Under a package of bills introduced in February, Michigan lawmakers are seeking to better close a sometimes-overlooked pathway for invasive species to enter the region’s waterways — the transport and trade of live organisms.

“We’re seeing case after case of people smuggling these invasive species in Ontario,” Sen. Mike Kowall says. “We need to crack down on that activity.”

Conservation officers found 6,350 kilograms of bighead carp, some of which were alive, in a truck as it tried to cross from Michigan to Ontario via the Ambassador Bridge. The carp were being transported from Arkansas.

Because there is a market for Asian carp as food, Kowall says, more instances of invasive species being moved through Michigan are possible — unless more effective state-level deterrents are put in place.

The newly introduced bills (SB 795-802) would make several changes in Michigan statute. For example, the penalty for possessing aquatic invasive species would be stiffened — jail time of up to three years (it is two years under current law) and a maximum fine of $100,000 (current maximum is $20,000).

In addition, vehicles and other equipment would be confiscated, and perpetrators could have their commercial driver’s licenses taken away and commercial fishing licenses suspended for one year. (The fishing license would be revoked for subsequent violations.)

Across the Great Lakes basin, as the result of rules established by states, the provinces and the U.S. and Canadian governments, the possession, movement and commercial sale of many specific aquatic species are already prohibited. Bighead carp, snakehead, grass carp and 51 other aquatic animals are part of the “Great Lakes Prohibited Species List.” (This list was compiled by the Great Lakes Commission’s Great Lakes Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species and updated in 2012.)

By:
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