

Friends of the Chicago River



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March 31, 2011

Colonel Vincent V. Quarles
Chicago District Commander
US Army Corps of Engineers
111 N. Canal Street, Suite 600
Chicago, IL 60606
RE: Great Lakes and Mississippi River Interbasin Study Scoping

Dear Commander Quarles:

On behalf of the board, staff and 4,500 members and advocates for Friends of the Chicago River, I am writing to comment on the Great Lakes and Mississippi River Basin Study (GLMRIS). We recognize that this is an enormously complex undertaking and requires careful review of the aquatic invasive species transfer between the St Lawrence Seaway, the Great Lakes and the Mississippi. We thank you for your leadership and hard work.

We agree with you that the Chicago River connection should be the GLMRIS team's priority. The damage from bighead and silver carp is potentially devastating to the Chicago River system and the Great Lakes. Friends wishes to see that risk eliminated as soon as possible. If there is a way to shorten the timeframe, we would be in support.

Throughout the study process we urge you to look closely at ecological separation of the Great Lakes and Mississippi River watersheds which is the only guaranteed solution if we are to stop aquatic invasive transfers for the long term. At the same time we implore you to conduct a thorough analysis of what is happening on the other side of the Great Lakes. The terrible impact from invasives that swam in or were released through ballast water from the east is well documented and continuing to impact the lakes and adjacent river systems every day.

In addition, we support integrating the work of the Great Lakes Commission and Great Lakes and St Lawrence Cities Initiative, called "Envisioning a Chicago Area Waterway System for the 21st Century." We think that this broad-based coalition will have a lot to offer when the project is complete in 2012.

As you may know, Friends of the Chicago River was founded in 1979 to improve and protect the Chicago River and as such we have worked across the region to build support and enthusiasm for the river's care. Today because of our advocacy and collaboration with a host of partners including government and the private sector as well as good laws, visionary leaders and thousands of individuals, the Chicago River is home to 68 species of fish, 60 species of birds, beavers, muskrats, and now river otters as documented by the Forest Preserve District of Cook County and spotted eating fish in downtown Chicago as recently as last month.

In addition to the wildlife, the Chicago River has emerged as a recreational and tourism center with thousands of people paddling, club teams and students rowing on all reaches of the river system, people motorboating, and downtown water taxis and tour boats providing color and an economic boost to Chicago and other communities along the waterways. The commercial use of the river continues to flourish.

Over the past 30 years billions of dollars have been spent to improve the Chicago River. The City of Chicago and Chicago Park District have invested in riverside parks, open space, habitat and public access. Private developers have build thousands of homes with docks and river frontage. The Metropolitan Water Reclamation District has spent over \$3.2 billion to reduce flooding and combined sewer overflows, contributing enormously to the positive impact the Chicago and Calumet rivers are playing in neighborhood gentrification, increased property value and quality of life.

The Chicago River, although not fully recovered from its years of abuse and treatment as a sewage canal is still a significant natural and in some places naturalized ecosystem. It provides habitat for endangered species including bald eagles, black crowned night heron, yellow crowned night heron, little blue heron, least bittern, osprey, common moorhens, Iowa darters, banded killifish, Blandings turtles, and aquatic and riparian pant species. It is a recreational fishery. It provides recreational access to the largest population of people in the Midwest and will continue provide more as water quality improves.

Therefore as you work to solve the complex aquatic invasive species puzzle, please ensure that GLMRIS takes into account the health and wellbeing of all of the Chicago River system including the Chicago Sanitary and Ship Canal and full Calumet system and ensure that whatever decisions are made protect this precious ecosystem as well as the Great Lakes and all their other tributaries.

Sincerely

Margaret Frisbie
Executive Director