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US Army Corps of Engineers, Chicago District
231 S. LaSalle St. Suite 1500
ATTN: GLMRIS Comments, Dave Wethington
Chicago, IL 60604

Dear Mr. Wethington;

I am writing to add my comments to the deliberations about what actions proposed in the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study (GLMRIS) should be taken to halt the spread of Asian Carp into the Great Lakes. I am a New York State senator whose 62nd District borders the south shore of Lake Ontario and is connected to Lake Erie by the Niagara River. The ecological integrity and health of the Great Lakes directly and deeply impacts the livelihoods and quality of life of my constituents.

The need for bold, decisive, preventative action to prevent the invasion of Asian Carp is compelling and demands immediate action as well as effective long term strategies. Scientific and technological data as well as natural resource management experiences have established the economic and ecological necessity of taking even expensive short and long term preventative actions over less robust management options.

The Congressional Research Service's January 24, 2014 report emphasizes the futility and expense of trying to eradicate an established non-native species and the wisdom of undertaking even expensive preventative measures:

Eradication of non-native species in aquatic environments is difficult and rare, having only occasionally been successful when efforts were focused on small-scale and closed systems like reservoirs, ponds, small locks, and marinas. Since eradication of a non-native species, once it has become established, is unlikely, difficult, and therefore expensive, management more often focuses on preventing troublesome species from entering new habitats, through regulating imports of certain nuisance species, preventing or slowing the spread of already introduced species, and monitoring to detect new invaders when their populations may be localized and at low densities such that eradication might still be possible. While efforts to prevent introduction may be costly, it almost always will be less expensive than continued attempts to eradicate or control non-native species that become established (p. 5).

The establishment of Asian Carp in the Great Lakes would devastate a critical economic engine of Great Lakes communities and their states or provinces. This cannot be allowed to happen. If a physical separation has the highest potential for effectively halting the spread of Asian Carp and other aquatic invasive species (and I do believe this), then the cost of this approach is worth it in comparison to the profound economic and social costs if Asian Carp establish in the Great Lakes.

At its 2014 semi-annual meeting in Chicago earlier this month, the Great Lakes Commission called for immediate action on a suite of near-term measures to reduce the risk of interbasin transfer of Asian carp and other invasive species at the Chicago Area Waterways System (CAWS). Near-term measures suggested by the Commission included:

continued implementation of the Asian Carp Control Strategy Framework and related efforts; immediate implementation of additional control measures as generally outlined in the GLMRIS alternative two (such as use of chemical controls, ballast and bilge management, habitat alternation, and controlled harvesting and overfishing); within three years, design, engineer and construct modifications to the Brandon Road lock and dam structure to reduce the risk of one-way transfer (into Lake Michigan), including additional electric barriers at the entrance and exit of the lock, use of fish deterrents, modifications to the gates on the dam, and other technologies; and design, engineer and test the "GLMRIS lock," as a national demonstration project, to determine its viability and effectiveness at stopping both one- and two-way transfer and cost.

I urge the USACE to accelerate efforts to develop consensus on taking such actions as those listed above, and any others that are feasible and effective. The immediate threat is Asian Carp but the overarching, ongoing threats are aquatic invasive species (AIS) with the potential to spread in both directions. All states and provinces have a mutual responsibility for preventing this. The bottom line for me, on behalf of my constituents is:

Asian Carp must be prevented from spreading into the Great Lakes, period. A combination of approaches must be implemented, not just one alternative listed in the GLMRIS. Bold, immediate, short and long term actions must be taken and must include the physical separation of waterways and in a much shorter timeframe than 25 years. The economic and ecological costs of anything less is not acceptable. The USACE needs to accelerate consensus building on a suite of actions, timeframes, and financing.

The Chicago shipping industry has legitimate economic concerns but not at the expense of the economic and ecological integrity of the Great Lakes, eight states, and two provinces. Mitigation measures should be explored to offset any substantial impacts of the short term tradeoffs to achieve long term benefits for the greater good. The GLMRIS demonstrates that restoring the natural divide is feasible and a number of viable options can achieve long-term environmental separation while maintaining crucial transportation and economic activity.

I believe that we are at an historic juncture for protecting two of the world's largest and most important freshwater resources, the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River, resources that millions of people rely on for economic livelihoods, community quality of life, and ecological abundance. This is not hyperbole. The actions taken in the next few years will have profound and very long lasting consequences, not only in our lifetimes but for future generations.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the GLMRIS. As always, I am available for further discussion.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "George D. Maziarz". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "G" and a stylized "M".

George D. Maziarz
Senator, 62nd District

GDM/ss