted. They can enhance education and outreach efforts with anglers, and involve various stakeholders in the development of best management practices for invasive species control.

The federal government can prioritize invasive species management through Great Lakes negotiations with the U.S., and harmonize fishery regulations across provinces so Asian carp cannot access the lakes through from within Canada.

The most effective and permanent solution is to restore the ecological divide between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basins to prevent all invasive species, including Asian carp, from moving between the two watersheds. To that effect, the governments of Ontario and Canada have a role to play in encouraging U.S. decision-makers to move quickly towards permanent separation.

7. What can you do to stop an Asian carp invasion?

- Anglers can help slow the spread of Asian carp by only buying bait fish from licensed retailers, to ensure they're not dumping carp offspring into local waterways.
- All anglers around the Great Lakes should learn how to identify Asian carp and report suspected fish to Ontario's Invading Species Hotline at 1-800-563-7711 or online at invadingspecies.com.
- Learn more about Asian carp by reading Environmental Defence's report and watching a short video at www.environmentaldefence.ca/asiancarp.