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This early December 2009 photo provided by the Illinois River Biological Station via the Detroit Free Press shows Illinois River silver carp jump out of the water after being disturbed by sounds of watercraft.

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Hoosier to lead fight to keep Asian carp out of Great Lakes

Sylvia A. Smith | Washington editor

WASHINGTON — A former director of the Indiana Department of Natural Resources has been appointed to oversee efforts to block the possible invasion of Asian carp into the Great Lakes, the Obama administration said Wednesday.

John Goss has been tasked with coordinating the federal and state approach to the migration of the non-native species. He will oversee a problem that has involved five states, Chicago and a federal agency in a lawsuit; has no obvious solution; and is likely to cost many millions of dollars.



Goss

Goss, who headed the DNR during the O'Bannon administration and is the executive director of the Indiana Wildlife Federation, promised a "transparent and science-based" approach.

He said he has not ruled out any option, but he was noncommittal about the demand by Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota and Pennsylvania to close two shipping locks in Chicago and install barriers to prevent the fish from overrunning the Great Lakes. The states have sued Chicago and the Army Corps of Engineers to force the closure.

"It's a serious problem for the rest of the fish and the ecosystem," Goss said, acknowledging there are conflicting interests among Great Lakes states. He said he hopes his work in coordinating other issues among states and with private industry will help smooth the Asian carp disagreements.

He cautioned that a "unified effort will be crucial" to keeping Asian carp from populating the Great Lakes.

In a telephone news conference coordinated by the White House, two senators gave an indication of how different states have opposing

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perspectives on the carp problem.

Closing off the Chicago canal system from Lake Michigan, said Sen. Richard Durbin, D-Ill., would cause flooding and "environmental problems of a massive magnitude."

Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., acknowledged that's an issue, "but we'd like to see the locks closed permanently."

She said because Asian carp have been discovered in Indiana waterways, every river and tributary that flows into Lake Erie and Lake Michigan must be considered.

The non-native species eat 20 percent of their body weight daily. If Asian carp established themselves in the Great Lakes, Michigan and New York officials have said, it would threaten the \$7 billion fishing industry.

The Asian carp can grow to 5 feet and 100 pounds. The species was imported to southern catfish farms to eat algae in the early 1970s. Fish escaped into the Mississippi River and have been migrating north since.

Asian carp were found in Indiana in the mid-1990s near the Ohio River. Some have been discovered in the northern part of the Wabash River more recently.

Indiana plans to build a mesh barrier at Eagle Marsh in Fort Wayne to keep the carp from leaving the Wabash River system.

Eagle Marsh, a wetland just north of Fox Island County Park near Interstate 69 and U.S. 24, has been identified by the state DNR as a possible flood-condition pathway for Asian carp to the Maumee River, which flows into Lake Erie.

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