

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Aid Guidelines

2020-2025

Background

Hennepin County has received funding from the State of Minnesota since 2014 to implement plans to stop the introduction or limit the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). AIS are “non-native, aquatic organisms that invade water beyond their natural and historic range” (Minnesota Statute 477A.19). AIS may harm economic, environmental or human health and threaten our natural resources. A list of prohibited, regulated and unregulated non-native species is available at dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/laws.html.

The Minnesota State Legislature appropriates \$10 million annually to Minnesota counties (Chapter 308, H.F. No. 3167: Omnibus tax bill) for this work, and Hennepin County receives about \$317,000 annually. To receive funding, the county must establish, by resolution or adoption of a plan, guidelines for the use of the proceeds. A copy of the county's guidelines for use of the proceeds must be submitted to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources by December 31 of the year funding was received.

In an effort to spur innovation and allow for flexibility, there are few limitations on how the funds can be used as long as it is consistent with state statute, which requires that the county develop guidelines for the use of the AIS prevention funding. Suggested activities include, but are not limited to, providing for site-level management, countywide awareness, and other procedures that the county finds necessary to achieve compliance. Counties may appropriate the funds directly or provide any portion of the proceeds to other groups, such as local units of government, park districts, joint powers boards, watershed districts and lake associations. After a stakeholder engagement process, the county board approved the AIS prevention aid guidelines in 2014 (Resolution #14-0438) that included key guiding principles that directed the AIS prevention work through 2019.

Many of the projects were conducted by partners who received pass-through grants from the county, while others were implemented by county staff. Funding was used for inspections at public accesses, outreach and education, early detection and monitoring, research, boat cleaning facilities and more. More information about the grants and accomplishments of this work can be found at hennepin.us/AISprevention.

In 2019, county staff undertook an evaluation process to consider changes to the guidelines. A survey was sent to 63 key stakeholders from lake associations, governmental organizations and county environmental experts. The survey had a 48% response rate. The survey results were shared with those surveyed and the findings were used to make adjustments to the county's AIS prevention aid guidelines to direct the use of funds received 2020 through 2025.

Changes to the guidelines include: updating the goals to reflect the Natural Resources Strategic Plan; defining the county's best practices for public water access design; emphasizing unpredictability in inspections; setting funding by category goals to ensure the program is comprehensive; funding of core program functions of enforcement at public water accesses and public access redesign project outside of a grant solicitation process to help partners with long-term planning and streamline administrative tasks to implement public access redesign work.

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The following guidelines serves as the basis for deliberate and thoughtful planning and implementation of the state AIS prevention aid. Additionally, projects are to meet the county's natural resources strategic goals:

- Waters are clean and healthy.
- Landscapes are diverse and functional and natural areas are preserved.
- Fosters effective partnerships.
- Motivates environmental stewardship
- Leverages financial resources.

Address all pathways

AIS can be spread throughout the county via numerous pathways and behaviors. Each pathway can have a higher or lower risk depending on the water body and the specific AIS. Funds will be used to address the five major pathways:

- Aquarium trade
- Gear and equipment
- Live bait
- Recreational watercraft
- Retail plant trade

The county's AIS program will support projects that are consistent with current science, sound cost/benefit analysis and reflect the values and culture of Minnesota's water traditions.

Address behaviors of spread and provide education

To be most effective, educational efforts should focus on engaging audiences and raising awareness about aquatic invasive species through interactive displays, hands-on materials, and messaging close to where people need to be taking action. Projects should use proven behavior change techniques to address behaviors that are specific to the pathway and culturally appropriate for the individuals.

Support innovation, incremental improvements and cost-effective methods

The funds are to be used to support innovation and reduce risk associated with trying new ideas. The funds can also be used to make incremental improvements that are supported by current research, programmatic evaluation and cost-effective methods. The funds are not intended to be used to replace work that is already being completed with other resources.

Improve facilities

Beginning in 2021, staff will work directly with partners, both private and public, to re-design public water accesses and improve facilities to make it easier for boaters to take the right actions.

The county's current behavior change strategies at public water accesses include:

- Self-service waterless cleaning system that provides the tools for boaters to take appropriate actions
- Pavement markings to influence traffic flow
- Designated locations to take aquatic invasive species prevention measures
- Signs to prompt the desired behaviors.

Inspections and additional enforcement

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 provide 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. Funds are to be used to provide additional AIS enforcement at unpredictable times at public water accesses throughout the county.

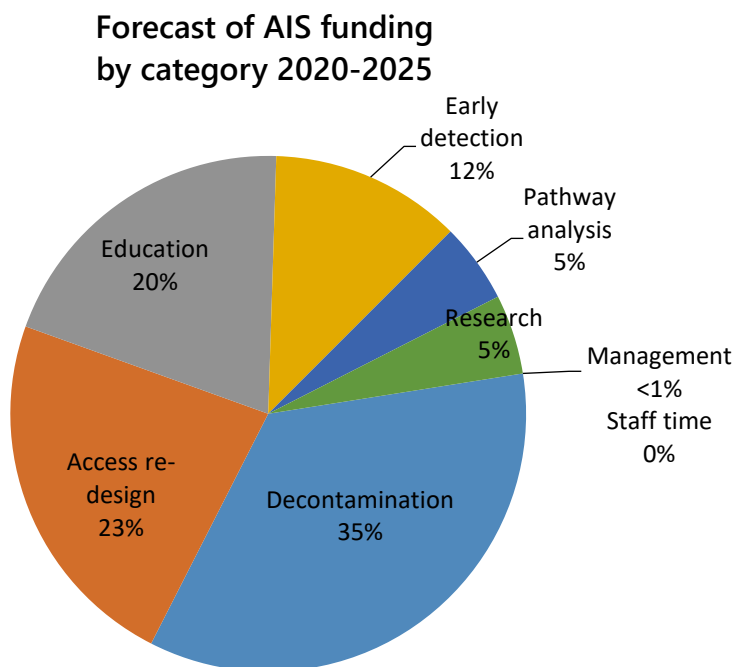
Early detection and rapid response

Early detection efforts involve training citizen volunteers to work alongside scientists to conduct lake surveys as well as to look for signs of aquatic invasive species. These efforts focus on early detection of aquatic invasive species where management options may still be available. Some of the funds will be reserved to support rapid response plans if prudent. For any rapid response action, the county would partner with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and/or local units of government.

Funding allocations

The county will allocate about one-third of the funding to ongoing watercraft inspection programs. 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. The county will solicit applications for the grants once a year through a Request for Proposals process. Working directly with local partners will continue to be a high priority with all county-directed projects.

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 during the next five-year guideline time period to ensure a comprehensive program. None of the state-provided AIS funding will be used for county staff time or training to administer the program.



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