



If you can't beat carp, rename it and eat it

BY ERIK ECKHOLM *New York Times* | Posted: Sunday, April 25, 2010 12:00 am

It's Extreme Makeover: Aquatic Edition.

Asian carp are reviled as vanquishers of native species, feared as hefty jumpers able to break a Mississippi boatman's jaw, and scorned as, well, carp. But even as some states battle to keep them from ravaging the Great Lakes, officials in the South, where the alien species have multiplied like guppies, are working to transform the carp into marketable assets.

First, the rebranding. In January, Louisiana wildlife officials rolled out the Silverfin Promotion, enlisting chefs to create recipes for what they called the tasty white meat of the bighead carp and silver carp, the two dominant invaders.

"A cross between scallops and crabmeat," declared Philippe Parola, a noted seafood chef whose new recipes include silverfin almondine.

Meanwhile, would-be carp exploiters in Kentucky, after trying the fish smoked, canned and in fried balls, concluded that it tasted remarkably like tuna and proposed labeling it Kentucky tuna.

No one has yet declared the Asian carp to taste just like chicken, but a new image does seem essential. "People are renaming these poor fish because of the American people's perception of the name 'carp,'" said Siddhartha Dasgupta, an economist at Kentucky State University who is exploring their commercial value. "We're all struggling to find a name that sounds more appetizing."

This approach has worked before: Few people in the United States ate Patagonian toothfish until marketers renamed it Chilean sea bass. It became so popular that overfishing is now a problem.

In China and Vietnam, the carp have been farmed and considered delicacies for millennia.

Asian carp grow to weights of 50 pounds or more mainly by eating plankton, not garbage on the floor of rivers and lakes. Their flesh is not high in mercury and is rich in healthy omega-3 fats.