

Online commentary: Asian carp threat in Great Lakes needs faster response from U.S.

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Silver Asian carp leap from the Illinois River near Bath, Ill. in 2010. Noise from boats causes the carp to leap. / BRIAN KAUFMAN/DFP

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For the past three months, a growing chorus of people from across the Great Lakes basin has demanded that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers speed up a study of how best to keep Asian carp and other invasive species in the Mississippi River system from storming the lakes.

Sadly, the Corps has decided to ignore that very legitimate demand.

The agency will forge ahead as planned with a study that will drag on until at least mid-2015, despite the fact that Asian carp are on the verge of invading Lake Michigan via the Chicago Waterway System.

This is outrageous on multiple levels.

The Corps has held 11 public meetings around the region as part of a scoping process for the agency's \$25 million Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study, known as GLMRIS. The study is an attempt to figure out how to halt the destructive movement of Asian carp and other invasive species between two of North America's largest freshwater ecosystems.

The Corps has said the scoping process, which includes a public comment period that runs through March 31, would "refine the scope of GLMRIS to focus on significant issues."

Boaters, anglers, conservationists, politicians and business leaders who attended the GLMRIS public meetings have repeatedly pointed out one very significant issue to the Corps: Four years is way too long for the Corps to complete its study, particularly the portion focused on the Chicago Waterway System.

We recently learned that the Corps has decided — one month before the public comment and scoping period ends — to stick to its original timetable for completing the GLMRIS study.

The Corps' behavior raises a disturbing question: Was the scoping process for this study an insincere PR move designed to create the illusion that the Corps would take the public's concerns into serious consideration?

The potential consequences of the Corps' shameful behavior are immense.

The longer it takes the Corps to complete its study, the greater the risk of Asian carp colonizing the Great Lakes and laying waste to the lakes' \$7 billion fishery and \$16 billion recreational boating industry.