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From: **Tim Ruth** <truth@wlf.la.gov>
Date: Wed, Feb 12, 2020, 4:04 PM
Subject: Asian Carp in Coastal Louisiana
To: Philippe Parola <chef@chefphilippe.com>

Dear Chef Philippe,

Please consider this letter of support for your continued efforts to provide a solution to the increasing invasion of Asian carp in Louisiana. Your recent inquiries and concern for Louisiana's coastal fisheries is also well warranted and very much appreciated. Louisiana's coastal waterways are thoroughly connected within basins influenced by rivers already infested with these destructive invasive species. Estimates indicate there are up to 5.5 tons of Asian carp per mile within the Mississippi River. Biologists in Louisiana predict there is no chance to effectively eradicate the species. Increased commercial harvest through effective marketing is currently the only option to help control the abundance and continued spread of Asian carp in Louisiana.

The four species of Asian carp invading Louisiana's estuaries (Silver, Bighead, Grass and Black carp) are highly prolific, destructive to our aquatic ecosystems and threatening our coastal economy. Silver carp can tolerate up to 12ppt salinity and low dissolved oxygen. They consume phytoplankton and zooplankton and can live up to 20 years. Bighead and Silver carp can consume up to 50% of their body weight daily and grow to exceed 80lb pounds. This far exceeds the consumption rate and growth potential of native estuarine planktivores like shad, herring and menhaden. The reproduction rate of the invasive carps also exceeds the rate of many native estuarine species. A mature female can spawn up to 5 million eggs a year. LDWF has documented reproduction in Louisiana as far south as the Atchafalaya River Delta. Further upstream spawning may be occurring up to 4 times a year. Another injurious member of the Asian carps, Grass carp can consume up to 40% of their body weight in submerged aquatic vegetation (SAV) per day. SAV in our estuaries is of extreme importance to the ecosystem. It is one of the most critical components of the estuarine food web. SAV provides food and nursery areas for larval and juvenile aquatic species as well as food for native and migratory waterfowl.

In 2019 the Mississippi River in Louisiana reached record levels and remained above flood stage for a historic length of time. The Bonnet Carre Spillway operated for a record 123 days and flooding within the Atchafalaya Basin persisted through August. Furthermore, there has been an increased frequency in flood events requiring the operation of the Spillway. Five of the 13 total spillway operation events have occurred since 2008 and its operation has been required 3 of the past 4 years. The Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries is currently conducting biological sampling and analysis of commercial and recreational species along the coast. Results released in September 2019 indicate a notable reduction in the availability of important species.

As you are aware, recreational fishing in Coastal Louisiana provides a significant economic benefit to our state. LDWF estimates indicate the total economic impact of saltwater recreational fishing in Louisiana at $757,091,876, supporting 7,753 jobs and generating $49,976,489 in state and local tax revenues. Increased freshwater introduction associated with recent floods produce several environmental factors which can reduce the abundance of marine and estuarine species. However, the effects of increased biomass introduction of Asian carp and further distribution of the 4 invasive species is unknown. During the peak of this year's flood Asian carp were found over 100 miles west of the mouth of the Atchafalaya River and over 30 miles east of the Mississippi River in Mississippi Sound. Biologists consider the recent expansion of Asian carp along our coast directly related to lower salinities produced by high river levels. Biologists also predict salinities will return to normal and Asian carp will retreat to areas of lower salinities in the upper part of our estuaries. Researchers with USACE and USGS are currently working on salinity tolerance studies for the species.

LDWF biologists and invasive species researchers still have many unanswered questions in regards to the specific threats of Asian carp to Louisiana's coastal fisheries. Recent facts indicate an increasing abundance and worsening impacts. Asian carp population dynamics data are currently lacking for Louisiana's waterways. However, we can confidently state that increased commercial harvest of Asian carp in Louisiana will decrease the species biomass and promote proliferation of native species.

Please continue your Silverfin marketing efforts with urgency. It is currently the only viable management option to limit the negative effects to our ecosystem and valuable coastal fisheries in Louisiana.

Tim Ruth

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