



OREGON INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

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PRESS RELEASE

ASIAN CARP IN OREGON—A HUMAN HEALTH HAZARD

SALEM, Oregon—When Oregonians think of a fishing trip, we usually envision a placid afternoon of trout fishing on a Cascade lake, or the exciting thrill of landing a Chinook in Tillamook Bay. We don't normally associate broken noses and jaws and concussions with a recreational boating trip, but the introduction of Asian carp, specifically the silver carp, in Oregon, would change that forever.

Asian carp comprise a group of four species—bighead, silver, black, and grass—introduced to the United States from Asia since the 1960s for aquaculture use and vegetation control. Bighead and silver carp were imported into the United States in the 1970s, but both species escaped confinement during floods, and are found reproducing throughout much of the Mississippi River system.

Grass carp were first introduced to private ponds for aquatic weed control in the Pacific Northwest in the 1970s. In 1998, grass carp were legalized in Oregon as a controlled species. Controlled species require a permit from ODFW. In the case of grass carp, ODFW requires grass carp to be sterile and tagged with a passive integrated transponder (PIT). Although grass carp are the only Asian carp currently found in Oregon, biologists and others are on the lookout for introductions of Asian carp because of their potential to successfully inhabit Oregon waters, from the lower Columbia River to reservoirs and lakes.

“We do not want Asian carp to ever enter Oregon,” said Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife Invasive Species Wildlife Integrity Coordinator Rick Boatner. “These fish pose significant risk to Oregon waters because they could easily establish populations in almost any water body, causing severe changes to the food chain and water quality in a lake or river.

This species of Asian carp primarily responsible for human health hazard issues is the silver carp, which, when disturbed, routinely jump out of the water. Boaters, water skiers, boats, and anyone in the wake zone of a boat risk injury and damage from these large (25–60 pound) jumping fish.

“If silver carp ever became established in Oregon, it would be like running a gauntlet of flying fish bodies anytime you attempted to boat or ski,” said Boatner. “A person would not be able to enjoy boating without being in fear for their own or their family’s safety.”

Unfortunately, the troubles from Asian carp don’t end with the damage they do to people from jumping out of water. Asian carp have a variety of feeding strategies that greatly affect native fish and wildlife habitats. Bighead and silver carp are filter feeders and alter plankton communities in large reservoirs, thus reducing plankton for native fish.

Grass carp increase the rate of algal blooms. In 2009, Devil’s Lake on the coast of Oregon experienced cyanobacteria alerts, and people and their pets were advised to avoid contact with the water. The algal bloom was caused by grass carp eliminating aquatic plant beds, which changed the light in the lake, reduced competition for nutrients, and increased sediment disturbance and toxic cyanobacteria.

Black carp eat mollusks, and have teeth evolved for crushing snails and clams, including native mollusks that are threatened or endangered.

And to make matters worse, bighead, silver, and grass carp host the Asian tapeworm, which has wreaked havoc with native North American Fish in five western states.

“Preventing the introduction of Asian carp in Oregon is a high priority,” said Boatner. “Asian carp are on Oregon’s 100 Worst List of Invasive Species—these are the species that have a history of invasiveness, are likely to cause ecological harm to native species or their habitats, are likely to cause significant economic loss, are capable of harming the humans or beneficial plants and animals, are reasonably susceptible to intentional or inadvertent introduction, have the capacity to spread via natural reproduction in Oregon, and are difficult to eradicate based on past global history. It is important for the

public to understand the tremendous risk these and other non-native species pose to Oregon's native fish and wildlife habitats."

Although it can be difficult to distinguish between some native Oregon species, such as the pike minnow, and non-native species, such as the black carp, people should report suspected sightings of Asian carp to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife. Possession of the fish is ideal; however, if that is not possible, attempt to take pictures of the fish that show close-ups of the head and fins. Additional information on identification of Asian carp can be accessed online at http://fisc.er.usgs.gov/Carp_ID/index.html.

The mission of the Oregon Invasive Species Council is to conduct a coordinated and comprehensive effort to keep invasive species out of Oregon and to eliminate, reduce, or mitigate the impacts of invasive species already established in Oregon.

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