

Christmas Lake AIS Program 2024 Program Report

This report provides a year-end look at the 2024 aquatic invasive species (AIS) program conducted at the Christmas Lake public access.

- Section I provides an Executive Summary of the 2024 AIS program along with our intentions for 2025
- Section II provides a summary of the costs of the program, historical comparisons, and a breakdown of the sources of funding for the program
- Section III provides perspectives on AIS in Minnesota and a smarter way to help prevent the spread of AIS
- Section IV was prepared by Waterfront Restoration, our services provider. This separate report provides an analysis of the data collected by the inspectors as a part of the AIS inspection process. It also includes information on species of greatest concern that we hope to keep out of the lake

We hope this program report helps make sense of what we are doing to prevent the spread of AIS into and out of Christmas Lake, how we are doing on this important effort, and our thoughts on a better way to protect more lakes from AIS.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any suggestions, comments, or questions.

Thank you,

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Christmas Lake AIS Program

2024 Program Report

I. Executive Summary

We are happy to report that 2024 was a year with few surprises, and no new aquatic invasive species were identified in the lake. Quite frankly, that's the best possible outcome from our efforts.

Our Christmas Lake AIS program is focused in four key areas:

1. **Inspection and Decontamination** - We strive to inspect every watercraft entering the lake to prevent the introduction of another aquatic invasive species or another strain of one of the species that have already infested Christmas Lake.
2. **Coordinated dock and lift installations and removals** - We work to intentionally limit the number of dock and lift service providers to further reduce the introduction of a new AIS into Christmas Lake.
3. **Dedicated trailers** - We work to limit the number of commercial trailers that haul watercraft into and out of Christmas Lake.
4. **Early detection and control** - We strive to know about an infestation of a new species as soon as possible to increase our control options, and we look to leverage proven science as well as research opportunities to gain greater control over AIS that are already in Christmas Lake.

Each of these areas requires volunteer support along with coordination and communications with lake residents. And we couldn't do this work without our public sector partners: the AIS Research Center at the U of MN, Hennepin County, and the City of Shorewood.

Our AIS program is expensive, and most of the expense is from the contract for AIS inspection services. Unsurprisingly, those costs went up significantly in 2024 due to a rate increase and the longer than normal season for our inspection program as inspections started earlier than normal due to ice-out in March.

The coordinated dock and lift program worked well, but a few uninspected barges were seen on the lake after our inspection program stopped on October 31. That represented some degree of risk which we may want to address for the future.

The dedicated trailers program worked well for inboards and pontoons, but it does not handle tri-toons which are becoming more common on Christmas Lake. To that end, we are considering the acquisition of a trailer that can handle both pontoons and tri-toons.

We were pleased with the 2024 AIS program and plan to continue operating in this same model in 2025.

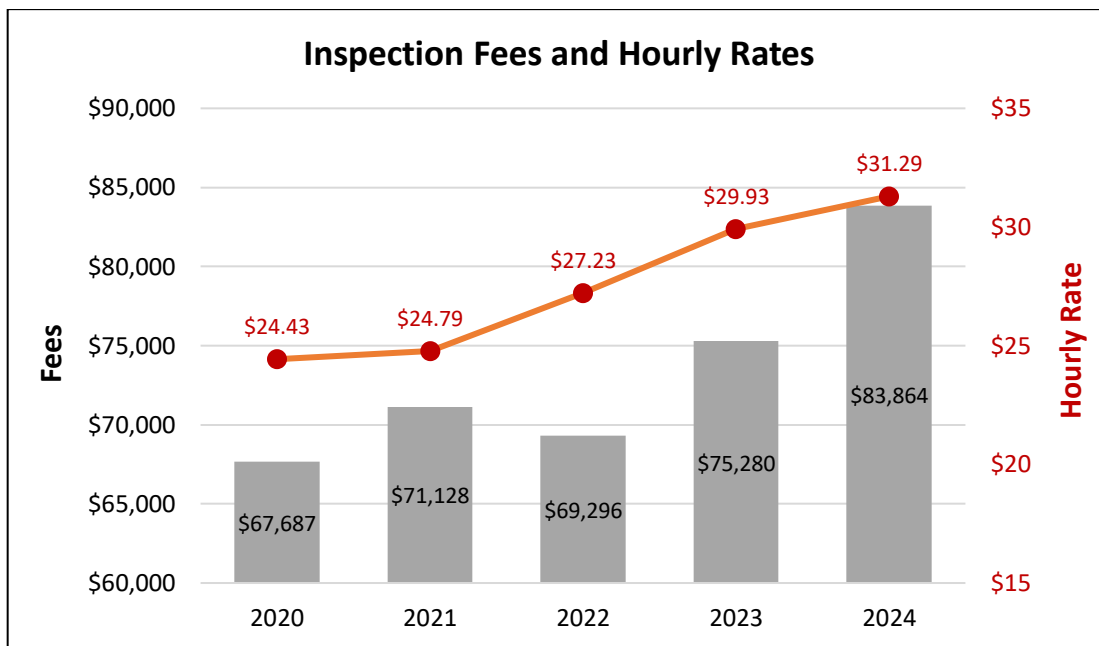
Christmas Lake AIS Program 2024 Program Report

II. Costs

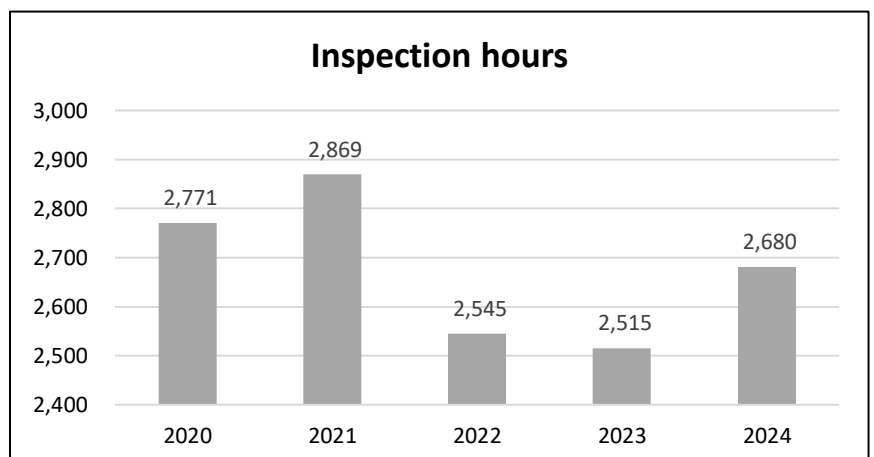
The total costs for the 2024 AIS inspection and decontamination program were \$87,924.

	2020 Expenses	2021 Expenses	2022 Expenses	2023 Expenses	2024 Expenses
Inspection fees	\$67,687	\$71,128	\$69,296	\$75,280	\$83,864
Operating supplies & maintenance	\$2,308	\$2,100	\$2,785	\$2,140	\$2,035
Technology infrastructure	\$660	\$660	\$774	\$1,672	\$2,024
Total expense	\$70,655	\$73,888	\$72,855	\$79,092	\$87,924

The largest variable in the cost of the program is inspection fees, and the change from last year was significant. The inspection hours were higher than last year by 165, and when coupled with a higher per hour rate than last year, the inspection fees were \$8,584 higher than last year.

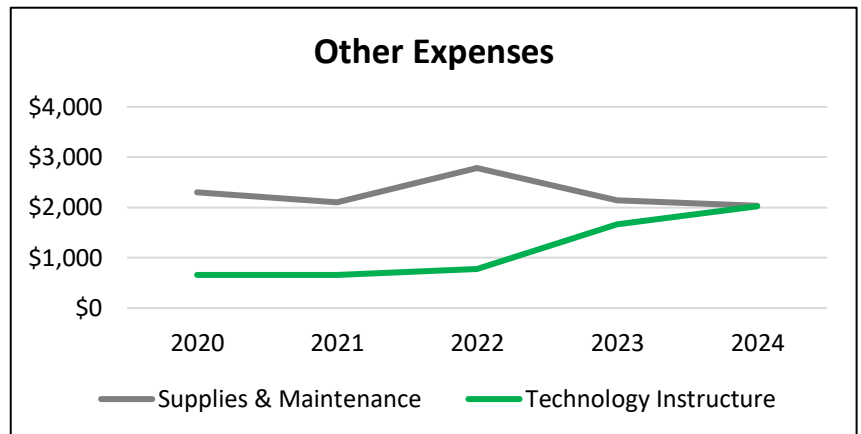


To limit the inspection fees, we cut the hours of operation after dark as well as seasonally. Other than starting early based on early ice-out we made no other structural changes in 2024 as we are pleased with the current model. The lake is well protected during the peak summer season with AIS inspectors on duty from 6 am to 9 pm, May 1 through August 15.

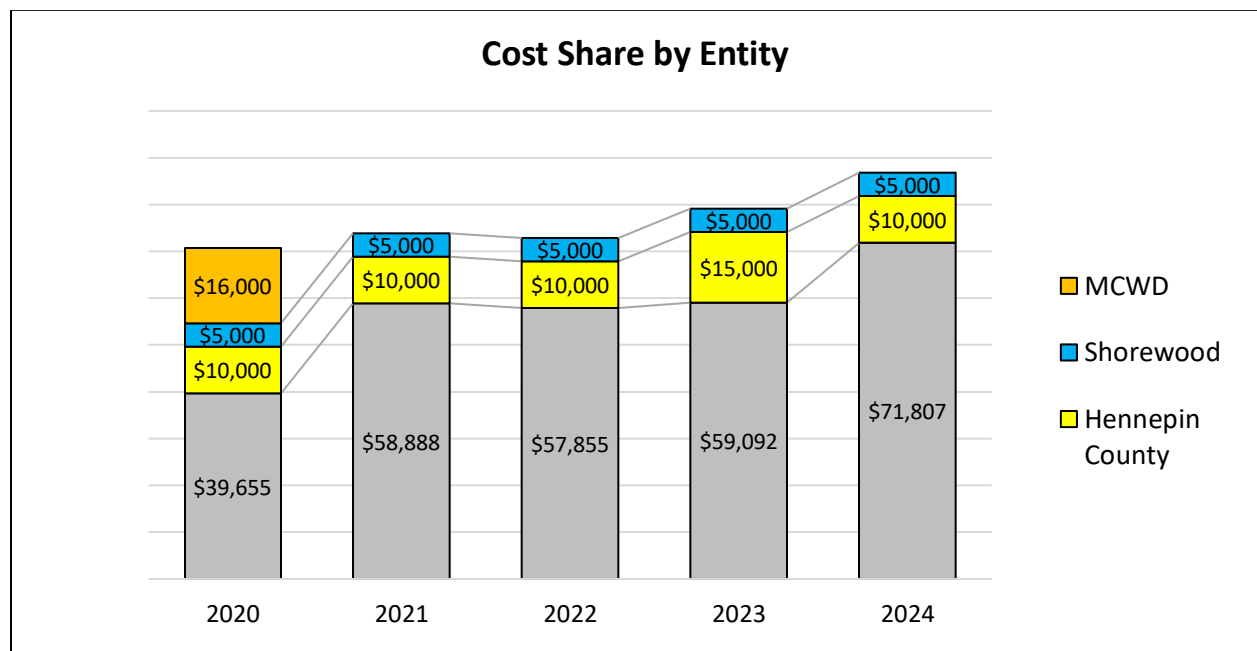


Christmas Lake AIS Program 2024 Program Report

The Christmas Lake Homeowner's Association owns and maintains the decontamination unit that stays on site at the boat ramp. Maintenance costs were lower this year due to fewer decontaminations and lower winterization costs, however we are now including our Christmas Lake Homeowner's Association liability insurance cost into the AIS Program for a more complete cost picture.



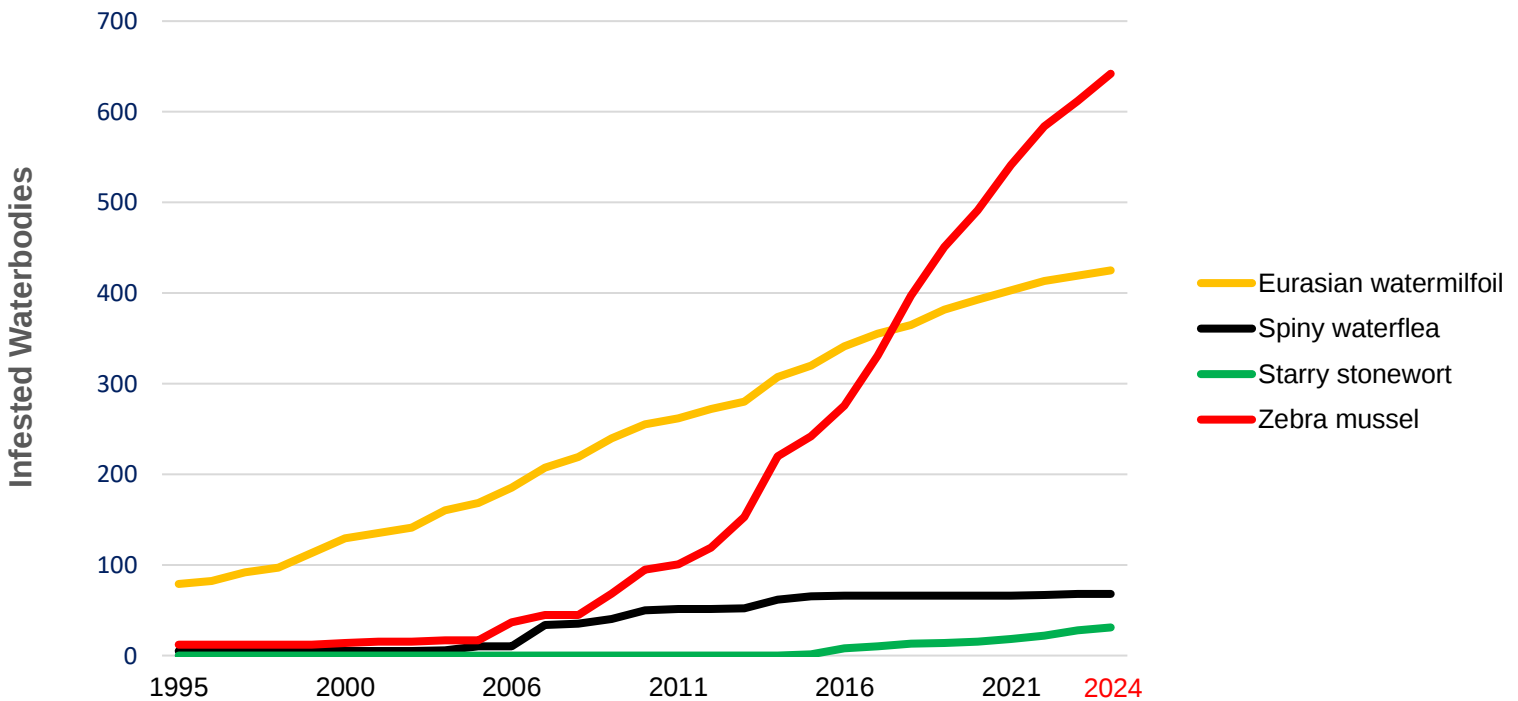
The 2024 costs were split between 3 entities with \$5,000 (6%) coming from the City of Shorewood, \$15,000 (19%) from Hennepin County's portion of the State's AIS Prevention Aid, and \$59,092 (75%) from the Christmas Lake Homeowner's Association. Funding from the Minnehaha Creek Watershed District ceased in 2020.



Christmas Lake AIS Program 2024 Program Report

III. The Bigger Picture

As evidenced in the graph below, the State's approach to stopping new AIS from entering the state and preventing the spread of AIS within the state has simply not worked well enough.



Data from MN DNR's Infested Waters list – October 31, 2024

The State's program is better than doing nothing, but it has not achieved its goals. As of the end of 2024, a huge percentage of the surface water of the State is now infested with one or more AIS.

Today, too many lakes are left unprotected without AIS inspections. And as a result, infestations keep increasing. AIS inspections are not perfect, but they represent the best tool in the toolbox to stop the spread of AIS. At-landing AIS inspections coupled with decontamination is what we use at Christmas Lake, and it is the best we can do to protect the lake from the next invasive species.

You may ask, "why doesn't every lake do what Christmas Lake does?" The answer comes down to money and leadership.

The annual Christmas Lake Homeowner's Association dues are now \$625 per household, and most of that is used to cover the AIS program. Not every lake has the financial support needed to bear the cost of this kind of a program.

Christmas Lake AIS Program 2024 Program Report

And not every lake has the leadership to galvanize the property owners to take on the burden of protecting “their” lake. Many property owners falsely believe the Minnesota DNR, or the County will protect “their” lake. The chart above tells the real story.

That said, there is a smarter model that could be used for AIS inspections beyond today’s at-ramp inspection model.

While inspecting boats at the point of entry into a lake is the most convenient approach for the boater, it unfortunately represents the costliest approach to prevention.

A mandatory regional AIS inspection model can protect more lakes at a lower cost per landing. With regional inspections, a centrally located AIS inspection station would be set up to service several lakes, and every boat intending to launch in one of those lakes would be required to be inspected at the central facility prior to launch.

This kind of a regional AIS model has been defined in state statute for over ten years, but only one pilot regional inspection project has been allowed by the Minnesota DNR and it ran for just one year.

The City of Shorewood and Hennepin County could, and should, lead the efforts in our area to leverage the laws already on the books and implement mandatory regional AIS inspection stations.

And the Christmas Lake Homeowner’s Association is willing to expand our public/private partnership, and to be a key player in a regional AIS inspection program to protect more lakes at a lower cost per ramp cost. The pilot project already sorted through the process and procedures, but it takes political will at the local level to make this a reality.

Let’s start that dialogue in 2025!