Though costs remain a concern, Illinois signals support for plan to stop movement of Asian carp

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A U.S. Army Corps of Engineers plan [2] to keep Asian carp from reaching the Great Lakes has an important new supporter — J.B. Pritzker, the recently elected governor of Illinois. In an April letter [3] to the Corps, Pritzker said the state was “willing to move forward to preconstruction, engineering and design” on the Brandon Road Lock and Dam Project. But he also expressed concern about the estimated price tag: $778 million.

“The state of Illinois is not in a financial position to commit to the full plan in its current form,” Pritzker said in his letter, telling the Corps that he would like to “discuss how we can lower the cost of this plan and still effectively address the threat of Asian carp.”

Prior to Pritzker taking office, Illinois officials had expressed misgivings about the Brandon Road project because of its potential impact on navigation and the economy. The state’s position has shifted with the change in governor.

For the project to move forward, the U.S. Congress must first fund the preconstruction and design work, and eventually authorize construction funding. Agreements must be reached, too, with Illinois, the project’s “non-federal sponsor,” which typically pays for 35 percent of the engineering and design costs associated with an Army Corps project.

But one idea with the Brandon Road project is for all Great Lakes jurisdictions to contribute in some way. Pritzker alludes to this possibility in his letter, saying that “our Great Lakes neighbors” should be viewed as “critical strategic and financial partners.” In 2018, then-Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder proposed [4] that Great Lakes jurisdictions share the annual costs ($8 million) of operating and maintaining the new barriers at Brandon Road Lock and Dam.

The Army Corps’ plan calls for the installation of a new electric barrier, an acoustic fish deterrent, an air bubble curtain and a flushing lock.

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