



Carp Catch 22

Story and photo by Pamela Eyden

Guidelines intended to protect fish species and the environment are making it harder to market carp, which threaten native fish species and damage river environments.

You may have to drive a long way these days to find a tasty chunk of smoked carp, fresh buffalo or other local river fish, and the drive is getting longer.

Hy-Vee, an employee-owned chain of grocery stores in eight Midwestern states, has stopped carrying smoked carp from the Mississippi River. The butcher and the store's corporate representatives both said the store couldn't offer it anymore because it's not listed on the Monterey Bay Seafood Watch list. The store's new "Responsible Seafood" policy requires it to follow the advice of Monterey Bay Seafood Watch and Greenpeace. If these two organizations don't put a stamp of approval on a fish product, the store won't carry it.

The chain is not alone. An increasing number of grocery stores, chains and other food purveyors are agreeing to purchase only fish that has been certified as sustainably caught — in other words, fisheries that contribute to ecosystem health, instead of damaging it. When Greenpeace, one of the organizations that certifies fisheries, first began ranking retail stores and their parent companies for sustainable seafood sourcing in 2008, all 20 they looked at failed. In 2014, they assessed 26 retailers. Four ranked "good" (Whole Foods, Safeway, Wegmans and Trader Joe's), four failed (Publix, Save Mart, Bi-Lo and Roundy's) and the others made passing marks.

Hy-Vee ranked fifth out of 26, with

6.65 points — nearly making it into the 7.0-plus "good" category. It was praised for ranking so well on its initial assessment, for introduc-

ing sustainable canned skipjack and albacore tuna products, and for stepping up to protect the ecologically fragile Bering Sea Canyons.

Monterey Bay Seafood Watch and Greenpeace use strict criteria and take their assessments seriously. Greenpeace assesses retailers and grades them for wise seafood policy, support for proactive initiatives, honest labeling and avoiding "red listers" (fish being harvested unsustainably). Monterey Bay Seafood Watch works the other end of the business, rating fisheries. It uses four criteria — how abundant or vulnerable the species is; how abundant or vulnerable other species are; whether the fishing is managed in a way that is likely to sustain the species and other species; and the impact of fishing on the habitat and ecosystem.

These criteria have almost no relevance to carp, which are invasive species that compete with native fish. They have done great damage to river ecosystems and threaten to do a lot more if silver, bighead and grass carp spread into more of the Upper Mississippi and the Great Lakes. Overharvesting carp might be very good for native fish and their river ecosystems.

Where Are the Carp?

Why aren't carp on the list? A spokesperson from Monterey Bay Seafood Watch explained they hadn't approved wild carp from the Mississippi River because they haven't assessed it. They do assessments based on market demand and availability, and so far, wild carp hasn't come across their marketing radar.

Wild carp would have a small market at best — not on a par with shrimp

Greenpeace Retail Seafood Scorecard 0 to 4 fail, 4 to 7 pass, 7+ good

1. Whole Foods.....	7.28
2. Safeway*.....	7.22
3. Wegmans.....	7.12
4. Trader Joe's.....	7.01
5. Hy-Vee	6.63
6. Harris Teeter	6.62
7. Aldi	6.60
8. Target.....	6.43
9. Ahold USA*	6.29
10. Delhaize*.....	6.11
11. Meijer*	5.93
12. Walmart*	5.60
13. H-E-B*	5.58
14. Price Chopper	5.54
15. Costco	5.35
16. Giant Eagle*.....	5.20
17. A&P*.....	5.17
18. SUPERVALU*.....	4.95
19. Wakefern*.....	4.74
20. Albertsons*.....	4.73
21. Kroger*.....	4.61
22. WinCo.....	4.20
23. Publix	3.21
24. Save Mart*	1.53
25. Bi-Lo.....	1.15
26. Roundy's*	1.06

* denotes a parent company with many store banners.

or salmon. It's a local specialty, a traditional food in river towns. Now that local fish markets have nearly disappeared, most shoppers have to look for carp in supermarket coolers. Therefore, it's not likely to make the grade, and retailers who have a policy of buying only fish that's been certified may drop it from their coolers, at a time when some ecosystem experts would like to see more carp taken out of the rivers.

Greenpeace's 24-page report on seafood sustainability in U.S. supermarkets is available on the web, as are Monterey Bay Seafood Watch recommendations. 🐟 🌊

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