small stretch the commission saw Wednesday.

"When you get an invasive species like this that enters into a system, they compete for food with the native species," Vonk said. "In many cases, they can outcompete. Our concern is how an invasive species will change the whole dynamic of relationships between our native fish.'

The silver carp, bighead carp, black carp and grass carp — commonly referred

to as Asian carp — are native to southeast Asia. In the 1970s, they escaped from aquaculture ponds in the southern United States and migrated up the Mississippi and Missouri rivers. A GF&P employee said the fish made their way into the James River during flooding in

According to the GF&P website, the fish are highly adaptive, prolific spawners that quickly outgrow potential controls by predation. They compete with juvenile game fish and native invertebrates for food resources.

Silver carp pose a physical danger because of their leaping ability. These large fish — basically performing their own version of Monty Python's fish-slapping dance may collide with boaters, personal watercraft or water skiers, causing serious

"It was an impressive sight, but in some ways it is a scary sight," Vonk said of the leaping fish.

John Cooper, chairman of the GF&P commission, said he had first taken a look at the Asian carp along the James River several years

"They've seen a steady increase in the total number of fish," he said. "The spawning season will probably be in the next two or three weeks, and then the numbers will be two or three times what

we saw today. It is cause for concern. I don't know what we can do about it at this

He speculated that perhaps a commercial use could be found for the fish that could help keep numbers under control.

One GF&P official told commission members that the fish are good to eat.

He added one interesting fact: Even though the fish jump into boats of their own volition, thus technically eliminating the need to fish, a fishing license is still required for those who plan to transport the creatures out

"Right now, it's a matter of maintaining good community outreach to let people know what is going on," Cooper said, referring to efforts to keep the fish from entering new waterways, such as above the Gavins Point Dam.

There was a die-off of these fish in Kentucky this spring that they think they've isolated to a viral infection," Vonk said. "I haven't heard any more about that, but it could be a key to a potential solution in

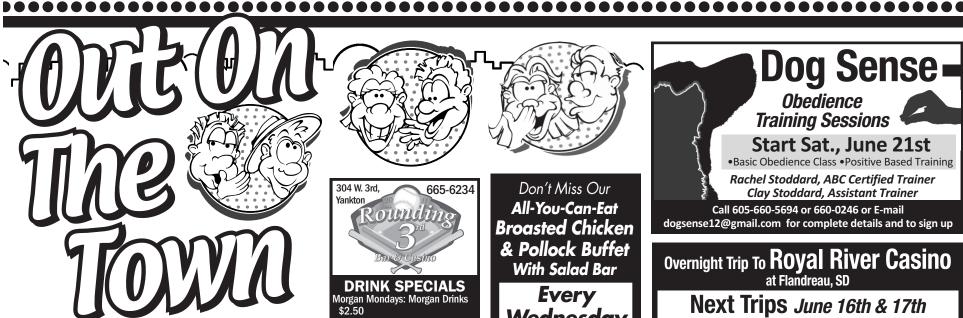
The GF&P Commission has no pending agenda items regarding Asian carp but members have a packet of information on the invasive fish to keep abreast of the situation.

the future.'

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.

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