Illinois sportsmen take aim at exotics, gaining a new sport while helping to curb the population explosion.

**Targeting Asian Carp**

Story By Mike Garthaus
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Sportsmen across Illinois have joined the fight against the spread of aquatic invasive species. Bow anglers have been shooting fish for decades and the introduction of Asian carp to Illinois waters has increased opportunities for bowfishing. One shot at a time, bowfishers are helping to remove invasive, aquatic species from Illinois waters. One may think bowfishers could not remove many fish, but a tournament held on the Illinois River in 2009 removed more than 25,000 silver carp.

In 2010, the Department of Natural Resources and the Bowfishing Association of Illinois sponsored the first Director’s Shoot. The Spring Valley tournament was held to promote the sport of bowfishing and increase the awareness of Asian carp. Conducted in a “Big 6” tournament format, the grand prize was awarded to the person possessing the heaviest stringer of six silver carp.

Bowfishers are playing an important role in helping to remove rough fish, including silver carp, from Illinois waters.

One of the issues with bowfishing tournaments is what to do with the fish. Fish taken during the Director’s Shoot were processed into high-grade emulsion fertilizer. The same company that processed the fish for fertilizer can make a variety of tasty foods from fresh Asian carp, as evidenced by the silver carp fare available to tournament participants and spectators.

Even though many seasoned tournament bowfishers have elaborate boats with generators and lights for night
fishing, a novice can walk the shoreline and find plenty of Asian carp activity.

Ed Devries, from the Bowfishing Association of Illinois, said that beginners can walk the shorelines near the smaller tributaries of the Illinois River and have plenty of chances to shoot Asian carp.

“I suggest people concentrate on smaller tributaries flowing into the Illinois River between the Fox River and Peoria,” Devries said. “One also can increase their odds of finding Asian carp fishing smaller tributaries from a canoe or small boat.”

Having a fully equipped boat provides even more opportunities to bowfish for Asian carp. Devries splits the Illinois River into two large segments, above the Starved Rock Dam and below the dam. The higher concentrations of silver carp are below the dam, and Devries encounters more bighead carp above the dam.

Members of the Bowfishing Association of Illinois organization utilize three basic techniques to harvest Asian carp from the river.

The first technique is used during the day and involves having the driver keep the outboard motor down as far as it can go and positioning the bow anglers at the back of the boat. As the boat driver varies the speed and RPM of the motor, silver carp in the area will begin to jump. If you are having trouble picturing bowfishers shooting flying silver carp, think of skeet shooting on the water with a bow.

A similar technique can be used at night utilizing lights to illuminate the water. The driver varies the speed and

Many public lakes allow bowfishing, but before you head to your local lake for bowfishing, check the site-specific fishing regulations.

Some lakes are classified as two poles and line only, a regulation that prohibits the use of devices other than fishing poles. To increase bowfishing opportunities, some lakes with this regulation have an exemption to allow bowfishing.

Even though a sportfishing license is required to bowfish, sportfish cannot be taken by bow. However, carp, carp-suckers, shad, drum, buffalo, suckers, gar (except alligator gar) and bowfin may be taken with a bow. Current fishing regulations can be found at www.ifishillinois.org.

Like other forms of fishing, bowfishing is a great way to introduce youth to an outdoor activity as old as the ages.
these clubs are eager to share their equipment and knowledge about bowfishing. For the competitive type, each of these clubs also hosts tournaments on lakes and rivers in Illinois.

With the assistance of the bowfishing clubs, in 2010 DNR implemented state records for spear and bowfishing. Thirteen fish species are recognized for spear and bowfishing state records, but carp, gar and buffalo are the main fish groups targeted. The current state records and eligible fish can be found at www.ifishillinois.org/awards/bow_table.html.

The Redneck Fishing Tournament held at Bath on the Illinois River has taken another approach to removing Asian carp. Started in 2005 as a result of frustration with silver carp invading the Illinois River, the tournament has turned into a world-famous event. Instead of using a bow for harvesting the fish, a dip net is used. Since silver carp take sail, tournament participants catch the fish on the fly with a dip net, but only one hand-held dip net is allowed per participant. Tournament rules do also allow keeping fish that land in the boat. A helmet is recommended as numerous silver carp can be airborne at once. Granted, the Redneck Fishing Tournament is more about recreation than removing Asian carp, but it has helped spread the word about the impacts of aquatic invasive species and is a perfect example of turning lemons into lemonade.

As we struggle with the issues of invasive, aquatic species, sportsmen are finding ways to increase recreational opportunities in Illinois. If you see a lighted boat trolling the water at night or an angler carrying a bow on a boat, there is a good chance someone is taking part in an effort to remove an exotic species from our waters.

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Learn more

To learn more about bowfishing, contact one of these Illinois organizations:
Bowfishing Association of Illinois: illinoisbowfishing.net
Illinois Bowfishers: illinoisbowfishers.com
Bowfishing Association of Southern Illinois: http://ultimateoutdoorsnetwork.com/basi
For details on the annual Redneck Fishing Tournament, visit www.redneckfishingtournament.com.