

# Local AIS Workshops Summary 2020

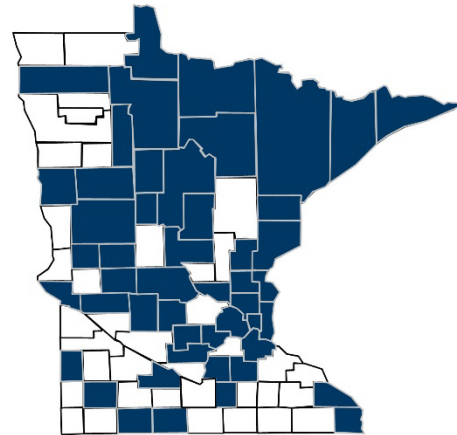


The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) provides technical support to local government staff leading their counties' Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Programs, including hosting yearly workshops across the state. These workshops provide opportunities for participants to actively share and learn from one another's collective experiences (the successes, as well as the challenges), initiate regional and statewide collaborative efforts, gain knowledge on AIS topics of concern and build stronger inter-county relationships.

In December 2019 and January 2020, four workshops were held in Park Rapids, New Ulm, Arden Hills and Duluth. Eighty-seven people participated, representing 47 counties and 18 partner organizations, which include lake associations, watershed districts, tribes and others. Twenty-one DNR staff also participated at one or more workshops.

County AIS Prevention Aid Programs cover a wide spectrum of activities. This document summarizes the major topics that were discussed by county AIS leads and their partners at these four workshops.

## Map of Participating Counties



## More Information

### DNR Planners

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### County Contacts

Here is a direct link to the [Primary County AIS Contacts](#), which is found on the [Local AIS Prevention webpage](#).

# Sharing County AIS Successes

## New to the Program, Evaluating the Program, or Trying New Things

- **Clearwater County** has a new coordinator and is planning on setting up a decontamination station.
- **Clay and Cook counties** recently transferred coordination of the AIS program from the county to the Soil and Water Conservation District.
- **Wadena County** has a new coordinator who is getting up to speed on AIS issues.
- **Grant County** incorporated AIS into their water plan.
- **Brown County** is stepping back on doing radio ads and looking at other ways to get information out to lake and river users.
- **Murray County** is looking into partnering with lake associations to support watercraft inspections.
- **Stearns County** is looking into providing AIS prevention best practices to excavators that have to be licensed to do shoreland work. The county will be developing a 5-star program with lake service providers (LSPs), similar to what was started in Itasca County.
- **McLeod County** departments recently reorganized and now that it's complete the AIS program has been reignited.
- **Hennepin County** is moving forward with a new five-year plan for AIS prevention.
- **Kanabec County** had a lapse in watercraft inspections in 2019 because they couldn't find qualified candidates for the job. They are considering different options for hiring staff in 2020.
- **Sherburne County** met regularly with its task force to review the program and look at the next five years. This effort also included a survey of members. Not much changed in the plan, but they will highlight more high school education opportunities and increase volunteer programs.

- **Meeker County** has a new coordinator. They are working with the University of Minnesota's AIS Research Center (MAISRC) to determine where to strategically place watercraft inspectors in 2020. They are working closely with lake associations to make sure accurate information about AIS is shared amongst members.
- **Lincoln County** is looking to change statutory language for allowable area when treating a lake to control invasive aquatic plants. Prairie pothole lakes have 100% of the lake in the littoral zone (15 feet or less), but DNR permit restrictions only allows treatment of 15% of the littoral zone.
- **Beltrami County** looked to improve signage at accesses so people are more likely to read them. They created a new sign with AIS prevention messages and a topographic map of the lake – everyone likes to look at maps of the lake. It shows where decontamination stations are located, directions and the DNR website for decontamination locations. The county received many requests from lake associations for similar signs on their accesses. Permission to post signs at DNR accesses can be obtained from DNR Parks and Trails. Three signs are now up in the county.
- **Carlton County** gave half their funds to one lake association. The county is looking for more groups to partner with.
- **Pine County** now has an additional staff person working on AIS. They are interested in finding more opportunities to educate and increase awareness throughout the county.

## Watercraft Inspections

- **Chisago County** developed a new safety policy for their watercraft inspectors in cooperation with their Sheriff's Office.
- **Stearns County** is looking into setting up temporary portable sheds for inspectors at accesses. The sheds provide a more visible presence and more protection when bad weather occurs. Cost is about \$1,500 per shed.

Working to meet permission requirements from DNR Parks and Trails and local governments.

- **Morrison County** expanded from one to five lakes participating in a volunteer ambassador inspection program.
- **Sherburne County** had volunteers serve 250 hours at accesses to educate boaters about self-inspection.
- **Hubbard County** received substantial supplemental funding for their watercraft inspection program from townships and lake associations, which guarantees that inspections will happen in their township or on their lake. This additional money allows the county to double the amount of inspections.
- **Lake of the Woods County** doubled the number of inspections in 2019. Held monthly meetings with inspectors for check-ins and team building.
- **Crow Wing County** partnered with MAISRC to utilize their risk analysis model to strategically place watercraft inspectors at lakes throughout the county. This year they hired inspectors in-house instead of using an employment agency. They are trying to achieve more consistency by finding inspectors that are interested in coming back for multiple years.
- **Waterfront Restoration** implemented a secret boater program for quality assurance and training purposes.
- **Water Guards** will offer supplemental trainings in 2020. They created online quizzes for their inspectors to improve their knowledge and skills at their convenience.
- **Northern St. Louis County SWCD** increased participation in their inspection program from six to 12 lakes and improved their inspection efficiency to 1.2 inspections per hour.
- **Koochiching County** formed a partnership with Voyageurs National Park to post an inspector on a busy access on Rainy Lake.

## Boat Decontamination and Cleaning Tools

- **Stearns County** worked with local restaurants to provide coupons at accesses for a free drink and an additional coupon for a burger basket if the boater agreed to have their boat decontaminated on site. In this pilot the number of decontaminations doubled compared to previous years, therefore drawing a lot of new people into the decontamination process.
- **Becker County** had a regular schedule for decontamination units kept at high-use, zebra mussel-infested lakes and performed 370 decontaminations in 2019, which is a new record.
- **Ramsey County** set up tool stations at some public accesses that included simple grabbers and brushes tethered to signs/posts.
- **Koochiching County** had a mobile decontamination unit for the first time and it was moved around to multiple accesses.
- **Itasca County** set up a decontamination station in a fixed location that is open 24 hours. Offers cold running water to anyone to clean their boats and trailers on their own. Level 2 inspectors have access to the hot water option. Trying to make hot water available for LSPs whenever they need it too.

## Enforcement of AIS Laws

- **Grant County** has a new Sherriff and AIS seems to be one of his priorities. He will have one person dedicated to doing water patrol and inspections.
- **Martin County** worked closely with local law enforcement.
- **Le Sueur County** paid the Sherriff's Department to do inspections.
- **Dakota County** provided overtime pay for the Sherriff's Department to enforce laws and support inspectors.

## Invasive Aquatic Plant Control

- **Morrison County** offered grants to lake associations to do treatments for the control of invasive aquatic plants and they had to put a cap on it. Associations that receive money for treatment must also do other activities to promote AIS prevention as part of the grant.
- **Rice County** offered grants to lake associations to do treatments. Trying to get them involved in education and outreach and not just treatments.
- **Waseca County** offered grants to lake associations to do treatments of curly-leaf pondweed and Eurasian watermilfoil.
- **Washington County** has a competitive grant program to support lake treatments.
- **Pope County** treated starry stonewort in the Starbuck Marina on Lake Minnewaska. They saw some success, but they are not eradicating starry stonewort as some might think. Communication efforts are focusing on setting realistic expectations. Some watercraft docked in the marina have exterior damage (pitting) which the County, City and DNR are looking into.
- **Three Rivers Park District** has been doing copper treatments on starry stonewort in Medicine Lake. The population has not expanded, but still seeing high densities. They are also doing some native plant introductions into Hyland Lake with some success.
- **Anoka County**, in partnership with the **Coon Creek Watershed District**, aggressively treated 14 non-native Phragmites sites, which will also include winter mowing.
- **Isanti County** treated six locations of non-native Phragmites with a noxious weed grant from the Minnesota Department of Agriculture. They also partnered with a volunteer on Florence Lake to hand pull 2,000 feet of purple loosestrife growing along shoreline and partnered with the City of Cambridge to treat purple loosestrife in stormwater ponds.

- **Sibley County** used information from MAISRC to treat non-native Phragmites.
- **Dakota County** provided the **City of Eagan** with a grant to remove flowering rush along a shoreline. They are also looking at downstream sites to see if it is spreading and looking to re-establish natives.

## Working with Resorts

- **Hubbard County** has relationships with about 40 resorts operating in the county so they are aware of AIS and educating their customers.
- **Cass County's** Resort Ambassador Program saw some success. Five resorts are now doing inspections with surveys. Using dock boys who have the time, because the owners typically do not. They also have used trained AIS Detectors to do inspections at resorts. They are partnering with **Itasca** and **St. Louis counties** on how to work with resorts. Received some grant funds from the Initiative Foundation, but that ends in March 2020. The counties will be picking up the costs after the grant runs out. Cass County offered to pay resorts \$7/inspection, but many of the resorts refuse to take the money.
- **North St. Louis County SWCD** has resorts using the DNR's inspection survey. The data show there are higher numbers of boats coming from different lakes and higher number of boats coming from out of state at private resort accesses compared to public accesses.
- **Chisago County** will have a new seasonal education specialist working with resorts and private accesses.
- **Lake Vermilion** has 33 resorts and 20 have private accesses onto the lake. The goal for 2020 is to work with all resorts on the lake and to help break down barriers to achieve full resort participation in the AIS prevention program.

## Working with Other Audiences

**Examples:** Duck hunters, anglers, SCUBA divers, water garden suppliers, aquarium enthusiasts, shoreland property owners, and Lake Service Providers (LSPs).

- **Houston County** did outreach at launches for duck hunters and at trout streams for anglers. They also established good communications with a local water garden supplier.
- **Le Sueur County** did a training for duck hunters and gave out waterproof cellphone holders.
- **Winona County** focused their AIS prevention efforts on trout streams by putting up signage at stream accesses and monitoring them for invasive species.
- **Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board** started a free permit program for SCUBA divers in Minneapolis. Once per year to get divers' contact information. Includes instructions on how to identify zebra mussels when they are diving and mark locations if found. There were 35 people who obtained a permit.
- **Minnesota Sea Grant's** Habitattitude campaign provides alternatives to pet release. Since the beginning they have hosted 17 events in Minnesota and Wisconsin and over 600 animals have been rehomed and not released into the wild. Developing a tool kit.
- **Itasca County** has their five-star program for LSPs that go beyond what they are required to do for AIS prevention. The LSPs agree to decontaminate their equipment between lakes and follow best management practices. In return, they are aggressively marketed to potential paying customers through lake associations and newsletters.
- **Otter Tail County** continued to do dock and lift registrations for used pieces of equipment being moved from one lake to another. The goal of the program is to educate shoreland property owners about the 21-day-dry law. Word of mouth is helping to spread the news throughout lake associations.
- **Marshall County** found a popular local radio personality/fisherman who supports AIS

prevention. He is active on social media and at local festivals. He wrapped his boat in "Clean, Drain, Dry" messaging, which acted like a moving billboard for AIS prevention.

- **Minnesota Sea Grant** partnered with **Lake County** and Bent Paddle Brewery to host a crawfish boil, while also promoting and distributing information to participants about the rules and regulations concerning invasive crayfish.

## Early Detection and Monitoring

- **Lake of the Woods County** worked closely with Rainy Lake Watershed Board (U.S. and Canada) to talk about risk assessment and what species they should be looking for next. Big news this year was zebra mussel veligers being found in Lake of the Woods in Muskeg Bay near Warroad, but no adults have been found yet.
- **Douglas County** did early detection monitoring using aquatic plant surveys. Finding out what is in their lakes, since current data were unknown or outdated. The survey is a hybrid of the Point Intercept method and meander survey. They used a contractor (Blue Water Science) for all the surveys. They did 15 lakes in 2019 for a cost of approximately \$42,000. No new infestations were discovered. They plan to continue these efforts on high priority lakes.
- **Minneapolis Parks and Recreation Board** received a grant from **Hennepin County** to test the use of environmental DNA (eDNA) sampling as another tool to monitor for zebra mussels.
- **Ramsey County** is testing zebra mussel eDNA monitoring and analysis techniques in partnership with the University of Minnesota Genomics Center.
- **Murray County** has a lake with zebra mussels that is connected to another very popular lake. They asked people to put out settlement plates to monitor for zebra mussels at 25+ locations.
- **Sibley County** will be doing carp sampling with Minnesota State University Mankato because they don't really know what is in their lakes.

- **Le Sueur County** did carp assessments on 11 lakes. Hoping to find out how they move around.
- **Chisago County** started a zebra mussel watch program with sampling plates. Volunteers went up from 25 to 59, and no new zebra mussel infestations were discovered.
- **The Forest Lake Comfort Lake Watershed District** provided throw rakes to inspectors to do early detection searches at public accesses.
- **Three Rivers Park District** monitored 15 lakes last year. Will continue monitoring new lakes in 2020.
- **Carver County** hired interns to do early detection monitoring.
- **Washington County** did a lot of early detection monitoring in 2019.
- **Burntside Lake** is building a sentry program focused on early detection and rapid response. They used 20-24 volunteers to check the lake close to their properties. They also had two paid sentries from the local college monitor 10 hotspots on a monthly basis.
- **Lake County** did early detection monitoring at 75 different accesses.
- **Cook County** has been collecting calcium data on lakes, which is related to zebra mussel suitability as well as water quality. They are also monitoring for the presence of spiny waterflea.
- **1854 Treaty Authority** has a surveillance program to cover 90 lakes every three years.
- **Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa** partnered with the **1854 Treaty Authority** to search for Chinese mystery snails in the winter to see if they congregate, which could lead to potentially harvesting them as a control effort.

### AIS Education for School-Aged Children

- **Otter Tail County** had big success with their “Train the Teachers to Train the Kids” program, which does accredited education on AIS in 14 school districts in the county. Reached 500 kids in 2019. Unit involves classroom Jeopardy-style

game along with a pontoon ride on a nearby lake to identify things in the field.

- **Clay County** worked with River Keepers, which does fishing clinics for kids, to include information about AIS. The county also participated in the Fall Water Fest with fourth graders from North Dakota and Minnesota which reaches 2,100 kids in four days.
- **Marshall County** partnered with other northwestern counties to host and staff the Northwest Water Fest. An AIS station is included, and over two days, 600 fourth graders are educated about water issues.
- **Kandiyohi County** hired a contractor who did seventh grade AIS education that follows the state science curriculum standards. They are also looking at doing AIS education with 600 fourth graders maybe using CLIMB Theater.
- **Big Stone County’s** 4H aquatic robotics program has been highly successful and recognized nationally.
- **Anoka County** created teacher kits that include AIS lesson plans and a movie.
- **Lake County** is in its third year partnering with 4H for a 5-6 week program for fourth through tenth graders. They go out to the lake to do early detection and learn about the scientific method.

## Problem-Solving Challenges

Participants discussed the challenges – some common and some unique – that they experienced while running an AIS program. Participants also brainstormed potential solutions to some of the challenges aired.

### Getting Local Law Enforcement Involved in AIS

- DNR Conservation Officers offer free training for local law enforcement that can count as two POST credits. The class generally takes 1.5 hours, but could take 2 or 2.5 with a large group.
- Many counties offer a cash incentive to local law enforcement to be involved. For example,

offer to pay overtime hours to local officers if they do AIS work.

### Getting Lake Service Providers (LSPs) to Follow the Rules

- A few counties reported encountering LSPs that are not following their permit requirements. For instance, not following the 21-day dry time before moving docks/lifts from one water body to another.
- **Beltrami County** found mud packed into a wedge pole that an LSP uses to lift docks. The inspector pointed it out to the LSP and they cleaned out the pole.
- Perhaps LSPs should be spot checked, and if a violation is found, they should be severely fined.
- Lake residents and lake associations can play big roles in making sure LSPs are doing what they need to do – hire only those with good reputations; the bad ones will go out of business or clean up their operations.

### Getting Anglers to Save or Dispose of Bait Properly

- Anglers need to bring extra water if they want to save their live bait for future use. By law anglers must drain and refill their bait containers before leaving the access. Outreach on this concept could be improved, as awareness seems to be low. Anglers know the rules about fishing and catch limits, they should also know the laws about keeping and proper disposal of live bait.
- **Becker County** inspectors keep water (about 5 gallons) to give out to anglers who forget to bring extra water from home.
- At most access sites there are no garbage or compost bins to dispose of unwanted live bait. In Wisconsin anglers collect minnows in a plastic bag and then throw the bag away later. Perhaps Minnesota could do something similar.

### Building Capacity in Partners to Address Limited Staff Time

- Sometimes only five to ten percent of a coordinator's time can be devoted to AIS work. Many offices have fewer than five staff with a multitude of other responsibilities. An AIS task force can help spread out some of the responsibilities. Volunteers can also help ease the workload, but it is important that volunteers understand their limitations, especially when it comes to their authority.
- **Stearns County's** task force wrote the county plan and is a standing committee that works closely with the County Environmental Services. They make budget decisions and are given tremendous latitude. Environmental Services helps manage their expectations.
- **Winona County** worked with Minnesota-Iowa Conservation Corps, which is affordable and provided an extra set of hands.
- **Martin County** used Minnesota Valley Action Council to hire a couple staff to do part-time AIS work.
- **Three Rivers Park District** said responding to new infestations requires a lot of extra time. Having a rapid response plan in place helps with that situation. Identify partners up front so you are ready when a situation occurs.
- **Sherburne County** has AIS Detectors on their task force. They help with Starry Trek, distribution and monitoring of zebra mussel sampling plates, etc.

### Hiring and Keeping Seasonal Staff

- **Washington County** attended college job fairs, nonprofit job fairs, the University of Minnesota's Environmental Career Fair, etc. They found enough employees, but this takes up a lot of time.
- **Cass County** conducted supplemental training which has contributed to retention of inspectors year after year. Potlucks or regular gatherings with inspectors helped create a team atmosphere.

- Look for retirees. That might mean posting open positions in newspapers or in places frequented by seniors like the grocery store, the library, the local Senior Center, etc.
- Use the “Handshake” App.
- Texas A&M Environmental jobs online listing is one example of a way to reach out to younger people.
- Use St. Paul Right Track if you are looking for bilingual workers.

### Increasing Use of Decontamination Units

- Counties with decontamination units should consider using the Community-Based Social Marketing approach to change behaviors.
- **Winona County** observed that sometimes people will skip the access where the decontamination unit is located. Better to advertise “free boat wash” instead of “decontamination.”
- There is a general resistance by boaters to having their motors flushed. Decontamination is kind of like a sales position, you have to sell it. For example telling the boater the process will not cause damage, it doesn’t take long to do, and they set a great example to others observing.
- Maybe we need to come up with a different idea for decontamination units. They are too big, too difficult to move, too dispersed and not always available when you need one.
- Western states have started using stationary on-demand hot water systems. The challenges are that you need space, water on site, power and propane. Advantages are that it is cheap – just \$3,500 – and temperature control can be kept to within one degree. They also require less maintenance than mobile units.
- **Stearns County’s** decontamination incentive pilot program (burger basket coupon) promoted voluntary decontamination at accesses. Many people received coupons and many decontaminations were performed. Not all coupons were cashed in, saving the county some funds. Inspectors said that using the

coupon to talk about decontamination was a good icebreaker with boaters.

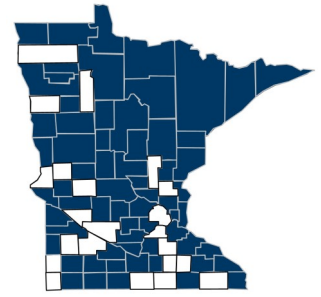
## In Summary, AIS Prevention Aid:

- **Empowers** local organizations to take actions that fit the needs of their communities.
- **Strengthens** working relationships among local units of government, state agencies, lake associations, conservation nonprofits, researchers and businesses.
- **Increases capacity** by getting thousands more eyes on the water and boots on the ground. This includes supporting hundreds of jobs and thousands of volunteer hours.
- **Supports** the inspection of more than 500,000 watercraft a year, more than any other state in 2019.
- **Establishes** Minnesota as a leader in AIS prevention efforts.



# AIS Prevention Aid Metrics 2019

A majority of the counties (see map) that receive Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Prevention Aid voluntarily completed and submitted metrics templates—a tool created to help all counties track their accomplishments. These impressive numbers highlight AIS Aid funded activities in 2019.



**\$8,242,486.33 of AIS Prevention Aid was used by 65 counties in 2019 to fund these activities:**

People Involved

**1,582** people doing AIS work, including **945** jobs and **11,115** hours served by **637** volunteers.  
**268** lake associations, **59** conservation groups, **199** businesses, and **161** local governments are involved.  
**35** Counties have AIS Task Forces and Committees.

Communications

**56,800** residents and visitors reached about AIS during events.  
**48** County Youth Programs gave presentations to **31,418** children.

Enforcement

**198** local law enforcement officers were trained on AIS laws. **138** officers conducted AIS work and contacted **5,166** boaters in **23** counties.

Watercraft Inspection

**611** Level 1 and **115** Level 2 inspectors worked **203,599** hours and performed **385,480** inspections.  
They covered **732** accesses on **550** water bodies in **40** counties.  
They operated **41** decontamination units.

Funds Leveraged

**30** County Grant Programs awarded **\$1,996,439.32** to **167** organizations.  
**\$1,691,913.56** in additional funds were leveraged from **156** organizations.

Control

**24** counties funded invasive aquatic plant management on **176** lakes.

Monitoring

**41** counties surveyed **531** lakes and rivers for AIS. They conducted **380** aquatic plant surveys, deployed **431** zebra mussel settling plates, and conducted veliger tows on **127** water bodies.

Response

**\$1,527,302.45** is saved in a contingency fund (over multiple years, for a variety of activities) by **38** counties.  
**\$12,018** spent on new infestation responses.  
**18** counties have new infestation response plans.