**CHICAGO**

Asian carp DNA hits spike

Testing will intensify as sign of their presence turns up beyond lake barrier

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Wildlife agencies are stepping up waterway testing efforts following a spike in detection of Asian carp in the Chicago River, about 5 miles from Lake Michigan.

State and federal officials on Friday said they would step up sampling for DNA from the invasive species in the river’s south branch after routine fall testing yielded 76 hits for silver and bighead carp.

The hits came from Bubbly Creek, a nickname for the south fork of the river branch in the city of Chicago.

The “proximity and abundance” of DNA hits — 49 for silver and 27 for bighead carp — “are much higher than values seen previously in this area,” the Illinois Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service said.

The wildlife service last month collected 414 samples in the Chicago Area Waterway System, downstream of electronic barriers that are supposed to block the invasive fish from reaching Lake Michigan and spreading throughout the Great Lakes basin.

Authorities said the finding did not mean a reproducing population of carp had jumped the barrier. No live fish were found, and no other waterways tested positive for DNA.

The carp are seen as a major threat to the fishing industry because they outcompete native species for food and habitat. The fish also are considered a safety threat to boaters because they leap from the water when startled.

The detections triggered a letter from U.S. Sens. Gary Peters and Debbie Stabenow, of Michigan, to the wildlife service and Army Corps of Engineers urging them to immediately begin a planned effort to remove carp by “electrofishing” — shocking the water, which causes the fish to leap out, and then netting them.

“There is no reason for response actions to wait ... particularly when the samples that led to the findings were taken three weeks ago,” they wrote.

The operation was set to begin Monday.

In May, Congress received a $778 million plan to block the fish from advancing further north by strengthening a choke-point lock and dam on the Des Plaines River near Joliet.

The so-called Brandon Road plan proposes a gauntlet of fortifications that include an electric barrier, a bubble barrier, acoustic deterrents and a flushing lock meant to reduce the chances Asian carp could reach Lake Michigan while still allowing barge traffic to transit the lock. 

**Asian carp, jolted by an electric current from a research boat, jump from the Illinois River near Havana in 2012.***John Flesher, AP files*

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