

## Species Conservation News

### **The constant battle over aquatic conservation keeps drawing headlines.**

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I've been out on vacation for a bit, but I'm back in a blogging frame of mind.

So, that said, I noticed two interesting bits of news for those who love the aquatic world and all of its denizens.

First, the Obama Administration has come out against closing the connection between the Mississippi River Basin and Lake Michigan, as well as the navigational locks that may allow Asian carp, an invasive species in the United States, to eventually enter the Great Lakes.

Six states, namely Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, New York, Pennsylvania and Ohio, have requested that the locks be closed permanently, but the issue went to the Supreme Court, which subsequently blocked the request. The issue is being appealed, and a separate lawsuit seeks to sever the connection between Lake Michigan and the Mississippi River Basin entirely.

Instead of closing the locks, the Obama Administration has proposed a nearly 80-million dollar short-term mix of solutions, including limiting the number of days the locks are open. So far, the Administration has only promised to conduct studies for the purpose of determining the viability of closing the connection between the two waterways.

The issue is complicated, because the locks in question support the business of barge operators who move large amounts of goods through the waterways each year, to the tune of millions of dollars in trade.

However, I'm convinced that less-aggressive methods of controlling invasive carp populations and preventing them from entering the great lakes – and in the process potentially destroying commercial fisheries in the great lakes – will fall short.

For example, a system of electric shock fences are in place to keep carp out, and during a recent repair effort where the gates had to be turned off for a while, poison was introduced into the waterway to “nuke” any potential invasives.

What's next? I think we're already reaching with the electric fences and poison bombs. Maybe we could genetically engineer some cyborg killer fish to hunt down the invasive carp? How about a radioactive barrier to sterilize the fish as they enter Lake Michigan?

It's only a matter of time before such half-hearted measures fail. The connection between the waterways and the lock system that may directly allow carp into the Great Lakes likely needs to be closed if the states involved and the federal government really want to prevent carp from establishing breeding populations in the Great Lakes.

This invasion may have happened already. No carp have yet been found in Lake Michigan, at least that I am aware of, but I read that some of their DNA has been found in the lake.

This is definitely a complicated issue, and perhaps a better solution will be found. I would hate to see legitimate businesses and barge operators suffer, but others stand to lose too if carp are allowed into the Great Lakes. Who wins and who loses? It's unfortunate that this has to be decided at the federal level.

Oh, I would like to point out one silver lining to the whole issue; the aquarium hobby has not been blamed for the invasive introductions. Generally, the explanation I've heard for the prevalence of carp in the Mississippi River Basin has to do with carp escaping from commercial aquaculture operations, where they are used to help clean up other fishes' waste.

It isn't anything to celebrate, but it's certainly better than the alternative.

### The Whale Wars are Escalating

I don't know how many of you follow the show “Whale Wars” on Animal Planet or the controversy surrounding Japanese whaling, but I think the topic is definitely interesting to conservationists out there.

As many of you may know, the Sea Sheppard Conservation Society fields several ships to disrupt the activities of the

Japanese whaling fleet conducting “research whaling” in the Southern Ocean. The Sea Sheppard conservationists use aggressive tactics, including prop fouling and stink bombs, to prevent the Japanese whaling fleet from killing whales.

Generally, I support reasoned action and diplomacy to solve environmental issues, but in some cases, this approach just doesn't seem likely to succeed. Take, for example, the grossly dishonest position taken by the Japanese government regarding their “scientific” whaling operations in the Southern Ocean.

The Japanese government claims their whaling fleet is attempting to capture and kill a quota of 1,000 whales (including minke and fin whales) each year for “research purposes.” However, the Japanese use a factory whaling ship (the Nisshin Maru), the whale meat ends up in Japanese fish markets, and I'm not aware of many reputable, peer-reviewed papers coming out of this “research.”

The Institute of Cetacean Research, the government-subsidized Japanese organization responsible for whaling, lists several research papers on its website, with such catchy titles as, “Improvements in More Humane Killing Methods of Antarctic Minke Whales, *Balaenoptera bonaerensis*, in the Japanese Whale Research Program under Special Permit in the Antarctic Sea (JARPA),” “Comparative Experiment of Whaling Grenades in the Japanese Whale Research Program under Special Permit (JARPA and JARPN)” and “Chemical Properties of Epidermal Lipids, Especially Sphingolipids, of the Antarctic Minke Whale.”

To be fair, they list a few papers that may have scientific merit, but I question the need to kill whales to collect the relevant data.

When was the last time we had to kill a few hundred sea turtles in a marine sanctuary to study them? How many endangered tigers do we have to cull from the wild to ensure our understanding of their delicate status? It seems odd – and totally unjustifiable – that the Japanese government has taken the position that it is necessary to kill whales for the purpose of studying them.

And then there is the fact that in an interview with The Australian, Japan's Foreign Minister, Katsuya Okada, essentially admitted that the dispute over whaling being conducted in the Southern Ocean is a culture issue having to do with food.

In any case, the battle in the Southern Ocean is definitely becoming more violent. The Sea Sheppard Conservation Society has already lost one vessel completely this season (their new, high-tech ship, the *Ady Gil*, was sunk after a collision with a Japanese whaling ship), and a second ship, the *Bob Barker*, was damaged in a separate collision.

Neither side is backing down, and it seems each whaling season sees an introduction of new tactics and technology on both sides of the battle.

Of course, I have to wonder about the motivations behind the new, aggressive tactics being used by both sides. There is a television show mixed up in all of this, after all, and collisions, high-tech devices and sinking ships likely make for higher ratings.

Are the conservationists drawing attention to this issue for the purpose of aiding their cause, or to otherwise benefit from the media exposure? Intentions aside, their goal seems admirable, while the Japanese whaling goals seem intentionally misleading and highly suspect.

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