

February 20, 2025

Sarah Strommen, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Commissioner  
500 Lafayette Rd.  
St. Paul, MN 55155-4052

Commissioner Strommen,

The DNR established the Statewide Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Advisory Committee (SAISAC) in 2013 to provide public input and guidance for the agency's AIS prevention and management. SAISAC requests the DNR advise Governor Walz to reconsider proposed cuts to the County Local AIS Prevention Aid as they will greatly increase DNR AIS management costs.

- County-led programs (watercraft inspections, cleaning stations, enforcement and outreach) account for 90% of Minnesota's commitment to slowing the spread of AIS. Without support from the state, these programs are at risk. The impact will fall heaviest on rural counties, they are most at risk, more dependent on tourism, with fewer funding resources. Cutting aid by half will dramatically impact state-wide AIS prevention efforts.
- Each new infestation is essentially irreversible and becomes a vector for new infested waters. Studies show each dollar spent on prevention is equivalent to \$100 of AIS management. Infested waters cost Minnesota taxpayers over \$2.6 million in management in 2024, each new infestation will only increase this burden. Minnesota has well over 13,000 water bodies with over 1,100 listed as infested and nearly 800 more lakes at immediate risk of Zebra Mussels infestation. New infestations have decreased markedly over the last 10 years. The success of this effort is evidence that our efforts are working, not a justification for budget cuts. This program saves Minnesota taxpayer dollars.
- AIS impacts water quality, public health, and lakeshore property values. Tourism and outdoor recreation (fishing, boating, etc.) brought Minnesota \$13.5 billion in revenue (2023) based in part on our beautiful lakes and rivers. AIS spread negatively impacts our natural resources, with serious consequences for this industry. Property owners, local tax bases, and the public at large are directly affected. Accounting for increased expense of mitigation/management, decreased property values/tax base, tourism impacts, water quality and public health impacts, these budget cuts are a false economy.
- AIS Management and Prevention research at the The University of Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center has made major breakthroughs in new techniques mitigating AIS. AIS prevention now buys time for these new tools for managing AIS.

Minnesota has long had a broad, bi-partisan, state-wide commitment to maintain our natural resources for future generations. Part of this commitment includes preventing the spread of AIS. Rather than taking a step back, now is the time to lean into this crucial effort. We urge you to recommend reconsideration of these budget cuts.

On behalf of SAISAC  
Spencer McGrew, Chair