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Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal to Close for Fish Barrier Maintenance

Fish toxicant to be used to prevent Asian carp from moving past barrier toward Lake Michigan

CHICAGO – A section of the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal (CSSC) is planned to be closed to all traffic, weather permitting, beginning December 2 for a period of four to five days.

During the first week of December, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is planning to perform scheduled maintenance on Barrier IIA, one of two electric barriers presently in operation on the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal constructed to prevent the movement of the destructive Asian carp into Lake Michigan and the Great Lakes. Performing scheduled maintenance is required in order to maintain reliability of the structures and minimize the risk of unplanned outages due to inadequate maintenance.

During the maintenance shutdown, Barrier I will remain active. However, because of late summer detection of Asian carp near the barrier system and concern that Barrier I may not be effective in deterring juvenile fish, a fish toxicant called rotenone will be applied to the canal between the barrier and the Lockport Lock and Dam. The application will allow for the removal of Asian carp and other fish to keep them from advancing past the barrier toward Lake Michigan. Illinois EPA water quality experts will be monitoring downstream of the application zone to ensure that the waters of the state are protected, and the chemicals do not move beyond the designated application area.

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“The barrier is currently the only protection against Asian carp for the Great Lakes and the maintenance shutdown may present an opportunity for the destructive fish to advance up the canal toward Lake Michigan,” said Illinois Department of Natural Resources Assistant Director John Rogner.

During this process, the U.S. Coast Guard will be enforcing a safety zone and the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal (CSSC) will be closed to all commercial and recreational vessel traffic between CSSC Mile Marker 291 and CSSC Mile Marker 298. The waterway is planned to be closed beginning December 2 and last for the duration of operations.

“We understand the impact of this canal closure on commercial and recreational waterway users, but it is necessary to help protect lives, prevent long-term damage to the ecosystem, and facilitate the working group’s application of rotenone and its cleanup,” said Rear Adm. Peter Neffenger, Commander of the Ninth U.S. Coast Guard District. “We will work closely with our partner agencies to reopen the waterway as soon as operations permit.”

Asian carp have been detected using environmental DNA testing in the canal below the barrier, and there is consensus among federal, state, and local agencies along with other partners that actions must be taken to prevent these invasive species from reaching Lake Michigan while Barrier IIA is shut down.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR), in coordination with the multi-agency Asian Carp Rapid Response Workgroup along with the Great Lakes Interagency Task Force, will manage the application of rotenone in the CSSC. While the toxicant will eradicate Asian carp and other fish in the canal, rotenone does not present a risk to people or other wildlife when used properly.

The application of rotenone is planned for December 3, and crews from the IDNR and other agencies will remove fish from the canal and dispose of them in a landfill. The fish habitat in the section of the canal scheduled for treatment is made up of mostly non-sport fish with the most common species being common carp, goldfish, and gizzard shad. Before the application of rotenone, an electro-fishing operation will be conducted to relocate as many sport fish as possible. Rotenone dissipates quickly on its own, but to accelerate that process a neutralizing agent known as potassium permanganate will be used following the application.

The Asian Carp Rapid Response Workgroup and its partners are committed to implementing the rapid response plan and completing the electric barrier maintenance as quickly as possible to expedite the reopening of the ship canal.

“Protecting and restoring the Great Lakes is one of U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s highest priorities,” said Cameron Davis, Senior Advisor to U.S. EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson on the Great Lakes. “The plan announced today reflects a difficult, but critical team effort to protect the lakes against a destructive fish that could cause catastrophic damage to the Great Lakes ecosystem.”

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If Asian carp become established in the Great Lakes, they could cause a catastrophic decline in native fish species and severely damage the Great Lakes sport fishing industry, valued at \$7 billion.

The Asian Carp Rapid Response Workgroup includes the Illinois Department of Natural Resources, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Coast Guard, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, Chicago Department of Environment, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago, Midwest Generation, Great Lakes Commission, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, International Joint Commission, and Wisconsin Sea Grant. Fisheries management agencies from Indiana, Wisconsin, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Pennsylvania and New York are also providing support to the operation.