

**Great Lakes Day Comments
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Aquatic invasive species are widely recognized by the Great Lake community and environmental agencies as a problem of historic proportions.

The National Aquatic Invasive Species Act of 2003 (NAISA) was introduced into the U.S. Senate and U.S. House of Representatives on March 5, 2003 by Senators Carl Levin (D-MI) and Susan Collins (R-ME), and Representatives Wayne Gilchrest (R-MD) and Vernon Ehlers (R-MI) (S. 525 and HR. 1080 and 1081). The bills have broad bi-partisan cosponsorship in both chambers

NAISA re-authorizes and strengthens the National Invasive Species Act of 1996, and increases authorized funding in several categories of actions for prevention and control of aquatic invasive species.

These actions include many that are critical to the Great Lakes, including establishing a timetable for regulation of ballast water in ships, funding for state management plan implementation, rapid response coordination, and for upgrading and operation of the electrical barrier to fish passage in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

Each of these is also a key element for implementation of portions of the Council of Great Lakes Governor's Restoration Priorities and the Great Lakes Commission's Program to Ensure Environmental and Economic Prosperity.

The Great Lakes Commission continues its support for NAISA and in 2003 the Council of Great Lakes Governors sent a letter of support to Congress via a letter from Chairman Taft on behalf of all of the Governors. This action came upon recommendation of the Aquatic Invasive Species Task Force of the Council.

I'd like to take a few moments to highlight areas critical to the Great Lakes states regarding aquatic invasive species.

Federal ballast water standards

Currently ships carrying ballast that enter the Great Lakes through the St. Lawrence Seaway are required by the National Invasive Species Act to have exchanged that ballast water on the high seas.

The required exchange is of unknown effectiveness and does not apply to ships entering the Great Lakes declaring no ballast on board. Ships that have performed an exchange

and those declaring no ballast on board could still be carrying aquatic invasive species from other countries to the Great Lakes.

Federal government and international actions to control ballast water discharges have been long delayed and no immediate action is anticipated. It's important to note that February's action by the International Maritime Organization does allow faster, independent action by member states like the U.S. and Canada.

Absent effective national or international standards, states are taking steps to reduce the threat of introducing aquatic invasive species in ballast water to their jurisdictions.

Michigan is continuing to implement its own ballast water reporting legislation and will be making a determination on ballast water treatment under that legislation later this spring.

The most stringent to date is legislation recently passed in the state of Washington that requires treatment of ballast water to meet a state standard before discharge.

The National Aquatic Invasive Species Act sets national dates and a timeframe for establishment of standards for discharge of aquatic invasive species in ballast water, a much needed next step. We need to bring a greater sense of urgency to the discussions.

Funding to Great Lakes states for ANS management plan implementation and to the Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species for Coordination and Collaboration

The good news on this front is that more states are developing ANS management plans. The bad news is that funding available for states and the Great Lakes Panel has been declining both in real dollars and as a function of an increased number of approved management plans now eligible for funding.

The National Aquatic Invasive Species Act authorizes an increased level of funding for the critical implementation and coordination efforts of the state management plans.

Implementation at the state level is often the first line of prevention and control for aquatic invasive species programs. The actions taken include policy, legislation, research, monitoring, information, and education.

With support from the Great Lakes Commission, The Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species has proved a key tool for collaboration on programs and a place for genesis of new ideas for all aspects of prevention and control.

Passage of NAISA and appropriation of continued funding for these activities is critical to support the continuing fight against aquatic invasive species in the Great Lakes.

Rapid Response to New Invasions of Aquatic Invasive Species in the Great Lakes

The Great Lakes states have no statewide coordinated plan for responding to newly discovered invasions of aquatic invasive species.

There are numerous species already in this country, such as Asian carp, that could wreak havoc in Great Lakes waters if introduced and established. In addition, there are many species around the world that could find their way to the Great Lakes, such as the monkey goby and the aquatic plant hydrilla. Species like these have all the characteristics that could lead to serious long term effects on aquatic ecosystems if introduced to the Great Lakes waters.

The Great Lakes states need support from the federal government for coordinating and funding rapid response to new invasions of aquatic invasive species.

In fact, approved state management plans will have to be updated and modified to include rapid response plans in order to be eligible for federal funding.

Michigan is presently working up a prevention, early detection, and rapid response plan for hydrilla, a highly invasive plant that has clogged many lakes and rivers in the southern United States.

NAISA will provide support for this type of activity and will coordinate federal participation, making passage of the act all the more critical.

Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal Aquatic Nuisance Species Barrier Project

Last and certainly not least, NAISA would help address the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal Barrier Project. The zebra mussel long the poster child of aquatic nuisance species has been overshadowed by the threat of the Asian carp.

Because of their size, reproductive rate, and huge appetite and compatibility with the climate of the Great Lakes region, it is feared Asian carp would compete for food with the valuable sport and commercial fish. If they entered the system, they could become a dominant species potentially turning the Great Lakes, some have said, into Great carp Ponds.

You know they expanded their range from aquaculture facilities in the South into the Mississippi during floods in the early 90's.

Steadily, the carp have made their way northward, becoming the most abundant species in some areas of the Mississippi, out-competing native fish, and causing severe hardship to the people who fish the river.

Currently, the carp are approximately 50 miles from Lake Michigan in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal which connects the Mississippi River with the Great Lakes.

To stop Asian carp, the Great Lakes states place great value on the electrical barrier in Illinois that was authorized under NISA and energized in 2002.

The existing barrier array is a relatively temporary arrangement with the electrodes expected to last until about April of 2005. Once the electrodes wear out the barrier will have to be shut off to replace them.

We know the original barrier isn't sufficient or permanent. A second barrier is in the planning stages and construction was expected to begin in 2004. But the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has reduced funding to the project to the level that construction cannot be completed at the present time.

While this is not part of NAISA, we must do everything in our power to convey to the Corps the critical immediate need for this project and re-instate full funding for construction of a permanent barrier in 2004. Beyond that, passage of NAISA will ensure continued operation of at least one barrier in the Canal, providing a first line of defense for the Great Lakes from invasive species.

Summary

In many ways, today we may be preaching to the Great Lakes Choir. But obviously a year after introduction, there's a question as to whether we're being heard.

In 2004 we need all voices joining the chorus that includes the Great Lakes Commission, the Council of Great Lakes Governors and our Congressional delegation members who are sponsoring the bills.

Our refrain is a simple one: by whatever means of introduction, invasive species are a real, immediate threat to the Great Lakes. We need action on NAISA and we need it now.