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Lynne Whelan
312-846-5330
lynne.e.whelan@usace.army.mil

Army Corps of Engineers Completes Asian Carp barricades along the Des Plaines River and I&M Canal

Chicago – On Oct. 29, 2010 U.S. Representatives Judy Biggert and Daniel Lipinski, officials from the White House Council on Environmental Quality and the office of Senator Richard Durbin joined the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago; Illinois Department of Natural Resources, and Cook, DuPage and Will counties at a ribbon cutting to mark the completion of barricades along the Des Plaines River and I&M Canal.

The project was designed and constructed by the US Army Corps of Engineers and funded through the U.S. Army Environmental Protection Agency as part of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative. These measures are intended to reduce the risk of Asian carp being swept from the Des Plaines River and I&M Canal into the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal (CSSC) during heavy rains and flooding. The Des Plaines River barricade, a project completed on time and under budget, consists of concrete barriers and a specially fabricated wire mesh that allows water to flow through the fence but prevents the passage of fish. The fence extends approximately 13 miles from Romeoville, Ill. to Willow Springs, Ill. The completion of this project marks yet another milestone met in the framework laid out by the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been operating a system of electric barriers near Romeoville, Ill. to prevent invasive species, including Asian carp, from migrating into Lake Michigan via the CSSC. The Water Resources Development Act of 2007 directed the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to maximize the effectiveness of the barrier system by conducting a study of a range factors that could potentially reduce the efficacy of the Electrical Dispersal Barriers. The first report USACE completed under this authority identified areas of potential bypass upstream of the electric barriers during flooding and recommended construction of this barricade along the Des Plaines River, along with a stone blockage in the I&M Canal.

“Construction of these measures is crucial to reducing the risk of Asian carp bypassing the barriers,” said Colonel Vincent Quarles, commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District. “The electric barriers focus on the largest, most direct, pathway. Now, we have measures in place to reduce the possibility of Asian carp entering the CSSC via those flanking waterways.”

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“The successful completion of the Des Plaines Bypass Barrier is a critical step in closing the gaps in our defenses and preventing the Asian carp from threatening our precious lakes,” said U.S. Representative Judy Biggert (R-IL-13th), who helped secure legislative authority for the construction of the barrier. “I commend our team of federal, state, and local environmental managers for their hard work in identifying this threat and implementing an effective solution. This effort demonstrates that through sound science and cooperation, we can stop the spread of these invasive carp, and do so without harming the jobs and commerce that depend on Chicago’s waterways.”

During the July 24 - 25, 2010 heavy rains in the Chicago area the completed I&M Canal blockage and the completed portions of the fence along the Des Plaines River functioned as designed and prevented unimpeded flow of water at connections closest to the electrical barriers.

Funds for the project were provided by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as part of the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative in 2009.

“The completion of this project exemplifies the incredible teamwork underway on the federal, state and local level to protect the Great Lakes from Asian carp,” said John Goss, Director of Asian Carp at the White House Council on Environmental Quality. “The fish barriers are one of the dozens of short and long term actions in our comprehensive Asian Carp Control Strategy Framework that includes an unprecedented commitment from the Obama administration to keep Asian carp from becoming established in the Great Lakes.”

Construction of the fence required a temporary closure of Centennial Trail, which extends through portions of the Will, Cook and DuPage Forest Preserve Districts. Now that construction has been completed users will once again have full access to the trail.

In addition to continued operation of the barrier system the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is also engaged in ongoing efforts to monitor the location of Asian carp, continuing research into ways to enhance the efficacy of the barrier system, and conducting a large scale study of ways to prevent or reduce the risk of Aquatic Nuisance Species transfer between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River basins via aquatic pathways. For additional information visit www.lrc.usace.army.mil.

USACE is a member of the Asian Carp Regional Coordinating Committee (ACRCC), which is an interagency task force made up of federal, state and local agencies, working together to prevent Asian carp from establishing sustainable populations in the Great Lakes. More information on the framework and the ACRCC can be found on the website at www.asiancarp.org.

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Photographs of the ribbon cutting event and the new barricades are available on the Army Corps of Engineers Flickr site at www.flickr.com/photos/usacechicago.