

## **Asian carp found in Ohio River along WV border**

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By Jim Ross – The State Journal

An invasive species of fish that has worried people in the Great Lakes region has been found in the Ohio River along the West Virginia border.

So far, the numbers of Asian carp in West Virginia's waters have been small, but state wildlife officials are still monitoring the situation.

The fear, as with many invasive species, is that Asian carp will crowd out species already in the rivers or will affect the ecosystem in ways that causes harm to them.

The term Asian carp refers to four species of carp that were introduced into the United States from Asia and have gotten into waterways: bighead, silver, black and grass. Most of the concern has focused on the bighead and silver carp.

The silver carp can be seen on several YouTube videos, as the species tends jump several feet out of the water when startled. At least one video shows people startling the carp and attempting to shoot them with arrows.

Asian carp average 30 to 40 pounds, with some weighing as much as 100 pounds.

In Illinois, an electrical barrier has been installed in the Chicago River, an artificial waterway connecting the Mississippi River with Lake Michigan, to prevent Asian carp from getting into the Great Lakes.

The silver carp has not been found in West Virginia waters, but the bighead carp has been found at two locations in the Northern Panhandle and in the Ohio River in the Huntington area.

The fish found in the Wheeling and Moundsville areas could have moved up the river naturally, or they could have escaped from a fish culture facility, said Bret Preston, assistant chief of warmwater fisheries management for the West Virginia Division of Natural Resources.

Preston said he was part of a meeting recently of wildlife management specialists from all states along the Ohio River to discuss the Asian carp situation.

"We don't have any specific program for Asian carp at this point. Given their proximity now, it's likely we're going to be seeing larger numbers of silver carp and bighead carp up in the upper Ohio River system," he said.

"We're looking at what are some of the things we can do in the Ohio River basin to minimize or control that spread."

It's more than an ecological issue. It's also a safety issue, Preston said. A 40-pound fish jumping out of the water can injure a person in a small boat or on a personal watercraft, he said.

Preston said the carp are filter feeders that consumer a large amount of larger-size plankton. Mussels and gizzard shad eat the same plankton and could be crowded out, he said. Also, the loss of large plankton could lead to blooms of smaller plankton and cause problems with turbidity (cloudiness) in the river, he said.

Chris O'Bara, a large river biologist with the DNR, said one adult bighead carp has been caught below the Robert C. Byrd Locks and Dam, which is about 30 miles upstream from downtown Huntington.

"They're not likely reproducing, or we would have found smaller ones," he said.

Asian carp can live in a variety of river conditions, but one thing that may affect their spread in the Ohio is the number of dams that create slow-moving pools to benefit navigation, O'Bara said.

Asian carp eggs float, he said. They need a distance of free-flowing river to survive. Otherwise they will sink to the bottom, he said.

"Our river is actually more of a reservoir-type river than a free-flowing river. But there have been reports of Asian carp reproducing in the Green River in Kentucky, which is more like the Ohio," he said.