

# 2015 ANNUAL REPORT



## MN DNR STATEWIDE AQUATIC INVASIVE SPECIES (AIS) ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### Summary of Committee Accomplishments in 2015

*“The responsibility of preventing the spread of aquatic invasive species falls squarely on the shoulders of everyone who seeks to enjoy the bountiful wonders of our water resources. This endeavor requires the efforts of all of us and we must do the responsible thing.”*

Committee Chair, Robert Olsen

In 2015, the Committee worked – in collaboration with and with the support of the Minnesota DNR – on a multitude of aquatic invasive species (AIS) topics. It was in the spirit of a multi-pronged approach that the Committee:

- Reviewed and provided input on various DNR AIS issues, program modifications and products brought to the Committee.
- Facilitated a constructive dialogue representing a variety of constituent AIS viewpoints.
- Supported efforts to secure funding for AIS programs and research.
- Fostered collaboration between private and public sectors concerning AIS prevention.
- Contributed expertise to outside organizations.

### Looking forward to next year, the Committee will:

- Identify and address important AIS issues.
- Develop and refine a work plan with more focus on partnerships, coordinated communication, messages and actions.
- Support the County AIS Prevention Aid Program by understanding common themes and leveraging resources.
- Make recommendations for legislative action for the 2017 session at the state level; and for current and future federal congressional sessions.
- Formulate a plan to identify and address other pathways/vectors of spread.
- Work with the private sector, for example, nationally with boat manufacturing and locally with resorts and private accesses.

### Major initiatives (local, statewide, and national) taken on by the Committee and its members in 2015:

- **Individual actions of members between Committee meetings.**
- Provided input on ways to **address the DNR Invasive Species Program’s budget shortfall** for fiscal year 2016.
- **Evaluated Starry Stonewort Response Effort** – Helped identify tools that state, local, private entities needed to respond quickly, cooperatively, and comprehensively to a new infestation.
- **Supported local AIS Prevention Aid program** – Worked to understand successes and address challenges encountered by counties since the start of the program in 2014.
- **Engaged resort community on AIS issues** – Worked to understand how to better engage and educate resort owners on AIS and help them distribute information to their guests, without impeding their business operations.
- **Worked with the American Boat and Yacht Council (ABYC) on boat design** to reduce or eliminate the risk of transporting residual water and AIS – individual members and the DNR were part of a national task force convened in January 2015 which resulted in the creation of forthcoming national guidelines.
- Began work to influence the legislative process to **require boater education in Minnesota** and include substantial AIS training in the course.
- **Will meet in person with DNR Commissioner Landwehr** on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016.

### Water is a key aspect of Minnesota’s heritage.

Aquatic invasive species (AIS) threaten to change how we and future generations use and enjoy waters of the state. AIS burden local communities that depend upon healthy lakes and rivers. For instance, the increased cost, time, and effort it takes to clean zebra mussel encrusted boats reduces the number of boats businesses are able to winterize and store each year. AIS damage how lake and river ecosystems function, which in turn impacts how we use these resources for things like fishing, water supply, and recreation. AIS change the Minnesota lifestyle – new behaviors must be adopted to prevent the spread of AIS.

### Everyone is responsible for protecting Minnesota’s water legacy and this

Committee is leading the way by taking on local, statewide, and national initiatives on AIS communications, prevention, detection, management, and research. Continued dedication to address AIS issues is necessary to preserve Minnesota’s unique heritage and deep connection to water.



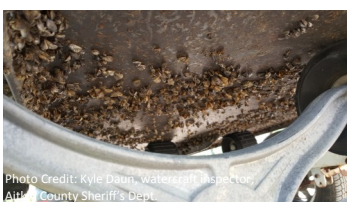
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The Committee members are dedicated to finding solutions. Each meeting sparks spirited discussions among stakeholders with diverse backgrounds. Conflicting views evolve to general consensus on complex and sometimes contentious issues.

Based on their ongoing work plan, the Committee's initiatives are categorized into four main strategies:

## Legislation & Public Policy On the Ground Strategies Research Communications & Outreach

The following activities within each strategy were accomplished through a variety of Committee actions, including: discussion of issues brought forward by the DNR, review of programs /documents, presentations to the Committee from DNR staff and other organizations, hearing from concerned citizens, writing letters, and meeting in-person with DNR Commissioner Landwehr.



### A Prevention Success Story

This boat, with adult zebra mussels attached to the hull, was stopped by a watercraft inspector before launching at Big Sandy Lake. It had been moved from the Mississippi River just one day before. The inspector with Aitkin County Sheriff's Department (funded through AIS Prevention Aid) directed the owner to get the boat decontaminated. The owner was later cited by a DNR Conservation Officer for transporting prohibited invasive species. If the watercraft inspector had not been present, live zebra mussels would likely have been introduced into an un-infested lake.

## Legislation and Public Policy

The primary legislative priority for the Committee was to secure a sustainable funding stream for AIS work in the state. The Committee:

**Tracked legislative priorities, stayed informed, and wrote letters as needed. Initiatives in 2015 included:**

- Preserve and improve the Trailer decal, fines with money going to DNR.
- Preserve the AIS Prevention Aid (county funding).
- Promote sustainable funding for DNR AIS Prevention Planners.
- Promote sustainable funding for the DNR's Invasive Species Program.

**Supported the Governor's budget proposal to increase the \$5 surcharge for boat registration.**

- Sent a letter to legislators supporting a \$5 surcharge on licenses.

**Requested the DNR include mandatory boater education in their 2016 legislative agenda.**

- A member presented on potential options for mandatory boater education and how training should include substantial AIS information. Could be a possible AIS funding source, but it appears other states aren't doing this right now.

**Discussed the feasibility and challenges of requiring registration or tagging of lake equipment (docks, lifts, rafts).**

## On the Ground Strategies

The Committee as a whole, as well as individual members, took actions to promote AIS prevention innovation in government and private sectors. They tackled the following initiatives:

### 1. Provided input on DNR AIS programs and activities, on topics such as:

#### General DNR Invasive Species Program functions:

- Recommended all State Parks with boat accesses have an AIS plan and provide AIS education.
- Advocated successfully that the DNR provide more information on infested waters listings (e.g. distinguish between confirmed infestations vs. precautionary listings).
- Reviewed and provided feedback on documents such as: DNR's Hydrilla Strategy, A Minnesota State Management Plan for Invasive Species, and the AIS Sign Manual; including review of new artwork and content for "supplementary" AIS signage at water accesses.
- Provided recommendations to improve the DNR's AIS Communications Plan.

#### Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination:

- Discussed focusing watercraft inspections on lakes with highest reported AIS violations.
- Emphasized the importance of the DNR's coordination of watercraft inspections and data collection by local governments (705 LGU watercraft inspectors trained in 2015 versus 330 in 2014 – this shows just one of many positive impacts due to the AIS Prevention Aid.)
- Gained insight on decontamination technologies from a presentation by Hydro Engineering.
- Advocated successfully for decontamination unit locations and hours of operation to be more readily available to the public. The DNR created an online decontamination location calendar starting in the 2015 season, where information is uploaded both by the DNR and by partners like local governments and lake service providers.

#### DNR's AIS Program Budget:

- Provided input on ways to address the DNR Invasive Species Program's budget shortfall for fiscal year 2016. Reductions were made to the amount of money given out in grants.
- Concurred with recommendation to not fund LGU watercraft inspection or public information grants for the 2016 open water season.
- Discussed scenarios and recommended an option for reducing the total number and total dollar amount awarded for invasive aquatic plant management grants.

## On the Ground Strategies, continued

### 2. Worked with the Private Sector

**Promoted changes to watercraft manufacturing to reduce or eliminate the risk of AIS transport.**

- Key committee members have been instrumental in working with the American Boat and Yacht Council (ABYC) and major watercraft manufacturers to promote design changes to watercraft and trailers that can reduce or eliminate the risk of transporting residual water and AIS.
- A national task force was convened in January 2015 by the ABYC with the support of DNR (as well as the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Tonka Bay Marina). ABYC has since created a technical report with national guidelines.

**Developed a better understanding of AIS issues in the bait and aquaculture industry** through a presentation from and discussion with DNR staff involved in aquaculture screening processes.

**Initiated collaboration with the resort community concerning how to engage resorts and their guests in AIS prevention practices.** Continue to build on these relationships to help the industry participate in AIS prevention efforts.

- Presentation by Dan McElroy, President/CEO Hospitality Minnesota – The Minnesota Restaurant, Lodging and Resort & Campground Associations on the background on his organization, what the tourism industry is doing to educate Minnesota resort owners about AIS, and how owners can pass that knowledge to their guests.
- Key members are working at the county level to engage resorts, including raising awareness about required lake service provider training and permits, and developing AIS materials for owners and their guests.

## Research

The committee views research on AIS prevention and management as a critical component of preventing the introduction of new invasive species and preventing the spread of existing AIS within Minnesota and advocates for a holistic approach to research. During 2015 they pursued and reviewed their research priorities and are revising their list. Initiatives include:

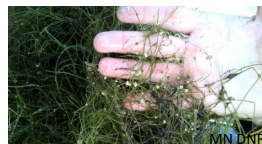
- Developed a list of researchers at local Minnesota institutions available to consult on and conduct small local AIS research projects. National and out of state additions to the list are in the works.
- Collaborated with University of Minnesota AIS Research Center (MAISRC). Sue Galatowitsch, MAISRC Director, presented an overview of the Research Center’s current work and process for identifying future priorities. Provided input into this research needs assessment.
- Successfully promoted research on residual water studies – to be conducted by a graduate student in partnership with the MAISRC and Tonka Bay Marina – a shining example of government and private sectors working together.
- Stayed up to date on zebra mussel biology, risk of infestation and risk reduction, pathways and mechanisms of spread (e.g. residual water), early detection, and response methods through presentations from Dr. Mike McCartney (MAISRC) and DNR staff.
- Gained insight through a presentation from U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on other AIS spread pathways besides watercraft and docks/lifts, such as: private ponds, live bait, live food, internet trade, aquariums, and biological supply.
- Will continue to share research priorities with the DNR, MAISRC and others.

**3. Remained engaged in the AIS Prevention Aid Program** (\$10 million each year to counties through Minnesota Statute 477A.19)

- Provided feedback on successes and challenges encountered in the program, which started in July 2014.
- Reviewed the “Local AIS Action Framework” – a working document available as a reference to counties, developed by Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates.
- Received updates from DNR AIS Prevention Planners.
- Will continue to track accomplishments of counties and provide guidance as problems arise.
- Will continue to advocate for regional collaboration and coordination – facilitated by DNR Planners as well as gatherings and projects initiated by the counties themselves.

### 4. Evaluated the Response to the Starry Stonewort Discovery in Minnesota

- The Committee was presented with information by DNR staff on the new infestation discovery and response processes as well as information on the known biology, ecology, and transport potential of the species. Throughout the response process, the Committee provided feedback to the DNR on their development of an “After Action Review.”
- The Committee discussed at length the pros and cons of access closure as a method for preventing the spread. The Committee agreed that the DNR response was not adequate and that the response should have been more aggressive.
- The Committee will present their concerns during their meeting with DNR Commissioner Landwehr in January, 2016.



#### Starry Stonewort Discovery

In August 2015, the first known infestation of Starry Stonewort in Minnesota was discovered in Lake Koronis, and connected Mud Lake, in Stearns and Meeker Counties. It is an invasive macro-alga that has star-shaped bulbils, the size of a grain of rice (left image). In coordination with local stakeholders and federal interests, the DNR temporarily closed their access on Lake Koronis for management actions in early October 2015. Response efforts are ongoing.



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## Communication and Outreach

***“We should all convey a message of hope.”***

DNR Commissioner Landwehr to the Committee  
January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016

According to the DNR Enforcement Division’s statistics, 86% of people stopped at roadside checks in 2015 were in compliance with AIS laws.



### About the Committee

The DNR Statewide Aquatic Invasive Species Advisory Committee was formed in 2013 to “advise the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources on its Aquatic Invasive Species Program.” The advisors were appointed by the DNR Commissioner and represent diverse interests and experience in AIS issues at local and regional levels. The committee includes five Ex-Officio members representing tourism, outreach, research, federal agencies and tribes.

### For Further Information

Meeting notes, the committee charter and other information can be found at:

<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/aisadvisory/index.html>

The Committee’s overarching goal for communicating AIS prevention is to promote a clear, consistent, positive message to all water resource users in the state and across the region.

Highlights of this work include:

- Recommended adding a spring version of the “fall clean-up” door hangers to emphasize the 21-day drying rule for docks and lifts. An effort to work with lake associations to help educate people on current laws for vectors other than watercraft.
- Promoted the work of the Committee – sharing agendas, meeting notes, letters, etc. on the Committee’s DNR webpage. Had members disseminate Committee activities to the organizations and constituents with which they are involved.
- Provided a list of AIS managers to the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), to facilitate better communication.
- Provided input to organizations (outside the DNR) working on AIS issues, as requested, such as MAISRC, Minnesota Sea Grant, Initiative Foundation, Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates, etc.
- Several members of the Committee participated in the review process for the Initiative Foundation’s AIS pilot projects.
- Supported the Aquatic Invader Summit in January 2015.
- Members involved in planning for the 2016 Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference and Aquatic Invader Summit II.

## Committee Members

|                           |               |  |
|---------------------------|---------------|--|
| John Barten               | Delano        | Natural Resource Director, Three Rivers Park District                      |
| Gary Botzek               | Elk River     | Association Manager/lobbyist   |
| Jerry Byron               | Waseca        | Vice President, Alumacraft Boat Company                                    |
| Pat Conzemius             | Blaine        | Conservation Director, Wildlife Forever                                    |
| Rachael Crabb             | Minneapolis   | Water Quality Specialist, Minneapolis Park & Recreation Board              |
| Jeff Forester             | Minneapolis   | Executive Director, MN Lakes & Rivers Advocates, Writer                    |
| Jay Green                 | Mound         | Software engineer/systems architect  |
| Ken Grob                  | Park Rapids   | Chairman, Hubbard County AIS Task Force                                    |
| Tera Guetter - VICE CHAIR | Detroit Lakes | Watershed District Administrator   |
| Barb Halbakken Fischburg  | Detroit Lakes | Minnesota Coalition of Lake Associations (MN COLA)                         |
| Gabriel Jabbour           | Orono         | Owner, Lake Service Provider   |
| Dr. Michelle Marko        | Moorhead      | Assoc. Prof Biology/Environmental Studies, Concordia College, Moorhead, MN |
| Robert E. Olsen - CHAIR   | Canby         | Lincoln County Environmental Administrator                                 |
| Greg Oswald               | Ellendale     | Owner, Oswald Fisheries  |
| Jim Stratton (Dec '14)    | Alexandria    | Douglas County Commissioner  |
| Paul Thiede (Dec '14)     | Pequot Lakes  | Crow Wing County Commissioner  |
| <b>EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS</b> |               |  |
| Carol Altepeter           | Brainerd      | NW and Central Region Manager, Explore Minnesota                           |
| Norman Deschampe          | Grand Portage | Chairman, Grand Portage Band of Lake Superior Chippewa                     |
| Mike Hoff                 | Eagan         | Regional AIS Coordinator, U.S. Fish & Wildlife - St. Paul                  |
| Douglas Jensen            | Duluth        | Aquatic Invasive Species Prog. Coordinator, U of M Sea Grant Program       |
| Dr. Michael McCartney     | St. Paul      | Prof., Minnesota AIS Research Center, U of M                               |

A new Committee will be established in early 2016, comprised of returning and new members. A sincere **THANK YOU** to each member for the dedication, time, ingenuity, and enthusiasm you contributed to this Committee. Your passion reflects the passion of Minnesota and the importance of protecting the state’s legacy of water.