

County AIS Prevention Aid is Protecting Lakes from Aquatic Invasive Species

By Jeff Forester, Executive Director, Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocate (500 words)



One sad reality of aquatic invasive species is that while the waters are public, the costs incurred by mismanagement are local. Mille Lacs is the best example.

MLR has long advocated that new state funding for AIS efforts were most needed at the local level. In 2014 the MN Legislature matched funding with the need, and created an annual \$10 million funding stream for local efforts to stop the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species, the County AIS Prevention Aid.

This standing appropriation comes directly from the MN Department of Revenue to Minnesota's counties. Some Counties have been hesitant to hire staff or buy the necessary decontamination equipment for fear that the funding will end or is temporary. Fear to act will not only lead to infestation, but is unnecessary.

- 1) The County AIS Prevention Aid is a standing annual appropriation and does not need to be reauthorized.
- 2) The County AIS Prevention Aid has broad public support. In 2015 bills were introduced to repeal the funding and the legislature received thousands of phone calls, letters and emails in support of the County AIS Prevention Aid. Neither bill ever went to a vote in committee and both were pulled. No repeal bills were introduced in the 2016 Legislative Session.
- 3) By building coalitions of active citizens around AIS work, resource managers and County boards increase both the effectiveness of AIS programs and further ensure continued funding.
- 4) Most importantly, the County AIS Prevention Aid has stopped the infestation of multiple lakes in Minnesota.

Two years after passage, it is clear this new funding is working.

	2013	2015
Number of authorized inspectors in Minnesota.	427	810
Number of watercraft inspections.	187,073	344,099
Number of watercraft where inspectors found an AIS issue.	12,540	31,121

On lakes and rivers across the state inspectors have intercepted over 31 thousand high risk or infested watercraft prior to launch. One example: On Leech Lake the MN DNR pulled out of providing inspection/decon services to a sailing regatta days before the event. Cass County AIS specialist Rima Smith Keprios quickly trained inspectors **on a donated sailboat** and moved a Cass County decontamination unit into place. **They discovered four sailboats from Lake Minnetonka infested with live zebra mussels.**

In 2015 the Aquatic Invaders Summit brought together over 400 public and private constituencies from 54 counties, Wisconsin and Canada for two days of intensive seminars on national AIS programs. Attendees developed a Local AIS Action Framework to improve consistency, cooperation and effectiveness across Minnesota.



The new local AIS funding drives collaboration, a trend that began at the 2015 Aquatic Invaders Summit. Sixty four percent of Aid recipients reported that they were collaborating with neighboring counties to develop regional programs. In April of 2015 Dave Rush, of Douglas County, brought together the “Top Ten” recipients of County AIS Prevention Aid funding with the goal to partner in efforts that reduce AIS risk statewide. In the email invitation Mr. Rush wrote, “I

believe now is a good time for us to gather and identify efforts ... that can and should be improved on and disseminated Statewide, and issues/problems we all are experiencing that could be collectively addressed.” This poster, developed by the Becker County AIS team, will be shared across the state to be used in bar and restaurant bathrooms.



Support for the County AIS Prevention Aid will continue to build. This local funding is leveraging partnerships, engaging active citizens to protect the lakes in their area, and has stopped infested watercraft from entering many pristine lakes (saving untold millions).