

Testimony Mr. Hugh Warren
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Testimony Submitted to
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES AND OCEANS
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Concerning

THE IMPACT TO THE U.S. CATFISH INDUSTRY OF LISTING ASIAN CARP AS "INJURIOUS WILDLIFE"

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member, and members of the Subcommittee, I appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony concerning the catfish industry's use of the three species of Asian carp identified by the Subcommittee.

I am Hugh Warren and have been Executive Vice-President of Catfish Farmers of America, Inc., (CFA) since 1989. Founded in 1968, CFA is the trade organization representing the interests of the farm-raised catfish industry with current membership from forty states. Producer members account for approximately 85% of total catfish production.

The 2002 Census of Aquaculture showed that aquaculture in the United States (U.S.) grew from a \$45 million industry in 1974 to a \$1.13 billion industry in 2002. This economic activity multiplies into an effect of over \$7.6 billion in the U.S. if feed mills, supply companies, processors, labor expenditures, and tax revenue are accounted for. Farm-raised catfish is the nation's largest aquaculture industry accounting for over 70% by volume (630 million pounds in 2004) and over 60% by value of all U.S. aquaculture production of fish. However, our U.S. aquaculture industry is threatened by the growth of cheap, imported seafood which contributed \$7 billion to the U.S. trade deficit, doubling since 1995 and second only to oil as the single largest natural resource component of the trade deficit. The Small Business Administration classifies the majority of U.S. catfish farms (84%) as small businesses. Much of the catfish industry occurs in economically depressed areas such as the Mississippi River Delta region. For example, in Chicot County, Arkansas, the catfish industry was responsible, directly and indirectly for 48% of the employment in the county and a total economic effect of over \$384 million².

Despite continued accusations by the media and various natural resource agencies, private aquaculture is not the sole entity responsible for introducing Asian carps into the U.S. In the 1960s and 1970s, environmental concerns over increasing pollution and chemical usage coupled with a perceived urgent need to find ways to feed the world's growing population fueled much of the interest by governmental agencies, universities, and private aquaculturists in filter-feeding fishes such as bighead carp which feed primarily on zooplankton and blue-green algae and silver carp which feed primarily on phytoplankton. Black carp were imported in the early 1980s as a potential food fish and as a biological control for snails and zebra mussels. The unfortunate introduction of Asian carp into U.S. waters is a combined result of legal stockings authorized by various governmental agencies and escapes from university research facilities, federal and state agency facilities, and private aquaculture operations.

The Aquaculture industry is aware and understands the potentially adverse environmental impacts of introduced, exotic species recognizing that introductions, either intentional or unintentional, can cause significant harm³. Producers in the major catfish-producing states support requirements that only triploid (sterile) black carp be stocked - subject to a state supervised permitting system. Since the discovery of trematode infections in catfish in 1999, the catfish industry has supported federal and state research evaluating biological⁴ and chemical alternatives^{5,6} to using black carp. Although chemical treatments have shown limited success, researchers have yet to find a suitable, native fish species to serve as an effective biological alternative to triploid black carp. The Aquaculture community has been an active participant in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Asian Carp Working Group in an effort to develop a national management and control plan for Asian carps. Aquaculture representatives have participated in the Asian Carp Workshop in St. Louis, Missouri (April 2000), the Asian Carp Working Group Meeting in Columbia, Missouri (May 2004), and the Asian Carp Working Group Drafting Team meeting in Nashville, Tennessee (August 2005).

Black carp are currently used on catfish, hybrid striped bass (HSB), and baitfish farms as biological control agents for snails which serve as intermediate hosts for several fish parasites that can kill juvenile fish and render fish flesh unmarketable. Catfish farmers stock triploid black carp for control of trematode infections. Recent research at Mississippi State University estimates that there is an approximate annual loss of \$72 million in catfish production due to these trematode infections. Although chemical control measures are being refined, the use of triploid black carp provides a longer, continuous protective period. The hybrid striped bass industry stocks black carp to control the yellow grub parasite. It has been estimated that farm profits on HSB farms would decrease by 41% on small farms, 36% on medium-sized farms, and 33% on large farm scenarios in the absence of black carp⁹.

Bighead carp constitute an important aquaculture enterprise in the mid-south. Bighead carp are grown together with channel catfish in ponds, harvested separately from the catfish, and then transported alive to markets in the northern United States and Canada. This can be an important source of revenue for fish farmers during times of low catfish prices^{7,8}. Nearly all retail sales are to Asian ethnic groups, who have a strong preference for live seafood products. Accordingly, this important market requires interstate shipment of live fish.

Silver carp have been confused with bighead carp, particularly in the popular press in recent years. However, there has been little aquaculture of silver carp in the U.S. in the last 20 years due to the difficulty in handling and transport and no market demand.

The listing of black and bighead carp as “injurious wildlife” under the Lacey Act would have a negative impact on catfish aquaculture. The resulting ban on interstate transport would leave commercial fish farmers without access to triploid black carp for preventative stockings and eliminate the marketing outlets for live, bighead carp and. It is our opinion that sterile, triploid black carp should be excluded from any listing as “injurious wildlife” under the Lacey Act. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service offers a triploid grass carp inspection service to provide assurance to purchasers that grass carp alleged to be all triploids, do not contain diploid (or fertile) grass carp^{10,11,12}. This service should be expanded to provide certification for triploid black carp as well. In the face of the documented benefits of bighead carp aquaculture, there is no evidence that stopping this business activity by listing bighead carp as “injurious wildlife” would have any impact on the further spread of this fish. Prohibiting interstate movement of live bighead carp may lead to loss of farms, with an overall economic impact (including loss of jobs) of at least \$150 million annually. We also feel that the preferred mechanism to develop management and control plans for these species is through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Asian Carp Working Group and the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force, an intergovernmental entity established under the Non-indigenous Aquatic Nuisance Prevention and Control Act of 1990¹³.

Thank you Mr. Chairman for allowing me to testify today. I will be happy to answer any questions you or members of the Subcommittee might have.

References:

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12 Mager, R.C. 1993 Reproductive development of triploid grass carp, *Ctenopharyngodon idella*. Master's thesis. University of California, Davis.

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