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[Chef has a solution—Let them eat carp](#)

Rebecca Dolan and Leslie Streicher, Medill News Service | Posted: January 29th, 2010



(Photograph by Leslie Streicher and Rebecca Dolan/Medill News Service.)

Despite having been a chef since his early teens, chef Philippe Parola hadn't encountered Asian carp until a fateful day boating when two giant fish literally leaped into his boat. The first thing that came to his mind was to cook them.

"This is the most incredible quality of fish I have come across in years," the Baton Rouge, La.-based chef proclaimed.

Parola has made Asian carp his culinary specialty and has become an evangelist for the fish that the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been fighting to stay out of Lake Michigan.

Commonly known as silver carp, signs of this species have traveled up the Mississippi to Lake Michigan. Parola prefers to call them silver fins.

"The first thing that needs to be done is bleed the fish dry," said Parola. This is done by cutting off the heads and fins. What's left is beautiful white meat with a consistency similar to that of scallops and crab, he said, adding that not draining the fish would dampen its flavor and shorten its shelf life.

The biggest obstacles to getting at the delicious meat are the tiny bones. Sound scary? Not to worry, said Parola. Simply steam the filet like a crab and pull out the bones. Voila!

Once the meat is freed of the skeleton there are many different things you can do with the fish.

Silver fin steaks. Fried silver fin. Silver fin almondine. Silver fin with fresh berries. Silver fin cakes. Like another Louisiana chef, Bubba said in the classic movie *Forrest Gump*: "You can barbecue it, boil it, broil it, bake it, sauté it. There's shrimp kabobs, shrimp creole, shrimp gumbo, pan fried, deep fried..."

Ok, so he was talking about shrimp, but the possibilities for silver fin are similarly endless. And, this just might be a solution to the impending carpocalypse.

"I'm in favor of any activity that would reduce the risk of Asian carp migrating into Lake Michigan," said Maj. Gen. John Peabody with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "Any action that holds promise to solve the problem is one to be considered."

Parola hopes that the U. S. Department of Agriculture or the U. S. Food and Drug Administration will make strides in officially approving the use of the name silver fin to market the fish.

Calls to the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the Food and Drug Administration were not returned by deadline.

The Asian carp may look ugly, but they are actually good to eat and even healthy.

"Eating plankton keeps them from accumulating contaminants," said Kevin Irons, a large river ecologist with the Illinois Natural History Survey. Because they don't eat other fish, they don't absorb contaminants from those fish.

Asian carp are filter-feeders rather than bottom-feeders, meaning they eat plankton by filtering it out of the water.

Though the Illinois Fish Advisory's Web site carries warnings about eating fish from the Chicago River, there are no specific restrictions for Asian carp. Asian carp can be eaten from the Illinois River.

Although officials say you can eat the fish, it is not known whether it would prove to be a profitable industry.

"We know the biology and history of the fish, and some people do eat them," said Jason Holm, the assistant regional director of external affairs for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. "You can eat the Asian carp, but I don't know how effective it would prove economically."

"I am on a mission to spread the good news of my findings," Parola said. "If you process the fish properly there are a lot of things you can do with it that are healthy and good."

So, even if carp, or silver fin, don't make it to your local Jewel any time soon, you can still call chef Parola down in Louisiana and order some up for yourself. Carp kabobs anyone?

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