

Aquatic Invasive Species Program Evaluation Report

Purpose

Since 2014, Hennepin County receives funding from the State of Minnesota to implement plans to prevent the introduction or limit the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). To receive funding, the county must establish guidelines for the use of the proceeds. In 2019, county staff undertook an evaluation process to consider changes to the guidelines. The report summarizes the evaluation efforts and changes made to the guidelines to direct the use of funds received 2020 through 2025.

Survey

A survey was sent to 63 key stakeholders from lake associations, governmental organizations and county environmental experts. The county received 30 responses from the following partners:

- 17 responses from private sector and private associations.
- 8 responses from government agencies or organizations.
- 5 responses from Hennepin County environmental staff.

Summary of survey finding

The following are key findings from the survey results. The full survey responses are also being made available to partners.

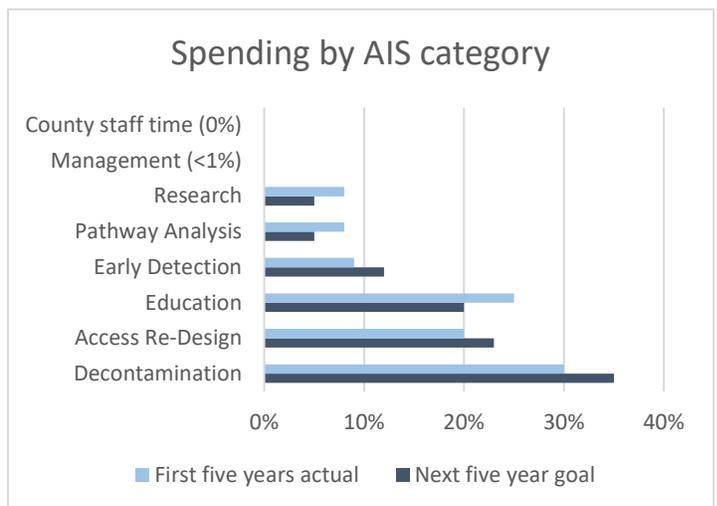
- Respondents found the county's AIS work in preventing and slowing the spread of AIS as extremely or very effective. Open-end responses noted that many respondents didn't have enough information to evaluate the county's work.
- When evaluating the relevant principles for the original guidelines, respondents found the most relevant principles today are to:
 - Support early detecting efforts
 - Be innovative, support new ideas and improvements. Don't just support existing programs
 - Give local partners a voice and support with pass-through grants.
- A number of respondents suggested new principles to consider fostering education and learning among partners, multi-purpose or collaborative projects, and sustained funding for projects.

- Respondents on average suggested about half of the funds be award through the grant process and the remaining funds be used to support projects initiated by staff to fill in gaps between project categories or pursue opportunities with timelines that don't align with the annual grant process.
- Respondents supported the county dedicating a portion of the funds for on-going projects such as supplementing existing public boat access inspections and access re-design rather than accessing those funds through a grant application process.
- When evaluating how funding is spread over 7 main categories, respondents want to see more funding spent on access redesign, early detection and education. Respondents suggested less funding spend on management and pathway analysis.
- Responses were complementary about the county's program and staff. Additional suggestions for improvement included:
 - Developing clear statement of mission, goals, objectives and quantifiable measures for the program.
 - Providing more information about the grant projects and results, analyzing what works best and facilitating the opportunities to share that information with partners.
 - Incorporating a panel of experts to review proposals and visit grant sites in person to evaluate and see first-hand the need for funding.

Summary of changes to the guidelines

Establishing funding guidelines by category

Based on past expenditures and feedback from partners, the county has established funding goals by categories to ensure the AIS prevention program is comprehensive. The percentage of spending by category will likely fluctuate from year to year, but the county will strive to match expenditures with the following percentages by category. Note, similar to the previous five years, none of the state AIS funding will be used for county staff time or training to administer the AIS Prevention Aid.



Funding allocations for project

The county will allocate about one-third of the funding by first to on-going watercraft inspection programs. This will help partners plan accordingly without the need to re-apply for a grant each year. Of the remaining funds, approximately 50 percent will be made available to partners through the AIS Prevention Grants, and the rest of the funds will be directed by county staff to fill gaps and focus on priorities. Approximately 50 percent of the remaining funds will be made available to partners through the AIS Prevention Grants solicitation process, and the rest will be directed by county staff. New inspection programs are encouraged to apply for grants under the grant solicitation process.

Enforcement/randomizing inspections

Having inspectors on site at public accesses is an effective way to ensure people are taking the necessary actions to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive species. Predictable inspection hours at public accesses ensure gaps of time when boaters know that they will not find an inspector present, leaving an accountability gap, and a higher risk of AIS

introduction during those times. Based on a boater behavior research, a minimal investment to provide additional AIS enforcement at unpredictable times throughout the county could have a significant impact on improving adoption of AIS prevention behaviors.

Early detection

To increase early detection efforts, the county will be partnering with the University of Minnesota to host AIS detection classes specifically for Hennepin County residents. The county will continue to promote the opportunity for local lake members to conduct an AIS survey/search on their lake with an AIS identification expert.

More proactive approach to access redesign

Currently, 20 percent of public accesses in Hennepin County have some level of AIS prevention re-design. Hennepin County has 45 public accesses on lakes and 11 public accesses on rivers. County staff will take a more proactive approach by conducting an inventory of AIS prevention re-design needs throughout the county and willingness of access owners to partner with the county of improvements. The goal is to create a prioritized list and address access improvements in a strategic manner. No access will be addressed without the willingness of a local partner and only at a level they can support.

Supporting research and sharing information

The MN DNR, the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center, and others are providing some exciting breakthroughs and new direction for AIS prevention programs. The county will incorporate these findings and recommendations into evaluation and prioritizing of project funding. The county will also provide more information about the grant projects and results, analyzing what works best and facilitating the opportunities to share that information with partners. During the winter months, Hennepin County will initiate information sharing among partners by sharing AIS Prevention project results and hosting gatherings to discuss results, trends, and best practices.,

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