



Arden Hills – February 6, 2018

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Workshops 2018

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides technical support to local government staff leading their counties' Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Aid programs. Technical support includes regulatory guidance, answering questions throughout the year, and facilitating a series of regional workshops. These workshops provide opportunities to actively share and learn from one another's collective experiences, initiate regional and statewide collaborative efforts, gain knowledge on AIS topics of concern, and build stronger inter-county relationships.

Four workshops held across the state in early 2018 attracted more than 100 attendees, including 57 local government staff representing 39 counties, 28 people from partner organizations, and 15 DNR staff.

This document summarizes the major topics discussed by county AIS leads in a way that can help everyone become more successful in their AIS work. Local programs are diverse, are at different stages of development and implementation, and cover a spectrum of AIS activities.

A Snapshot of Local AIS Initiatives Shared by Counties

Partnerships

Local governments, lake associations and businesses work together to learn from one another, build a sense of responsibility, leverage additional funds and resources, and make the work easier for everyone.

- St. Louis and Lake of the Woods counties work with resort owners to conduct watercraft inspections at their private accesses.
- Clearwater County works with Itasca State Park and Koochiching County partners with Voyagers National Park to support watercraft inspection programs.
- Hubbard County leverages an additional \$100,000 from townships and lake associations each year.
- Coalition of Lake Associations (COLA), task forces, and committees facilitate information sharing among all groups involved.
- Stearns, Washington, and St. Louis counties distribute all funds through a request for proposal (RFP) process. They found that the RFPs leverage many partnerships, foster a sense of responsibility, strengthen lake associations' capacity on AIS issues, generate research-based results, and facilitate a wide range of quality projects.



Brainerd – January 24, 2018

Public Awareness

Each dollar spent on AIS prevention in one area of Minnesota helps protect all Minnesota waters.

- Washington County, through the Comfort Lake Forest Lake Watershed District, held an AIS identification workshop. Later that summer, an attendee made the first report of zebra mussels in Comfort Lake.
- Douglas County has a new website that includes AIS, water quality and shoreland management.
- Kandiyohi County worked with a resort, lake associations, Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates, and State Senators to do an educational pontoon tour of Lake Koronis and the impacts of starry stonewort.
- Winona, Stearns and Carver counties updated AIS signage at public and private water accesses.
- Hennepin and Carver counties are addressing the aquarium trade and water garden pathways through inventories and specialized communications to prevent the sale of AIS.
- Schoolchildren learned about AIS through programs such as Sibley County's CLIMB Theater, Big Stone County's aquatic robotics, Lake County's science club, and Murray County's Prairie Ecology Bus.

Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination

Face-to-face interaction with the public through watercraft inspection is extremely valuable.

- About 34 counties and local governments with Delegation Agreements gathered to discuss their watercraft inspection program successes and challenges the morning before these afternoon workshops.
- About 27 of the 39 counties that participated in the workshops conducted watercraft inspections in 2017. All use past data to improve efficiencies

and fill gaps in their programs; most are planning to strategically expand inspection coverage next season.

- Becker County saw an increase in the use of their decontamination units because of a relatively new zebra mussel infestation.
- Hubbard, Kandiyohi and Carver counties want to encourage greater voluntary use of their decontamination units, including identifying and addressing barriers to their use.

Rapid Response Planning and Implementation

If you find it early, you have options.

- Wright, Hubbard and Itasca counties put their plan into action to respond to new infestations of Eurasian watermilfoil, zebra mussels, and flowering rush.
- Pope County was impressed with the coordination between the DNR, county, and the lake association to quickly respond to starry stonewort in Lake Minnewaska.

Early Detection and Monitoring

Early detection and rapid response have to be built into one; it has to be coordinated.

- Anoka and Hubbard counties have many volunteers checking zebra mussel plates throughout the summer and fall.
- Itasca County has a field team that's on track to survey all 700-plus lakes in just two and a half years.
- Three Rivers Park District monitors 15 to 20 different lakes every year.
- Ramsey and Kanabec counties conduct zebra mussel searches at public water accesses.
- Many attendees participated in or sent volunteers through the University of Minnesota's AIS Detectors program. It is a great professional development opportunity, empowers local groups with AIS identification skills, and can be a source of trained volunteer services for AIS projects.



Park Rapids, February 15, 2018

Big-Picture Challenges

While many challenges exist, the following three were brought up at all four workshops. As part of the exercise, participants were asked to provide potential solutions to the challenges aired.

Getting Support for Local AIS Programs

There is a concern that in counties with fewer water resources, AIS prevention isn't seen as a priority.

- Most argue that prevention efforts in one area protect all waters.

Sometimes it is difficult to find the people you want to reach.

- Attend and provide AIS information at gatherings that are already happening such as lake associations, chamber of commerce, outdoor recreation groups, Lions, Rotary, and other service groups.
- Meet people where they are and talk to them about what they care about.
- Use a variety of outlets to broadcast your messages (local newspaper, radio, TV, social media, etc.).
- Start a "Lake Days" or "River Days" event to bring people together over issues like AIS.

Engaging Different Audiences

Participants discussed how to avoid the "blame game" and find a way to communicate that all groups (government, associations, sportsmen, anglers, businesses, etc.) are working toward the same AIS prevention goals – each has a different perspective on how to accomplish those goals, based on their experiences and expertise.

- **How do we engage all stakeholder groups in general?** It's all about getting the right people to talk to one another. Invite representatives to be a part of an AIS task force, committee or consortium – it creates buy-in and helps build consensus on strategies.
- **How do we engage fishing tournaments?** Speak to the tournament organizer and find ways to work AIS prevention into their schedule. Larger tournaments must get a permit from the DNR, are published online and includes AIS BMPs, but smaller tourneys can be harder to reach.
- **How do we engage lake associations?** Attend their meetings, build relationships, provide funding, leverage additional funding, provide expertise, provide sampling equipment, etc.
- **How do we engage local law enforcement?** Offer training (DNR offers it for free), funds, overtime, resources, contacts, etc.

Responding to Use of Limited Resources

- When asked "Why don't you have an inspector at my lake all the time?" Some respond: Having an inspector at any access protects your lake too.
- When asked "Why aren't you doing x, y, and z?" Some respond: "What have you done or what can you do to help?" It's important to acknowledge limited resources of time, money, and manpower to do everything. Use this kind of question as an opportunity to recruit the help of the questioner by asking for their assistance.



Spicer – January 30, 2018

Metrics Template

The “Metrics Template” provides a standardized way for local governments and their partners using AIS Prevention Aid to voluntarily track measurable achievements and impactful success stories in a format they can easily share with their boards, stakeholders and communities.

The template was piloted in 2017 and 16 counties completed it. With 20% of counties reporting on 15% of the funds, here are some results: 264 volunteers served 882 hours; \$120,260 in grants were awarded to support 24 projects; \$147,152 in additional funds were leveraged; 137 events, presentations and meetings reached 11,013 Minnesota residents and visitors; 64 in-school presentations reached 3,853 children; and 219 waterbodies were surveyed for AIS. The statewide numbers are potentially five times greater, or more.

Counties that used the metrics template said it is a great tool and overall it was a good exercise. Others shared that it was appreciated by their board, they were doing something like this anyway, it was a nice way to summarize their accomplishments, and it provided a way to create an “elevator speech” for their AIS program. Others commented that there should be fewer and simpler metrics, they were concerned numbers could be counted in more than one category, and a one-page snapshot would be more ideal.

The DNR appreciates this feedback and will review it, update content, and share an updated version for use in 2018.

Community-Based Social Marketing

CBSM aims to promote the adoption of desirable AIS prevention behaviors and create positive social norms around AIS prevention. The DNR hosted a two-day CBSM workshop in October 2017. Attendees discussed their thoughts and potential next steps to adjust their programs to focus more on behavior change.

CBSM workshop takeaways included:

- Need to focus on individuals who are highly visible and seen as the influencers of the community.

- Just putting education materials out there isn't enough.
- Make things easy and convenient for people.
- Get commitments, which should be public, durable, and happening where the desired behavior happens.
- Don't jump right to the strategies.

Questions included:

- With 97% compliance, do we need to educate anymore? How do we use this to target violators?
- How do we use this for other pathways, such as the aquarium trade?
- We're doing great at reaching the people we know how to reach. How can we reach others?

Next Steps:

- Kandiyohi County would like to get more boaters voluntarily taking advantage of decontamination units when they are available.
- Lake County will be administering a survey about behaviors this season.
- The DNR plans to gather more information on behaviors and barriers/benefits to adoption of those behaviors (Steps 1 and 2 of CBSM); and share that information with local partners.

In Summary, the AIS Prevention Aid:

- Empowers local organizations to take action in their communities.
- Strengthens relationships between organizations that facilitate work on AIS as well as other local issues.
- Gets hundreds more eyes on the water and boots on the ground.
- Makes Minnesota's watercraft inspection program the largest in the nation.

Additional Resources

County Contacts:

- [AIS Prevention Aid: Primary Contacts by County](#)

Technical Support from Minnesota DNR

- Philip Hunsicker, Brainerd: 218-203-4355, philip.hunsicker@state.mn.us
- Tina Wolbers, Saint Paul: 651-259-5146, tina.wolbers@state.mn.us