

## Winona AIS Behavior Change Grant Summary Report

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### Introduction and Existing Behaviors:

The objective of the AIS Behavior Change Grant awarded to the City of Winona was to facilitate appropriate bait disposal and boat cleaning at public boat launch sites. These behaviors would be encouraged by adding clearly marked bait disposal bins and boat cleaning tools in convenient locations. The planning team also hoped to coordinate with local bait shops to establish a pledge and sticker to encourage proper bait disposal, but was unable to during the project timeframe

Four city-owned public locations were chosen to be the pilots of the bait disposal bin and cleaning stations. These were the two boat launches to East Lake Winona, the sole boat launch at West Lake Winona, and a boat launch at Prairie Island park along the Mississippi River. The Lake Winona locations were chosen because the majority of boaters on the lakes appear to be anglers, and are in a park setting where vandalism seems to be rare. There were concerns the boat cleaning equipment would be stolen or broken if in an isolated area. The Prairie Island location was appealing due to the fact that it is believed to receive more out of town boaters and variable usage since it is located next to a campground. Also, the Mississippi River presents more invasive species transfer opportunities than Lake Winona, so cleaning and proper bait disposal are probably more important to be completed there.

In order to understand current behaviors, City of Winona staff and volunteers observed behavior at the Lake Winona boat launches over two hour periods on separate days in August 2020. The goal was to note what kind of watercraft were being used, whether the boaters were fishing, and then note their boat cleaning and bait disposal behaviors once on land. The observers strived to appear as a casual member of the public rather than as an inspector/monitor so that the boaters did not feel like they were being watched, and therefore would do their typical behaviors. The challenge with this form of observation was how to plausibly be at a boat launch with a notepad and appear natural. Volunteers found success by fishing (or at least having a line in the water), sitting on a park bench with a book, and having a back pack and computer to appear as a college student.



*Figure 1: Photo showing weeds removed and drainage from a boat at a cleaning site.*

Although somewhat limited in scope, the monitoring indicated that the majority of boaters were not taking steps to clean their boats upon leaving the launches. Generally, boats were not obviously covered in aquatic plants or other material, so it could be presumed that cleaning was not necessary. The number of anglers was a slightly smaller sample, roughly 75% of boaters, and it was not always clear whether live bait was in use, so the team was unable to make firm conclusions on behavior. The observers did not see any bait disposal – either in the trash or into the water or shore.

Figure 2: Standard installation of boat cleaning equipment, signage and bait bin.



### Implementation:

A complete station would contain an Aqua Weed Stick for removing weeds and debris from the boat, a brush for further cleaning, and a small plastic garbage can for the bait. The City chose to use a red plastic trash receptacle to differentiate it from existing gray receptacles found throughout the park. Red is also a color used for biohazard material containers, which is fitting for this situation. All of these pieces of equipment would be affixed to or very near existing signage saying: Clean, Drain, Dispose. The goal was to install the stations by May 2021 to provide at least one season worth of monitoring. However, competing priorities and delays held up installation until late August 2021.

Installation was facilitated by the Winona County Soil and Water Conservation District. All cleaning tools were secured by a cord or wire to posts typically on metal clothesline wire. Tool hooks and bicycle hooks worked well to hold the equipment.

The public took notice of the bait disposal bins quickly after their installation, but not in the intended way. East Lake Winona Park goers were utilizing the bait disposal bins for all sorts of trash materials, very little of which seemed to have any connection to boating or fishing. Due to aesthetic and hygiene concerns, the full trash cans were emptied by park staff more frequently than initially planned, which impeded the behavior change team

from reviewing the contents. The original plan was to check the bait disposal bins weekly, which the team achieved for the Lake Winona stations, but near daily monitoring really was needed. These checks were simply peering into the trash can and noting whether the contents contained bait or other waste. In only one instance was a bait container observed in the trash, although the high trash volume easily could have obscured bait containers.

Public garbage cans exist throughout the park, yet these new bait bins seemed to get considerably more large items, such as a folding captain's chair. This may be due to the fact that the bait bins were next to a parking lot where someone could unload an item from their car. Interestingly, the West lake station was not getting extensive trash. In all cases though, little bait was getting thrown away in the bins during the observation period of September and early Oct. 2021.

*Figure 3: Bait disposal bin full of non-bait trash*



In response, the City added lids to the red bait bins on East Lake Winona, an 8.5 x 11 inch laminated sign adapted from the Comfort Lake Watershed District, and hand written labeling to all bins stating that the bins were for bait disposal only. As this action took place towards the end of the water season, the effectiveness of the intervention is uncertain.

# BAIT DISPOSAL

Protect our lakes and fisheries by properly disposing of unwanted bait



Bait and bait water can harbor harmful fish diseases and aquatic invasive species (AIS)

**KNOW THE LAW:** It is illegal to release bait into state waters. Before leaving the access, you must drain all water from water-related equipment, including bait containers.

*Figure 4: Signage added to inform the public that bins are for bait and AIS disposal.*

## Conclusions:

Observations of post intervention/installation of the stations were inconclusive as to whether boat cleaning behavior was being changed. Tool use was not observed, and there was no evidence of plant material in the vicinity of the tool when staff visited the site. Partly this is due to the small sample size – only one of the boats coming ashore was a traditional outboard motor boat. The rest were kayaks or canoes that would be far less likely to have material stick to it. The one behavior the kayakers or canoeists could do is drain their boat, but that was not seemingly common. Signage and messaging to that particular group of boaters may be needed.

Installing and implementing the bait disposal bins was the most disappointing result. The bins effectively became trash cans, and were not used for the desired purpose. If future stations are installed, signage and lids will be installed from the get go. Gaining buy in from maintenance staff would have allowed a more detailed review of the bait disposal stations. As it was, the bins became extra work for maintenance staff and thus were not seemingly enthusiastic about the project. Utilizing a different type of receptacle may also be needed to differentiate the bins from trash cans. When staff checked on the bait bins, they also kept an eye on vandalism and damage to the stations, which thankfully did not occur.

The failure to install the stations until late in the season was an impediment. We missed out on some of the highest traffic times and it also reduced our ability to do outreach. Until we had the infrastructure, we did not want to push bait disposal or boat cleaning (e.g. via social media) so people would not be frustrated by lack of facilities.

An overarching conclusion is that simply having the infrastructure and signage will not lead to the desired outcome. Additional outreach is needed so boaters know what they are supposed to do and how to do it. Now that the infrastructure is present, the City of Winona can work with our partners in future years to broadcast messaging.