

Success Story: Unified Fishing Method to Reduce Asian Carp Populations

In China, where Asian Carp are native and highly sought after for food, a “Unified Fishing Method” (Unified Method) has been developed to more efficiently capture Asian Carp. The Unified Method is an integrated approach that combines multiple gear types with water bathymetry and fishing techniques can be highly efficient, sometimes removing 90% of the fish from large, shallow, water bodies. Illinois DNR (IDNR) developed a plan to use this method to facilitate the removal of Asian Carp as part of an integrated pest management strategy. Field deployment of this method in 2016 suggests both some success and some challenges for use in the US.



To further reduce Asian carp abundance in the upper Illinois River, a pilot project to deploy this unified method was planned as test in a 500 acre lake in Illinois (Hanson Materials Services gravel pit near Morris) was developed. The initial plan was drafted, using aerial photography of the target waterbody. Fishermen and scientists compared notes and worked together to build a strategic plan. Generally, fish are driven towards a deeper central basin and this is done as not to overly excite and cause them to scatter or double back. Each net deployment is calculated to force the fish to move in the desired direction, and then more nets are set to block fish from returning to the cleared areas. In March of 2016, IDNR worked with contracted fishers to implement the plan for the pilot project. While each contracted fisher had over 1,000 yards of gill and trammel netting, as well as nearly 1,000 yards of seine, IDNR also had to bring over 2,000 yards of block nets and a pound net to the pilot project. These nets had to be lifted and reset many times, working from the west end of the Hanson Pit towards the east, funneling and blocking the fish to continually concentrate the fish into the east end of the lake over a two week time period. During this process, gill nets were set behind the block nets to help evaluate the success in clearing each section. Boat movement, motors, and additional sound were deployed by the fishermen to move the fish through the funnels and out of areas to be blocked off. Agency electrofishing boats operated in close synchrony with the commercial crews to drive fish. This “driving” technique evolved over the event. Revving of motors, banging on boats, and using plungers encouraged fish to move further. This “pounding” appeared to be highly effective to move fish away from boats and toward the capture/seine area. In all, nearly 100,000 pounds of Bighead and Silver Carp were captured and removed in this event, about equal numbers in the seine and the gill nets.

