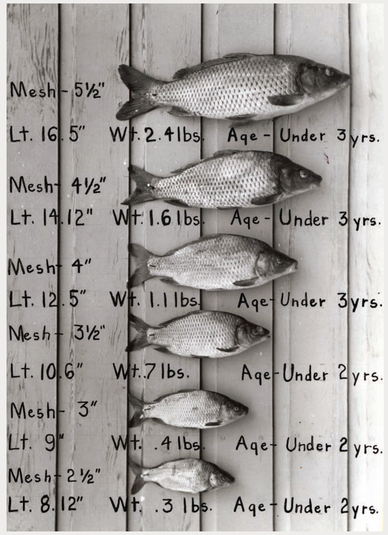
Too many carp

Unloading 110 gallons of carp fry at Lake Waubesa.

From 1881 to 1896, the state Fish Commission stocked about 100,000 common carp in 67 Wisconsin counties. Other states also introduced carp, but the fish thrived in the slow, shallow, weedy lakes of Dane County. Carp quickly became so abundant that sport fishers complained the bottom-feeding carp damaged underwater vegetation and reduced water clarity. Both harmed sport fishing. For 30 years, Fish Camp faced off against carp.

FISH CAMP COUNTY PARK

Dane County Parks Always in Season



Young carp grow fast. All photos courtesy of Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

CARP INTRODUCTION

Carp were introduced to provide food for the expanding American population. European immigrants, used to fishing and eating common carp, encouraged the introduction.

LAKE *and* FISHERY DAMAGE

Within a few years of their introduction, carp thrived at the expense of native sport fish like musky, walleye, bass and northern pike. They also reduced waterfowl habitat. Anglers demanded the state take action. Fish Camp's goal was to help stop the spread of carp.

STOPPING *the* INVASION

Contract fishing for carp continues in lakes such as Koshkonong near Fort Atkinson. Otherwise, healthy lakes with less runoff help native fish outcompete carp. When Madison stopped dumping its sewage upstream of Lake Waubesa in the 1950s, carp populations in Waubesa and Kegonsa dropped.

KNOW MORE

about adaptable carp

- A mature female carp can produce several hundred thousand eggs. Carp fry soon outgrow their predators.
- Carp like shallow, weedy water near shorelines.
- Carp eat almost any available food, including plants, insect larvae, fish eggs, mollusks and crustaceans.
- Carp can adapt to silty, low-oxygen, polluted water. They can also breathe oxygen from the air.

IN THEIR WORDS

sharp dorsal spines

« That was tough, too, because when you were loading this net out in the holding pond there were fish all around you. And carp have those dorsal spines. A big carp [has] upper dorsal spines that long, it's got barbs on it. And you'd get one in the waders, you know, every now and then right through the rubber waders. »