

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) can be devastating to the natural systems in a water body or watershed. AIS, which come in many different forms, can be extremely difficult to detect until well past the point where they are well established and unlikely to be removed. Other than the removal of invasive fish by killing all the fish in a water body with rotenone or drawdowns allowing complete freezing, there are no accepted methods of eradication of AIS such as Eurasian milfoil, curly-leaf pondweed, Zebra mussels, spiny water flea, rusty crayfish in Minnesota's waters and the only response available is control. Current method of control requires extreme diligence and perpetual funding for personnel and equipment.

AIS DYNAMICS

The most frequent method of AIS movement is through human assistance – the movement of boats, docks and other equipment from one place to another. AIS are not spread by continual translocations of species to infest waters. A single transmission is enough to doom a system to terminal infestation. The only possible successful program is one that is comprehensive and goes far beyond a “best efforts” attempt.

The methods of AIS movement control are relatively simple in concept but difficult in practice. These include:

- Awareness about AIS and their devastating effects
- Prohibition of movement of AIS
- Inspection/decontamination when moving boats, docks and other human elements
- Significant penalties for moving AIS

Minnesota is blessed with an abundance of surface water resources (lakes and streams) and a culture of freely moving recreational activity from one public lake to another. There is significant resistance to a change of this culture. But this culture creates a strong vector for the spread of AIS. The result is a rapid spread of AIS once they appear in the state. The effects are devastating.

AIS PREVENTION ATTEMPTS

While many other states levy severe penalties for transportation of AIS, the past efforts to significantly increase the penalties have not been successful in Minnesota. There is little personal consequence (\$50) for those people transporting so-called aquatic hitchhikers. Prohibiting the movement of boats, docks and other structural elements is not likely to be embraced by the public either.

There is significant public and legislative interest in the AIS issue. The question for the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council is, “What role should the Outdoor Heritage Fund play in funding programs that address AIS?” The Council has voiced support for programs with a reasonable chance of stopping the spread of AIS but has been reluctant to recommend funding for efforts that are just focused on slowing the spread. The logic is that the Outdoor Heritage Fund could be entirely consumed by efforts to slow a growing group of invasive organisms in Minnesota's waters but this would not over time change the outcome - AIS establishment in all suitable aquatic environments throughout the state.

REASONABLE ACTIONS

As a result of the cost and futility of funding long-term control, the best strategy for dealing with AIS is prevention of their movement from one water body to another. What does have a chance for some success is the restriction of access to a water system by boats, docks and other human elements unless they are part of a rigorous inspection and decontamination program and combined with advanced eradication or population control methods. Done in conjunction with accelerated research into bio-control, chemical control and mechanical control which is not the focus of the Outdoor Heritage Funds, there is some reasonable basis for public investment into AIS transportation prevention efforts.

LSOHC REQUESTS AND RESPONSES

The Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council has seen requests to address AIS in Minnesota over the last few years. Since its inception, the Council has recommended significant funding for control of carp in shallow lakes. It has also recommended funding for barriers to prevent new species of carp from moving further upstream. Both provide a reasonable chance of permanently addressing threats to aquatic habitat by specific species.

The council has also seen requests for control methods addressing other AIS issues such as zebra mussels, Eurasian milfoil and curly-leaf pondweed or efforts to voluntarily inspect/decontaminate boats, docks or other human elements. The latter have been focused on what is referred to as “personal responsibility” as a basis for the success. These efforts are commendable but fall short of having any real chance of successfully stopping the spread of AIS.

The 2015 Call for requests specifically identified “Programs Protecting, Restoring or Enhancing Fish Habitat Under Unique or Special Threat” as an area of emphasis. There were several proposals that came in that fall specifically under that category.

The Council heard testimony on two proposals for AIS management in its FY 15 Call for Funding Requests. Neither fully addresses the effectiveness issue as they do not cover activities 100% of the time nor require inspection/decontamination 24/7. The proposers are to be commended for their commitment to addressing this issue but it would seem that it might make more sense to look at developing a pilot program to allow for a better understanding of how to effectively address this issue based on HAIS-4 rather than fund either of the programs we have before us.

We know the legislature is interested in this issue as they modified our recommendations last year’s to include funds for AIS which the Governor eventually vetoed. But the Governor encouraged the Council to look at ways to effectively engage with the AIS issue.

A PROPOSAL FOR THE COUNCIL

A reasonable strategy might be for the Council to take the concept of HAIS-4 offering grants for AIS

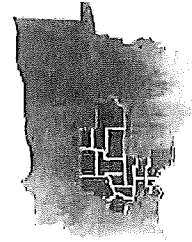
containment through inspection/decontamination stations and ensure grants meet the following criteria:

- A closure to ALL non-inspected boats, docks and other human elements by the owners/managers of ALL those access points in the watershed, including private landowners;
- An agreement to fund the inspection/decontamination stations' operational costs going forward after the availability of OHF appropriation has ended;
- Eligible recipients would be watershed units, counties, cities, agencies of state government, tribal agencies, SWCDs or other qualified organizations. To be eligible to receive funds, applicants would have to guarantee agreement of all parties to the prevention plan in a given watershed, including state authorities.

Since the DNR has not shown enthusiasm in AIS inspection/decontamination, it probably makes sense to look to someone who would embrace the opportunity to lead such an effort. Most likely this would be an independent non-profit organization familiar with the issue and equipped to manage a grant program which would most likely be a Minnesota based community foundation. They could be appropriated funds through an agreement with the commissioner of natural resources. The NGO would be charged with identifying the pilot location and the entities participating in the program. The NGO would be responsible for the management of the partnership and the deliverables. Funds would be available for five years. The suggested appropriation is \$3,000,000.

Possible outcomes include:

- # and % of the watershed reporting 0% increase in AIS infestation
- # and % of recreational boaters who have complied with mandatory inspection of watercraft
- # and % of recreational boaters who have gained a greater understanding of the transmission of AIS
- # and % of lakeshore and riparian property owners who have complied with mandatory inspection of watercraft, docks, and other structures
- # and % of participating agreement entities which have included on-going funding for the project in their operational budgets



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September 18, 2013

David Hartwell, Chair
Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council
95 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Mr. Hartwell;

The Initiative Foundation is very interested in exploring the opportunity to assist in the administration of a grants program to foster innovative programs to prevent the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species of plants and/or mussels. Since 1999 we have offered the Healthy Lakes and Rivers Partnership (HLRP) program, which has assisted community-lead organizations to develop strategic Lake Management Plans with specific work plans, time lines, budgets, project management, and metrics for evaluating impact.

Nearly 300 lake, river, or watershed organizations have participated in the HLRP program across 25 counties. We have demonstrated expertise in working with a wide range of stakeholders and allies of surface water management, including volunteer organizations, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, Lake Improvement Districts, Watershed Districts, law enforcement agencies, nonprofit organizations, and state regulatory agencies, including the Department of Natural Resources, Pollution Control Agency, Agriculture, and Bureau of Water Resource Management.

For the past decade issues associated with best practices for prevention and/or management of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) have become a high priority for a majority of communities that participate in the program. We share the concerns of some on the Lessard-Sams Outdoor Heritage Council on how to best evaluate intended and unintended consequences of AIS management, which strategies are most effective (and financially sustainable) for AIS prevention, and what the proper mix of non-regulatory programs (including education, visitor/user contact, and personal responsibility) vs. regulatory (permits, mandatory inspection, user fees). A grant program which allows pilot communities to design and implement a sound strategy to evaluate impact of AIS prevention measures would benefit the entire state through demonstration of success, as well as any "lessons learned" about what is not effective.

As background for LSOHC members less familiar with the Initiative Foundation, we are one of six regional community foundations created in 1986 to support community and economic development throughout greater Minnesota. Although our service area is the 14 counties of central Minnesota, we routinely partner with the other Minnesota Initiative Foundations (MIFs) and metro-based partners when program demands require. I have been associated with the HLRP program since 1999, and have over thirty years of experience in aquatic ecology, water chemistry, and environmental biology, and would welcome the opportunity to manage this project.

Sincerely,

Don R. Hickman
Vice President of Community and Economic Development