

# Protecting the Great Lakes, Defending Michigan Jobs

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## Background Fact Sheet

**The Diversion:** The Chicago Diversion was started in the late 1800's to address health problems from Chicago's sewage flowing into Lake Michigan and contaminating its water supply. The diversion projects (there were a series of actions over time) reversed the flow of the Chicago River, connected the Chicago and the Calumet Rivers with the Des Plaines River, and ultimately the Mississippi River. This created a connection between the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basins.

**The Diversion Case:** In 1922 Wisconsin sued Illinois and the (former) Sanitary District to stop Illinois' steadily increasing diversion to meet drinking water and sewage disposal needs. The suit was eventually joined by all of the Great Lakes states except Indiana. In 1930, the Supreme Court found that the diversion was unlawful and, after referral to a Special Master, entered a Decree limiting the diversion and requiring Illinois and the District to find alternatives for managing wastewater. There have been four modifications of the Decree – 1933, 1956, 1967, and 1980.

**Asian Carp:** In the 1990's, silver and bighead carp, imported to control algae in fish farms on the Mississippi River, escaped during a flood event. The carp reproduce quickly, eat vast amounts of organisms at the base of the food chain, and have quickly out competed native fish populations. The silver carp also jumps out of the water when disturbed by boat motors, presenting a public safety hazard. The carp have moved quickly up the Mississippi River, into the Illinois River, into the Des Plaines River, and now likely into the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and the Calumet-Sag Channel.

**The Electric Barrier:** In 2002, in response to the carp's movement up the Mississippi River, the U.S. Army Corps began operation of a temporary electric barrier in the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal, just above its connection with the Des Plaines River. The first phase of a permanent barrier only became fully operational in 2009. The Army Corps has acknowledged that the barrier is not 100% effective.

**The Cause for Concern:** Three recent events indicate that the carp may have moved past the electric barrier.

- After rotenone poisoning in early December, when the barrier was down for maintenance, one dead carp was found lakeward of Lockport. While not found past the barrier, it is not known where it was when it died. Further, it is estimated that over 50% of the fish killed sank.
- eDNA testing (environmental DNA testing) sponsored by the Army Corps has shown that carp may be past the barrier, in the Calumet-Sag Channel, near the O'Brien Lock and only seven miles from Lake Michigan. The Corps closed the Lock based on the eDNA evidence, but reopened it after the area was "fished" with commercial fishing nets, and no carp were found. Even with the O'Brien Lock closed the carp could move into the Grand and Little Calumet Rivers which have no permanent barriers.
- Carp have moved up the Des Plaines River, which parallels the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal for 20 miles, past the electric barrier. If there is a large flooding event, the Des Plaines may flood into the Canal, possibly introducing carps to the Canal.

