

## **DNR Invasive Species Program - Prevention Update**

December 20, 2012



Greetings,

More than a year ago, many of you began meeting with us as a stakeholder group to discuss new ideas for AIS prevention in the state. Your involvement led to recommendations to the Legislature last winter. Those recommendations led to new legislation being passed. That new legislation was landmark in terms of new authorities and responsibilities. We all view this as a significant step forward, but not the end in addressing AIS prevention needs in the state.

We have made a lot of progress this past summer and fall and want to share with you some of the highlights and proposed efforts for 2012. For prevention our focus is on two main fronts:

1) incorporating and implementing the new laws into program activities and 2) evaluating and planning for future program direction and legislation. You have been instrumental in providing input into both of these areas.

The next phase of AIS prevention in partnership with stakeholders will begin at the annual DNR Roundtable Meetings on January 6<sup>th</sup>. We also plan to keep stakeholders involved by providing information on upcoming AIS prevention activities and providing opportunity for comments on those activities. There are two opportunities for you to provide input which are highlighted in this update, on proposed prevention grants for 2012 and draft BMP's for water accesses.

Like many of you, we have continued to evaluate our implementation of the new laws, gather information and discuss new ideas for the next phase of AIS prevention in Minnesota. We look forward to discussing these ideas at future stakeholder meetings.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Luke Skinner'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

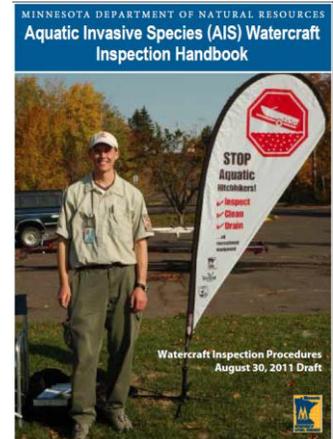
Luke Skinner, Supervisor  
Invasive Species Program  
Division of Ecological and Water Resources

## IMPLEMENTATION OF 2011 AIS LEGISLATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

### Implementing New Inspection Authorities

**Inspection and Decontamination in 2011** - In 2011, the MN DNR purchased three high-pressure, hot-water, portable decontamination units to be at public water accesses as a part of our watercraft inspection program.

The Colorado Division of Wildlife provided MN DNR with their handbooks for inspecting and decontaminating watercraft. The DNR developed new watercraft inspection handbooks and protocols utilizing Colorado Division of Wildlife and the Western Regional Panel's recommendations. Using the new MN DNR AIS Watercraft Inspection handbook and Colorado Decontamination manual, we trained and authorized invasive species program staff to inspect and decontaminate watercraft. These Invasive Species Program staff members then ran the decontamination units until we were able to hire an additional 17 staff to take over this important work. The new staff started in early September and worked through October 25<sup>th</sup>. The decontamination units were deployed around Detroit Lakes, Alexandria, Brainerd (including Mille lacs), and the Twin Cities at high-use accesses on zebra mussel infested waters.



During this eleven-week period DNR staff spent over 1,300 hours at the access completing inspections and decontaminations when necessary. A total of 2,113 watercraft were inspected, of those 23 (or approximately 1%) required standing water decontamination (draining and flushing boats and motors) and 111 (or approximately 5%) required full



decontamination (standing water plus exterior hot water rinse and spraying) based on inspection and interview results. Staff also offered courtesy decontamination to watercraft users at the access.

We learned a great deal from operating the decontamination units during this three-month period. We are using the knowledge gained in the 2011 season to modify our approach in the 2012 season. Changes include new accessories for decontamination units, modified approach to set up at the access, scheduling of staff and how inspectors interact with the public.

We will be making addition revisions to the Minnesota Watercraft Inspection manual and creating a new Minnesota Decontamination Manual. There is variation on the recommended protocols between different entities and we want to make sure we are using the most appropriate protocols allowed by our laws.

***Future stakeholder input opportunity:*** *Once the next drafts of the manuals are developed, we will provide the manuals and provide an opportunity for comment from stakeholders. The time line for revisions of the manuals is mid-February.*

### **Inspection and Decontamination in 2012**

**Purchase of decontamination units** - Specifications for the decontamination units have been updated to reflect modifications that were identified during our initial use of the units in 2011. The new

specifications were used to create a bid contract that both the state and other LGU's can purchase from. We will be purchasing an additional 20 decontamination units. The Level 2 Inspectors and decontamination units will be placed primarily at high-use zebra mussel infested waters, destination lakes where boaters travel to following boating at zebra mussel waters and DNR Enforcement checkpoints on roads near waterbodies.

**Implementation of the watercraft inspection program in 2012** - The watercraft inspection program will face several changes in the 2012 season. The program will be regionalizing, which means the addition of four regional watercraft inspection supervisors. Our goal is to hire approximately 100 Level 1 watercraft inspectors who will be trained to inspect watercraft and 46 Level 2 watercraft inspectors who will be trained to inspect and decontaminate watercraft. We will be pairing Level 1 and Level 2 inspectors to work with the decontamination units. We are currently developing the proposed deployment/allocation of the watercraft inspectors and decontamination units. This involves review of the watercraft inspection data from 2011 to determine the use levels of water accesses and the destination lakes for boaters leaving infested waters.

**Future stakeholder input opportunity:** *Once we have completed preparing and reviewing the data we will share a proposed allocation of hours for the inspectors and decontamination units. We anticipate that you will have an opportunity to provide comments on the proposed deployment in January.*

### **Lake Service Provider Training**

Service providers are individuals or businesses hired to install or remove water-related equipment or structures from waters of the state. They are now required by state statute to obtain a permit from the DNR before providing any services. DNR will begin to implement and enforce this for the upcoming 2012 open water season. All service providers must complete invasive species training and pass an examination in order to qualify for a permit.

A webpage has recently been uploaded to the DNR website with information pertinent to service provider training and permitting. The webpage can be found at <http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/lsp/index.html>.

The DNR has partnered with Minnesota Waters, a non-profit organization promoting responsible stewardship of Minnesota's water resources, to assist in and provide training and testing of service providers. Minnesota Waters increases the DNR's capacity to fully implement this training and permit requirements in 2012. Training materials are near completion and will be uploaded to the Webpage when finalized in mid-January 2012. Dates and locations of trainings will also be uploaded to the webpage as soon as they are determined. The first trainings will begin in late January, will run through March, and will be held across the state.

Persons working for service providers are also required to complete DNR aquatic invasive species training. Training for these individuals will be online. Those service provider employees taking this training will log into a training webpage, complete the training (about AIS, laws, and precautions), and upon completion receive a printed certificate. This online training will be made available by March 2012.

The DNR will begin accepting service provider applications and application fees in January 2012. The service provider application will be online, so service providers must refer to the Webpage to apply for the permit. Upon receipt of an application, a \$50 application fee, and verification of training a permit will be written and mailed. The service provider permit must be in possession while providing any

services and will be valid for 3 years. Keep checking back to the service provider webpage for additional information on the application and training dates and locations.

### **AIS Rules Decal**

The AIS Rules Decal has been finalized and it is out for bid to produce (see Figure 1 on last page). The decal is 3.125" wide X 8.0" inches tall and includes a smaller separate "check the drain plug" decal that can be cut off and placed on the trailer to remind boaters to replace their plug before launching. The decal will be silver with black printing. The decal is being bid with and without the additional "check the drain plug" portion. We have developed a distribution plan that includes sending out decals to those who issue boat licenses, boat dealers, DNR offices and State Parks, etc. We will also distribute the new decal at boat and sporting shows starting in January.

### **Enforcement**

The Division of Enforcement continues to target their efforts towards enforcement and education which have been proven as critical roles in reducing the spread of aquatic invasive species. This type of natural resource enforcement is relatively new, so updates and training will be mandated by the division. We will continue to monitor and evaluate our actions to provide the most effective measures available. We will work with the public and private entities on legislative issues to provide enforcement with the tools necessary to assist in controlling the spread of AIS. We emphasize this as priority work and it is now included in Enforcements core responsibilities.

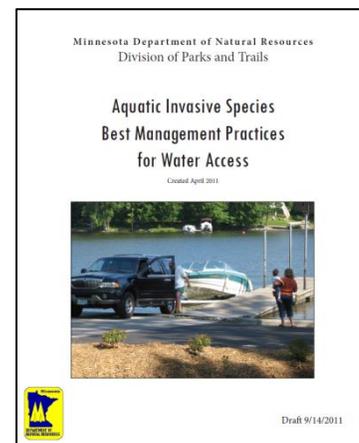
2011 Accomplishments – Conservation officers worked 13,629 hours on invasive species enforcement and held 287 specific aquatic invasive species (AIS) work details which included 5,463 contacts. In 2011, there were 487 written citations and 355 written warnings issued statewide. This is compared to 159 written citations in 2010. The primary violation was failure to drain water and/or pull the drain plug. Conservation officers worked closely with authorized inspectors to implement the new inspection authorities.

Planning for 2012 - For the remainder of this winter and into the spring, Water Resource Enforcement Officers (WREOs) will develop plans for education and enforcement of invasive species laws that are customized to the geographic areas they patrol. These plans focus on both species and activities that are unique to these areas. Other tasks include developing protocols and obtaining the equipment to safely and effectively administer AIS checkpoints and to plan training for law enforcement agencies.

Local Training – As was done this year, Local, County and State law enforcement agencies will be sent inquiries to determine their interest in obtaining AIS enforcement training. A list will be developed and the training will be provided regionally in late winter through early spring. All enforcement efforts are directed toward the goal of compliance to prevent the future spread of AIS and to receive complete buy-in from all involved parties.

### **BMP's for Accesses**

As recommended by the stakeholder and as part of the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) increased efforts to reduce the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS), the DNR has developed AIS Best Management Practices (BMP) for water accesses. These guidelines can be used by providers of public and private boat access facilities to create designated areas for AIS prevention activities to take place. The basic premise is to create a visible and functional area at the access where boaters can clean and drain boating equipment.



The goal of these BMP's is to provide a level of consistency and familiarity for boaters in and around designated AIS prevention areas, increase AIS awareness at boat accesses, and provide a safe environment for all types of access users.

The suite of BMP's can be implemented at varying levels as access sites vary in size, use and infrastructure, There may be cases where it is not necessary to employ a full range of options due to the sites location and type of use it receives.

High use sites on infested lakes and rivers will be the highest priority for BMP implementation. The extent of what can be accomplished will be influenced by program budgets. The approach to managing access sites with this particular set of BMP's may change over time as access providers become familiar with strategies that are most effective and new methods or technologies are developed.

In 2012, DNR Parks and Trails will begin to make \$500,000 of modifications to DNR water accesses. A list of priority access is being developed.

Draft BMP's can be found at: [http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/invasives/water\\_access\\_bmps.html](http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/eco/invasives/water_access_bmps.html)

**Stakeholder input opportunity:** *If you would like to provide comments on the draft BMP's, please submit comments to Nancy Stewart [nancy.stewart@state.mn.us](mailto:nancy.stewart@state.mn.us) by January 14, 2012.*

### **Prevention Grant Programs**

We are in the process of revising our prevention grant opportunities for 2012 and allocating funds for the four categories of prevention grants. Our goal is to provide grants to local partners for local public awareness and watercraft inspections. We propose to offer three levels grants for inspections including:

- 1) Public awareness projects
- 2) DNR provides match of local partners cost share for DNR authorized Level 1 inspectors at their local waters,
- 3) DNR provides match of about \$8/hour to LGU's who hire their own Level 1 inspectors (trained and authorized by the DNR),
- 4) DNR provides match of \$12/hour to LGU's who hire their own level 2 inspectors (trained and authorized by the DNR) and the LGU is responsible for obtaining their own decontamination unit.

**Stakeholder input opportunity:** *We have included a draft of the proposed allocation of funds for the prevention grant programs for this year and the criteria for evaluating the proposals. We welcome your input and request that you provide your comments to Jay Rendall [jay.rendall@state.mn.us](mailto:jay.rendall@state.mn.us) by December 28, 2011.*

### **Fishing Tournaments**

- 1) In 2011, watercraft inspectors worked 66 fishing tournaments statewide.
- 2) In 2012, fishing tournaments will be a priority for DNR inspections and decontamination efforts at accesses, with priority of inspecting anglers leaving zebra mussel infested waters. Fisheries will team with the AIS Program to conduct AIS inspection and decontamination demonstrations at 5-7 large contests held on high-profile, zebra mussel infested lakes. The goal is to teach organizers how to lead and implement inspections and decontamination at tournaments and be proactive in providing AIS messaging and actions to tournaments anglers.

3) In 2012, all Fisheries tournament permits will use the same language regarding AIS inspections:

**Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Related Permit Conditions -**

Minnesota Statute, Chapter 84D prohibits:

- Participants must comply with state aquatic invasive species laws
- The transportation of aquatic plants and prohibited invasive species such as zebra mussel on any road; and
- The placement of any watercraft or trailer into State waters that has any aquatic vegetation, zebra mussels, or prohibited invasive species attached.

Minnesota Statutes section 84D.10, Subdivision 4 (a) states, “when leaving waters of the state a person must drain water-related equipment holding water and live wells and bilges by removing the drain plug before transporting water-related equipment off of the access site or riparian property.” Water-related equipment includes bait containers which must be drained when leaving all waters. The drain plug and other water draining devices must be removed or open while transporting.

- Tournament sponsors will require inspections of all watercraft when entering or leaving tournament waters. Inspections will include a thorough search, inside and out, for the presence of any aquatic plants, and prohibited invasive species, including zebra mussels.
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- No boat may be launched when entering tournament waters until all aquatic plant material, prohibited invasive species (e.g., zebra mussels), and regulated invasive species (e.g., spiny waterfleas), and unlisted invasive species (e.g., faucet snails) have been removed and properly disposed of, and until all live wells and bilges have been drained.
- Participants must drain boat-related equipment holding water and live wells and bilges by removing the drain plug before transporting the watercraft from tournament waters.
- Unwanted live bait may not be released in to the water or dumped on shore. It must be disposed of in the trash.

**Public Awareness**

- Web – the DNR’s invasive species web page has been revamped to make it easier to access information on aquatic invasive species. Key categories of information include DNR contacts, news and announcements, Identification and Management, Make a Difference (How you can help), programs and other information. Specific new pages include info for lake service providers and invasive species management. We have also a new link on the DNR homepage under “find it fast.” More edits and additions are ongoing and planned for this winter.  
Go to: [www.mndnr.gov/invasives](http://www.mndnr.gov/invasives)
- The 2012 Fishing Regulations have been revised with new information including a new listing of infested waters by lake-name. There will now be 11 pages in the fishing regulations for invasive species information including a back page color ad showing zebra mussels in a lake.
- AIS Documentary – The 2011 Legislation required DNR to issue a grant for the production of a documentary on AIS for boaters. Through a competitive grant process, the DNR awarded a \$50,000 grant to Lindner Media Productions to develop a documentary on aquatic invasive species. The grant requires three products to be developed including a 15-20 minute documentary, a shortened

*Invasive species are a threat. DNR is working hard on the issue. Citizens have an important role to play.*

5-7 minute version and a 1 minute trailer for the documentary. The documentary will cover the problems associated with invasive species and what boaters and anglers can do to help prevent their spread. Zebra mussels, quagga mussels, Asian carp and Eurasian watermilfoil will be the focal species. The final products are due on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2012. One thousand DVDs will be available for distribution and the products will be posted on the DNR website.

## **PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE**

### **Legislative initiative for 2012**

We have already begun to discuss changes and develop preliminary language. These will be run through the process of developing initiatives for the Governor. Some of the legislative ideas that are being discussed for 2012 include:

- Increased authority to require removal of boats, docks, boat lifts, or delay time before moving to another lake;
- Additional authorities to require inspections;
- Ability to delegate authority for inspection to LGU's; and
- AIS certification for watercraft operators.

### **Evaluation of Statewide Prevention Strategies**

The DNR hired the consulting firm, Thompson Engineering, to evaluate costs, infrastructure requirements, feasibility and pros/cons for implementing and enforcing statewide prevention systems for aquatic invasive species (AIS). The evaluation is focused on strategies that would require inspections in various forms including: mandatory inspections before launch, mandatory inspections for boaters leaving infested waters, and red lake/green lake. The information will be included in a report to the legislature and to help inform policy discussion during the 2012 legislative session. The report is due to the DNR in mid-January.

### **Additional Staff for 2012**

In order to better deliver program functions and meet some of the increased demands for prevention and management activities, the DNR is hiring additional staff. Currently we are interviewing candidates to fill three Invasive Species Specialist positions (one vacancy, two new) in the metro, Sauk Rapids and Hutchinson. These new positions will provide for two Invasive Species Specialists in each region (total of 8 specialists). The Invasive species specialists are the primary contact for the public for AIS issues in their respective work areas. This includes both prevention related activities and management of invasive aquatic plants.

The DNR just posted openings for four regional inspection program supervisor positions. The new supervisors will be responsible for hiring and deploying the authorized inspectors (Level 1 and 2) within each region. With the ramp up of inspectors (approx. 100 level 1 and 46 level 2 inspectors) the supervisors are needed to manage the increased workload statewide.

*Invasive species are a threat. DNR is working hard on the issue. Citizens have an important role to play.*



Figure 1. New Aquatic Invasive Species Rules Decal (silver background with black writing), December 2011.

**Update contributors:**

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