

Stirring up trouble: Solving the carp problem in our lakes

We all want healthy water in our lakes. Clean, clear water brings ample recreational opportunities, provides scenic beauty, and draws wildlife into our region. However, in Spring and Prior Lakes, there are exotic fish at the bottom of our waters that are literally stirring up trouble.

Intentionally introduced into our lakes from Europe and Asia in the 1880s as a game fish, common carp have quickly out-competed our native fish and muddied our waters with their bottom feeding habits, which uproot native plants on which game fish depend. By stirring up the bottom of our lakes, the carp release phosphorus back into the water, also feeding the algae which can cloud the water and increase the potential for algae blooms throughout the summer.

A simple solution? Remove the fish from our lakes. The problem? Finding the fish when they're schooling. Between Spring, Upper Prior, and Lower Prior Lakes, there are over three square miles of lake bottom where the carp can hide, not to mention the many upstream lakes and wetlands to which the carp have access.

In order to solve this problem, the Prior Lake-Spring Lake Watershed District was recently awarded a grant funded by the state's Clean Water Partnership Grant Fund through the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency to use an innovative method to locate and remove a significant portion of the carp in Spring and Prior Lakes. This fall, the District will be catching carp in all three lakes and surgically implanting them with radio tags before releasing them back into the waters. The radio tags will send signals out to a receiver device, tracking the movement of the fish throughout the three lakes and connecting channels. Once the fish begin to congregate during certain times of the year, the District will move quickly to catch and remove the carp from the lakes.

The radio telemetry information will also help the District locate the areas the carp are using to spawn in the spring, located outside of the lakes where there is opportunity to prevent them from spawning. Fish barriers will then be installed to block the carp from entering these spawning areas, ultimately reducing their overall population growth.

"This project will also provide a unique opportu-



Above, a net full of carp is pulled in during a seining operation. Below, a radio tag is implanted into a carp so the schools of fish can be located for removal.

nity for residents to be part of the effort," stated Tony Havranek from WSB & Associates who is working with the District on the carp management project. Interested volunteers will be invited to help mark, count, and sort fish during the removal efforts. The District also hopes to engage the local school district in the project as part of its ongoing education efforts.

Although controlling the carp on the lakes will substantially improve the water quality, it is only one of the many tools that the District is using to keep our lakes as clean and healthy as possible. There is no silver bullet to improving water quality, but as Havranek notes, "This project will deal with phosphorous already in the lakes, while ongoing District projects are helping to reduce the phosphorus entering the lakes each year through runoff. All these efforts combined work together to improve the water quality of Spring Lake and Prior Lakes."



Researchers catch carp and implant radio tags.

