

## Act now before invader hits the Great Lakes


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The latest invasive species to threaten the [Great Lakes](#) is a brute called the Asian carp. The Wisconsin Legislature should take an opportunity today to act swiftly against the threat.

Capable of growing to 4 feet long and 100 pounds, the Asian carp has starved out native species by scooping up plankton as it slowly migrated north up the [Mississippi River](#) since the 1970s. The fish originally was imported from Asia to cleanse fish ponds and sewage lagoons in the deep South, but they escaped into the river.

Now the Asian carp is in Illinois and bumping up against the [Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal](#) , a manmade path from [Lake Michigan](#) to the Mississippi via the Illinois and Des Plaines rivers. If the big fish make it into the lakes, the fear is that the native species that now thrive in our waters would be crowded out within a few years. There's an electric barrier to convince the fish to stay back.

On Nov. 20 the U.S. [Environmental](#) Protection Agency announced that DNA from the Asian carp had been found above the electric barrier. Illinois officials last week poisoned a six-mile stretch of the waterway in hopes of wiping out any carp that had made it that far, and the EPA pledged \$13 million to help stop the fish from getting any closer.

[Environmentalists](#), the commercial shipping industry and now some lawmakers believe that's not enough to protect the Great Lakes ecosystem.

The state of Michigan is working on a lawsuit that would require closing the canal's locks to re-establish a permanent barrier. Wisconsin state Reps. Garey Bies, R-Sister Bay, and Jon Richards, D-Milwaukee, have introduced a resolution that would authorize the state attorney general's [office](#) to join the Michigan lawsuit.

"Preserving the Great Lakes [environment](#) and \$7 billion a year fishing industry isn't a partisan issue, it's a no-brainer," Bies said in his statement announcing the measure.

There is an economic reason not to close the locks. Tug and barge companies haul millions of tons of iron ore, coal, grain, scrap metal and other cargo through the canal. Without the canal those materials would have to be shipped the long way around, to the Atlantic Ocean and St. Lawrence Seaway, or be transported via [truck](#) or rail, which are more costly.

In these times it's not easy to endorse a plan of action that could raise the cost of basic goods because of increased transportation costs. But if it's the only alternative to the eventual

destruction of the salmon, whitefish, walleye and perch populations across the Great Lakes, Bies is right: It makes good sense to close the locks.

The Assembly can act by unanimous consent to pass the Bies-Richards resolution today, when it meets in a special session; otherwise it must wait until the next regular session at the end of January. That's too long; lawmakers should pass the measure today.