

# Bighead carp

(*Hypophthalmichthys nobilis*)

High priority AIS present in  
Lower Wisconsin River basin

## What is it?

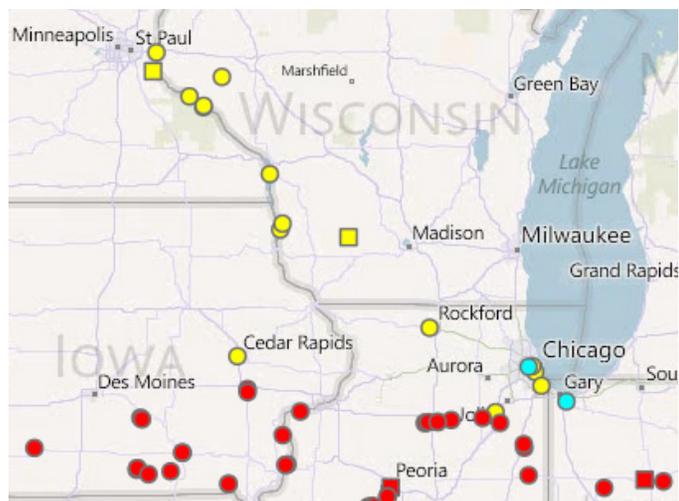
Bighead carp are one of four Asian carp species of concern to the Lower Wisconsin River. They are fast growing and become very large, weighing over 100 pounds and measuring up to five feet long.

## Where is it?

The bighead carp is native to large rivers in eastern China, eastern Siberia, and northern North Korea. They are established in the Mississippi River south of Rock Island, Illinois; however, several individuals have been found as far north as the St. Croix River. Three bighead carp were captured in the Lower Wisconsin River in 2011: the first, a 30-pound adult, was reported by an angler in July; the second, a large 47-pound adult, was captured in October by WDNR fisheries biologists gill netting for sturgeon at the Prairie du Sac Dam; the third, a 39-pound adult, was caught by an angler below the Prairie du Sac Dam in November.

## How does it spread?

The bighead carp was first imported into the United States in the early 1970s. Soon after, it escaped confinement during flood events and is now well established with reproducing populations in much of the Mississippi River Basin. Dispersal of bighead (and silver) carp appears to be occurring naturally, especially during high flow events which enable them to swim around or through barriers in the Mississippi River and Great Lakes region. People also spread carp, intentionally and unintentionally, for bait, aquaculture, and sport.



Regional Wisconsin distribution of bighead carp. Red=established population, yellow=specimen(s) collected, blue=extirpated/eradicated. (USGS, 2011)

## Why do we care?

In numbers, the bighead carp has the potential to cause enormous damage to native species because it feeds on plankton required by fish, such as gizzard shad and bigmouth buffalo, and native mussels.

Bighead carp, to a lesser extent than silver carp, has the potential to thrash around the surface when spawning, and on rare occasions leap in response to boats.

## What can we do?

At this time there is no feasible means of controlling bighead (and other Asian) carp if they were to become established in the Lower Wisconsin River. It is important that we continue to monitor the Lower Wisconsin River to make certain that there is not a breeding population. Angler outreach should be conducted to ensure that they are not harvesting bait (which is currently prohibited), to ensure that young Asian carp, if present, are not being transported to other waterbodies.

## STOP AQUATIC HITCHHIKERS!

Wisconsin law requires you to:

- **Inspect** boats, trailers, and equipment.
- **Remove** all attached aquatic plants and animals.
- **Drain** all water from boats, vehicles and equipment.
- **Never move** plants or live fish away from a waterbody.

If you suspect that you have found an invasive species call 1-888-WDNR-INFO (1-888-936-7463) to report it.



Bighead carp (USGS)