

# Asian carp summit fosters networking, new programs

Discussions at the Asian Carp Marketing Summit last September laid the groundwork for new directions and opportunities to address the potential threat these fish pose to the Great Lakes and the Illinois River. Since then, a thriving expert network has developed and efforts are on track to turn the conclusions reached at the summit into action.

“The summit was convened to identify obstacles and opportunities associated with commercial marketing of Asian carp as a way to reduce their numbers in the Mississippi River Basin,” said Pat Charlebois, IISG aquatic invasives specialist.

Gathered together in one room were representatives from restaurants, commercial fishing, processing and related businesses,



Courtesy of Eric Gittinger, Illinois Natural History Survey

as well as agencies, and academic institutions. Altogether, experts from eight states shared their insights and ideas.

At the summit, participants agreed that high-value Asian carp

fillets marketed to restaurants and retailers may provide the financial incentive for extensive harvesting of these fish. Looking to have immediate impact, they also recommended that whole fish be exported in high numbers to Asian markets, where these species are already popular food fish. Finally, they recommended converting Asian carp by-products into pet food or treats to eliminate waste and maximize profit opportunities.



Courtesy of Paula Ouder, Louisiana Sea Grant

Asian carp fillets can be marketed to restaurants and retailers.

The Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR) is now developing programs to help further these goals. “This is a public problem,” said Tom Heavisides, IDNR contaminants assessment manager. “We can’t expect this to be solved without public dollars for startups and training.”

Specifically, IDNR, in conjunction with Southern Illinois University Carbondale, is developing a pilot project to provide training for anglers in catching and proper handling of Asian carp—in large part to support marketing abroad. The pilot project will provide stipends or financial incentives based on bringing a pre-defined volume of Asian carp to market. Research will explore the impact of harvesting on the ecology of the Illinois River, where Asian carp are numerous, as well as the potential barriers and opportunities for marketing Asian carp.

The summit also provided opportunities to move new projects or plans forward. For example, Louisiana Sea Grant Fisheries Specialist Julie Anderson had been developing a plan with Operation Blessing, a non-profit organization, to send canned Asian carp to Haiti, where food is certainly needed and canned fish is preferred. At the summit, Anderson was able to meet Carole Engle, a University of Arkansas researcher who has

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# New 'Clean Boats, Clean Waters' looking for volunteers

Just like it is important to bathe regularly to fend off invasive germs and dirt, it is equally important for boaters to clean their vessels to stop the spread of invasive aquatic species.

“To quote Benjamin Franklin, ‘An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure,’” said Cathy McGlynn, the Northeast Illinois Invasive Plant Partnership (NIIPP) coordinator. “And that definitely is the case with invasive species.”

IISG and NIIPP are currently working together to bring to Illinois and Indiana the “Clean Boats, Clean Waters” program, which will train people to help spread awareness on the issue.

They are currently looking for volunteers to organize and conduct a boater education program in their community. Those who sign up will attend a training workshop and will be in the field this summer. Volunteers will also perform boat and trailer checks for invasive species, distribute informational brochures, and collect and report any new water body infestations.

“Many invasive species can move from Point A to Point B through recreational boaters,” IISG

Aquatic Invasives Specialist Pat Charlebois said.

Since this is the program’s pilot year in both Illinois and Indiana, it will only take place in one county in each state—Lake County in Illinois and Lake County in Indiana.

Charlebois also said they have enough money to fund Clean Boats, Clean Waters from this summer to the next; however, she added that the goal is to partner with more organizations to make the program self-sustaining, as well as extend it across more counties in the two states. The program has been already implemented in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

Some tips that volunteers will be giving boaters are: Remove any visible mud, plants, fish, or animals before transporting recreational equipment; drain water from equipment before transporting; and never release plants, fish, or animals into a body of water unless they come from that body of water.

To volunteer or for more information, e-mail McGlynn at [cathy.mcglynn@niipp.net](mailto:cathy.mcglynn@niipp.net).

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developed a USDA-approved process for canning Asian carp.

“We were able to develop new products using this canning method, including a tomato-based version of Asian carp,” said Anderson. “We’ve taste-tested several products with Haitians and are now getting logistics and prices together to move this project forward on a larger scale.”

The summit was also helpful to partners in a new Asian carp business plan. The plan for Grafton Summit Enterprises LLC is to establish two Asian carp processing plants in Illinois—one to process fillets and the other to process the fish by-products. These plants may provide employment to more than 40 people altogether and process 50,000 to 100,000 pounds of fish per day, according to the Associated Press. This proposed business is now under review by the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity.

This two-day event took place at the Lewis and Clark Community College in Godfrey, Illinois. It was organized by IISG, with sponsorship from the IDNR and the National Great Rivers Research and Education Center. You can download the published summary from the Asian Carp Marketing Summit by visiting [www.iiseagrant.org/asiancarp](http://www.iiseagrant.org/asiancarp).