TIME

Asian Carp in the Great Lakes?

This Means War

American officials were first alarmed by the appearance of Asian carp in the 1990s, when the fish were found swimming in the Chicago River. Since then, the carp have spread across the Great Lakes, where they feed on native fish, depleting the water of oxygen and potentially threatening the ecosystem.

In recent years, the United States has invested millions of dollars in efforts to control the carp population. One such effort is the development of a “biological control” method, which involves adding a virus to carp eggs in the wild, killing the young carp and thereby reducing the overall population.

Despite these efforts, the carp continue to pose a threat to the Great Lakes ecosystem. Scientists are working to develop new strategies to control the carp population, including the use of DNA editing techniques to create carp that are less likely to reproduce.

The carp are a significant economic threat as well, as they are becoming increasingly common in the United States. In some areas, the carp have become a major pest, eating the eggs of native fish and competing with them for resources.

In the face of these challenges, experts are calling for increased funding and research to combat the carp population. The future of the Great Lakes ecosystem could depend on the success of these efforts.

To learn more about this issue, visit the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service website.
The White House has taken action as well. On Monday, federal officials announced $78.5 million in funding to prevent the spread of Asian carp; plans include building new barriers between the Chicago canal and the Des Plaines River. (The carp may be able to bypass the existing electric barrier in the canal when water levels are high and the two waterways mix.) "We see the threat and potential impact of the Asian carp establishing themselves in the Great Lakes," says Nancy Sutley, chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality. "We believe we have the chance to work together to prevent economic and environmental damage before it occurs."

That's an ideal plan, since it's much easier to prevent invasive species from infiltrating a new home than it is to eradicate them after the fact. And any plague of foreign species will likely become harder to quash because of global warming, as nonnative plants and animals are often better able to adjust to changing climates than indigenous species, according to a study published last week in the journal *PLoS ONE*. "We have to recognize that we are the ones changing the natural world, and we have an obligation to do it responsibly," says TNC's Lowenstein. "Not just for the planet, but for our own sake."

If the preventive efforts don't work, you might want to put on a helmet the next time you go waterskiing on Lake Michigan.

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Answer the following questions.

1. Why are invasive species becoming more common?

2. The Rocky Mountain pine beetle causes how much damage a year?

3. What do Asian carp eat? Why are they not considered direct predators?

4. Why is knocking out the bottom layers of a food chain bad? How can it disrupt the entire ecosystem?

5. Why don't we just shut down the canals that connect the Mississippi River to the Great Lakes?