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GREAT LAKES, GREAT PERIL | UPDATE

## Chicago urges Army Corps to report on carp sooner

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By Dan Egan of the Journal Sentinel

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April 10, 2011 | (22) COMMENTS

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Reuters

"Invasive species are a significant and immediate threat, and separation of the watersheds is an important opportunity to invest in and improve the environment, our infrastructure and our economy. We cannot go slow or take a wait and see approach. The study must be expedited." - Rahm Emanuel, Chicago mayor-elect

Chicago is leaning on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to fast-track an ongoing study to protect Chicago's Lake Michigan shoreline - and the rest of the Great Lakes - from an Asian carp invasion.

"The proposed timeline for the study is too long," Chicago environment commissioner Suzanne Malec-McKenna wrote to the Army Corps on March 25. "The threat of Asian carp has been known for more than a decade. It is not acceptable to wait another five years for solutions. We urge the Corps to speed up this timeline to every extent possible."

It is an ironic twist of history, considering that Chicago sparked the problem over 111 years ago when it obliterated the natural barrier between the Mississippi River basin and Lake Michigan by constructing the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

The canal remains the linchpin in the Windy City's giant plumbing system that flushes waste away from its Lake Michigan drinking water intake pipes, down the Mississippi and into the Gulf of Mexico. The canal, which reversed the flow of the Chicago River so it flowed out of Lake Michigan instead of into it, was built to send about 6 billion gallons of Lake Michigan water per day into the Mississippi basin, though a Supreme Court ruling has capped that amount at about 2 billion gallons per day.

Harsh feelings still linger among Illinois' Great Lakes neighbors about the water grab, but today they are eclipsed by the fact that the canal has become the prime pathway for the giant invasive fish to make their way out of the Asian carp-infested Mississippi basin and into Lake Michigan.

The Army Corps, prodded by Congress, is now exploring what it will take to plug that canal and restore the natural hydrologic separation between the two massive drainage basins, a move that could severely affect the barge industry that operates on the canal system, as well as the way Chicago manages floodwaters.

It could also mean trouble for the Chicago area's sewage treatment system because it would no longer have the luxury of sending highly contaminated wastewater toward the Gulf of Mexico, a trip that allows the sun, temperature and time to bake the bad stuff out before it flows from taps in downstream cities such as St. Louis.

But some see the project as an opportunity to upgrade wastewater treatment plants whose discharges are among the nation's nastiest, as well as a chance to enhance the way cargo flows through the extremely congested region by rebuilding the canal system so it's better integrated with roads and rails.

Add the City of Chicago to that group.

"We encourage you to consider solutions that provide multiple co-benefits beyond the aquatic invasive species issue, especially for the Chicago region," wrote Malec-McKenna to the Army Corps in the last week of a public comment period on its study. "This is a unique opportunity to positively affect change around long-standing issues related to flooding, storm water management, ecological degradation, transportation and navigation."

That strategy was the focus of a [Journal Sentinel series](#) last summer. The idea of re-reversing the Chicago River so it again flows into Lake Michigan instead of the Mississippi basin has also won support from Chicago Mayor Richard Daley.

Daley will leave office in May, but his successor, Rahm Emanuel, has already publicly embraced the idea of pushing the Army Corps to

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