Combating the Spread of Asian Carp in Southeastern Waters

Key Points

USFWS/Michael Johnson

Background

- Four species of Asian carp—bighead, black, grass and silver—have steadily expanded their range the last 50 years across the Mississippi River Basin. They were brought to Arkansas and Mississippi to control water quality in aquaculture ponds. Hurricanes and floods, though, allowed the carp to escape and, eventually, end up in the Mississippi River.
- Much of America's interior river system is now occupied by one or more Asian carp species; at least one type of carp exists in 45 states. They are now working their way up the Ohio, Cumberland, Tennessee, Arkansas, Red and White rivers.
- Asian carp are voraciously invasive and target the Southeast's rich biodiversity. They eat at-risk, threatened or endangered mussels and snails, as well as basic food sources like phytoplankton that sustain sport fish like crappie and largemouth bass.
- Billion-dollar tourism and sport-fishing industries, vital to local economies, are also under attack.
- Kentucky is at the forefront of the battle against carp.

Money and Management

- A national anti-carp framework has been developed in collaboration with more than 70 federal, state, non-governmental, and industry partners. It was approved by the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force in 2007 and serves as the overarching plan for managing Asian carp. In addition, each of the six sub-basins with carp problems has set their own priorities.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is leading the multiagency carp-deterrent efforts. Congress appropriated $25 million to the Service in fiscal year 2020, a $14 million increase that will allow the Service to fund anti-carp projects in all six sub-basins.
- In the South, the Service has been funding Kentucky and Tennessee removal and monitoring efforts since 2016 in the Ohio, Tennessee and Cumberland Rivers and tributaries. The Service has added Mississippi and Alabama the last two years.

Fighting Asian Carp in Kentucky

- The Modified-Unified Method is the latest carp-fighting tool deployed in Kentucky. The removal system will corral carp on Kentucky Lake with a series of nets and boats utilizing underwater speakers and electrofishing gear. The project should last through February 2020. The Service is providing technical assistance, equipment, and personnel to implement this removal method at Kentucky Lake.
- A bio-acoustic fish fence, or BAFF, is also deployed at Kentucky's Lake Barkley lock and dam. The $7 million, three-year field trial is designed to keep carp from entering the lock's chamber. It deploys customized sound signals, strobe lights and an air-bubble curtain to steer the fish away from the lock chamber. The BAFF, a collaboration between the Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Geological Survey, the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources and others, has the potential to deter the movement of invasive fish without impeding navigation.
- State biologists in Kentucky and Tennessee use Service money to track carp movements via acoustic transmitters placed throughout the Ohio and Tennessee river basins. They also use eDNA to determine the leading edge of the carp invasion.
- Commercial fishers, contracted by the Kentucky Department of Fish and Wildlife Resources, have harvested more than four million pounds of Asian carp from Kentucky lakes, Barkley in particular.

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