Ecology South

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**COMMENTARY**

**It's time to get serious about Asian carp**

BY ROB PORTMAN

Have Asian carp finally infiltrated Lake Erie?

Many Ohioans are asking that question after the announcement this month that more samples taken from the lake tested positive for carp DNA. I believe this is

another indication that unless we get serious, Lake Erie could be irreparably changed through the introduction of Asian carp to its ecosystem.

The federal government, working with Ohio and Michigan, initiated the recent search after the discovery that some water samples retrieved from Sandusky Bay last

year also tested positive for carp DNA. Although the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stressed that these findings do not confirm the presence of carp in Lake Erie, other

experts warn that the pattern and location of the detections suggest the presence of live fish in the lake.

For years, Asian carp have worked their way toward the Great Lakes from the Mississippi River. Federal agencies such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers have

monitored the progress of the fish. They have tried to erect barriers at various points of entry, to block the carp from invading the Great Lakes and permanently

disrupting the region's $7 billion fishery industry.

Much of the corps' focus has been on building electric barriers to prevent carp from moving through the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal; unfortunately, such barriers

are known to malfunction. Preventive measures also have been established at Eagle Marsh in Indiana, where a simple chain-link fence is all that stands between carp

and the Maumee River -- a direct tributary of Lake Erie.

This month's findings offer further proof that our previous actions to prevent the spread of Asian carp have not been sufficient. Earlier this year, it looked as if the

federal government would not have a plan in place to combat Asian carp until well after 2015.

Dissatisfied with this timetable, I joined my colleague Sen. Debbie Stabenow (D., Mich.) to reintroduce legislation that will finally put in place a plan to prevent

permanently the spread of Asian carp to the Great Lakes. The Stop Invasive Species Act compels the corps to submit to Congress by 2013 an expedited action plan

with options for stopping Asian carp from penetrating the Great Lakes.

Previous legislation on this issue did not gain traction. But this improved version ensures that the corps must look at ways to block carp from all possible points of

entry to the Great Lakes, not just the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal.

Thanks to the efforts of groups such as the Ohio Nature Conservancy, the Ohio Environmental Council, and the Lake Erie Charter Boat Association, we got the Stop

Invasive Species Act signed into law in June, less than three months after its introduction. The legislation requires the corps to make an interim progress report to

Congress and President Obama by the end of this month.

I hope the corps' interim report will include recommendations that can provide additional protections for the Great Lakes region in the near term. The federal

government must acknowledge that Ohioans are looking not only for answers, but also for action.

It is imperative that the Obama Administration meets the deadlines set by Congress and completes a report that identifies the single most cost-efficient and effective

solution for permanently preventing Asian carp from entering the Great Lakes.

With economic uncertainty looming as far as the eye can see, we can't allow this threat to harm Ohio's 100,000 fishing-related jobs, as well as the rest of the state's

economy.

U.S. Sen. Rob Portman (R., Ohio) is co-sponsor of the Stop Invasive Species Act.