

Asian carp: Michigan asks Supreme Court to shut 2 corridors to Great Lakes

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Great Lakes' \$7 billion fishing industry threatened, Michigan says



Deckhand Pat Tobel stands aboard The Tanner as the towboat passes underneath the Chicago Skyway as it travels on the Calumet River toward the O'Brien Lock and Dam. The lock is one of two Michigan seeks to have closed to stop the advance of the Asian carp. (Tribune photo by E. Jason Wambsgans / December 21, 2009)

The fight to keep invasive Asian carp from the Great Lakes reached the nation's highest court Monday as Michigan's attorney general sued Illinois, asking for the closing of two shipping locks near [Chicago](#) in perhaps a last-ditch effort to save the region's \$7 billion fishing industry.

Contending that Illinois officials have been too lax in defending Lake Michigan from Asian carp, Attorney General Mike Cox asked the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) for immediate action in closing the O'Brien Lock and Dam in the Calumet-Sag Channel and the Chicago Controlling Works in the Illinois River -- hoping to seal off the most direct route for fish entering Lake Michigan.

"We don't want to have to look back years later when (Asian carp) have gotten into Lake Michigan and say, 'What was the matter with us? We should have done something,' " Cox said. "Clearly, (closing) the locks are easiest, the most reliable and the most effective steps we can take in short run."

[Gov. Pat Quinn](#) declined to say whether he favored closing the locks, but said: "We have to protect the ecology of the Great Lakes; we also have many, many jobs that depend on shipping, so there has to be a proper balance.

"There are ways of preventing the carp from getting into the Great Lakes without strangling our economy."

[The Army](#) Corps of Engineers, which operates the locks and is a co-defendant in the lawsuit, declined to comment.

In addition to closing those two locks, the lawsuit seeks creation of new barriers to prevent carp from escaping the Des Plaines River or neighboring waterways during flooding. Cox is also calling for a study of Chicago's water system to understand the size and scope of the Asian carp population and how to eradicate it.

The lawsuit comes during a period of heightened anxiety over Asian carp in Illinois, where recent DNA research has hinted that the voracious fish may have bypassed the underwater electric barrier system near [Romeoville](#) and could now be within 6 miles of Lake Michigan. In August, Quinn signed into law a \$3 million program giving universities and researchers authority to fish as many varieties of Asian carp as they can get their hands on. Last week, Illinois was awarded \$13 million in federal funds to deal with the carp problem.

In filing suit, Michigan is asking that the court reopen a 100-year case sparked by Chicago's reversing the flow of the [Chicago River](#) to send its sewage and human waste away from Lake Michigan and toward the Mississippi River. A number of states around the Great Lakes complained that Chicago's manipulation of the waterways was harming the lakes. The courts responded by limiting the amount of water Chicago could divert each day.

The Alliance for the Great Lakes, which recently studied permanently closing Chicago's shipping canals over fear of invasive species, said there is too much at risk to dismiss closing locks entirely.

"That canal is becoming a liability because it's putting the future of the Great Lakes at risk," said Joel Brammeier, chief executive officer of the alliance. "Right now, it's every tool in the toolbox, whatever it takes to keep the carp from getting into the Great Lakes."