

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Aid for Counties: A Resource Guide

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Introduction

Building capacity at county, watershed and regional levels is critical to combatting spread and impacts of AIS. How can Prevention Aid be best used? How can staffing be approached? Are there existing campaigns or programs? What are the best strategies, methods and tools? How can they be delivered? Based upon previous successful efforts, county strategic action plans can be effectively developed, implemented and evaluated. This resource guide is not intended to be prescriptive. Rather, it is intended to provide a menu of strategies from which counties can choose based on need and desires to help them get the best bang from their Prevention Aid.

Considerations for County Staffing and Program Development

Using Prevention Aid, a county may consider hiring staff in three ways: 1) temporary or permanent term county staff, 2) pool county prevention aid for temporary or permanent term regional positions (e.g., Extension) where appropriate, or 3) hire consultants via contracts.

In counties with substantial Prevention Aid and/or are large geographically, hiring county-based staff may be most appropriate. Counties with relatively few waterbodies resulting in little Prevention Aid may choose to consider putting resources into a regional position who develops a multi-county plan, recognizing the differences in individual county needs and benefiting from inter-county consistency, and implements plan. Counties that have no interest in creating new positions may consider hiring plan development and/or implementation through contracts or other arrangements. Another alternative is to issue a request for proposals (RFP) and set up a proposal review process to select funding awards to qualified recipients such as lake associations, conservation groups, non-profits, etc.

Successful Campaigns and Programs

Critical to addressing the spread of AIS is attacking pathways for spread. Various pathways exist including: boating, angling, sailing, personal watercraft use, scuba, sea planes, waterfowl hunting, non-motorized watercraft, aquarists, water gardeners, live study specimens, lake service providers, aquaculture, research, fishing tournaments, live seafood, construction equipment, and shoreland restoration. Several existing campaigns and programs have been created that are effective in addressing these pathways:

Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!TM <http://www.protectyourwaters.net/>

HabitattitudeTM <http://www.habitattitude.net/>

Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point <http://www.seagrants.umn.edu/ais/haccp>

Nab the Aquatic Invader <http://www.iisgcp.org/%5C/NabInvader/index.html>



**STOP AQUATIC
HITCHHIKERS!**



HabitattitudeTM
PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT
DON'T LET THEM IN WITH AQUATIC INVASERS



Communication and Education Tools

Over 100 communication and education tools exist that can be adapted or adopted by counties. Sources include:

Wildlife Forever (<http://www.wildlifeever.org/invasive-species/threat-campaign/new>), University of Minnesota Sea Grant Program (<http://www.seagrants.umn.edu/ais/publications>), Minnesota DNR (http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/ais_ads.html), and many, many more. There is no sense reinventing the wheel when tried and proven strategies and tools exist.

Strategy and Implementation

Counties can either accept Prevention Aid by either passing a resolution or by approving a plan with guidelines for use of proceeds. Passing a county resolution to accept proceeds with guidelines is fine. But, having a more comprehensive plan can help get counties the “best bang” for Prevention Aid. Several existing plans exist that can help counties develop their plans. In 2009, *A Minnesota State Management Plan for Invasive Species* (<http://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/eco/index.html>) was federally approved providing an excellent framework for developing a watershed, county and local strategic and implementation plan. Specifically for Northeast counties, the Lake Superior AIS Complete Prevention Plan (http://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/lakesuperior/ais_draft.html) was also federally approved that identifies pathways for spread and establishment of AIS and recommends prevention actions to “close the door” to and from Lake Superior. County water plans are also an appropriate starting point to integrate a new AIS plan or build from existing AIS plan elements.

Developing a strategic protection plan is critical to most effectively addressing AIS pathways in each county. Every county has its own risks based on spread via various pathways, proximity to established AIS infestations outside the county, established AIS within the county, access (public and private), and habitat. Several strategies are identified below that serve as a menu for counties to choose from for development of a plan. Each county has its own risks and varying amount of resources available in Prevention Aid, so being able to pick and choose what each wants to emphasize provides needed flexibility.

Objective 1 – Conduct Assessments of County

- 1.1 Conduct qualitative assessments to determine extent and magnitude of pathways (i.e., boaters, water gardeners) for introduction of AIS in the county.
- 1.2 Determine vulnerability of county waters to introduction, establishment and spread of AIS, including identifying vulnerable waters based on associated pathways in that county.
- 1.3 Assess AIS that are greatest threats – aimed at preventing new and slowing spread of existing species.
- 1.4 Map current hot spots to highlight priority areas to be addressed.

Optional Strategic Guidelines for Plan Implementation

Build upon previous objectives to develop a comprehensive strategic plan with specific guideline objectives that will maintain and improve protection against AIS in counties.

Objective 2 – Protect County Through Public Outreach

- 2.1 Join and implement campaigns and programs like *Stop Aquatic Hitchhikers!*TM, *Habitattitude*TM, and *Nab the Aquatic Invader*.
- 2.2 Adapt and adopt existing or develop new communication, outreach and education tools.
- 2.3 Educate residents and non-residents about prevention of AIS through talks, booths, workshops, and meetings.
- 2.4 Signs for public water accesses, public service announcements, radio and news ads, news releases, stock footage and text (see DNR website), billboards and social media.
- 2.5 Facilitate holding HACCP training workshops for entities conducting field operations.
- 2.6 Distribute list of prohibited and regulated species in Minnesota.
- 2.7 Conduct assessments (e.g. surveys) of public awareness and behaviors toward AIS.

Objective 3 – Protect County Through Watercraft Inspection/Decontamination & Enforcement

- 3.1 Facilitate DNR trainings of local citizen volunteers or AIS Ambassadors (background check required) who conduct AIS education at public accesses (see DNR website).
- 3.2 Complete delegation agreement with LGU* (see DNR website).
- 3.3 Educate public through trained volunteers and Ambassadors, hired by an LGU and authorized by DNR, to be at water accesses.*
- 3.4 Educate public and inspect watercraft by watercraft inspectors hired by LGUs and trained by DNR (plan needed here).*
- 3.5 Purchase decontamination equipment by working cooperatively with the Minnesota DNR.
- 3.6 Gather survey data from recreational water users.
- 3.7 Support training for local law officers on AIS regulations and enforcement.

Objective 4 – Protect County Through Monitoring, Early Detection and Rapid Response

- 4.1 Develop and implement citizen volunteer AIS monitoring program.
- 4.2 Integrate and coordinate monitoring activities within the county for all agencies, research institutions and organizations in the county, including those who are currently or have previously conducted AIS monitoring such as Minnesota Sea Grant, Minnesota DNR, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency, and Minnesota Waters.
- 4.3 Train and educate citizen volunteers and provide equipment to monitor lakes, rivers, and wetlands.
- 4.4 Provide data into common format so it can be shared across all counties.
- 4.5 Document and graphically present monitoring results.
- 4.6 Ensure that the assessment data are presented in a comprehensive way in a single, publicly available resource using documents and a web site.
- 4.7 Identify unassessed waters for possible monitoring.
- 4.8 Assess safety of waters for drinking purposes.
- 4.9 Assess monitoring efforts for early detection.
- 4.10 Educate public about prevention of AIS through monitoring efforts and assess awareness.
- 4.11 Respond to suspicious sightings by the public, assist identification and extent of potential infestation, and respond by coordinating activities with entities with appropriate federal, state, tribal, and local authorities and as well as county interests.

Objective 5 – Minimize Impacts on County Through Management and Control

- 5.1 Conduct management and control (e.g., herbicides, mechanical control, biological control) of existing infestations of invasive aquatic plants including: Eurasian watermilfoil, curlyleaf pondweed, purple loosestrife and flowering rush, especially newly discovered infestations.

Objective 6 – Coordinate and Maintain Partnerships Between State and Local Interests

- 6.1 Coordinate with state agencies, education institutions, environmental consultants, and other interested parties to conduct research exploring and establishing characteristics of waters and wetlands that may make them more vulnerable to AIS. Use this research to help identify areas most at risk, increase monitoring, and target potential pathways for spread with best management practices.
- 6.2 Coordinate with state agencies, education institutions, environmental consultants, and other interested parties such as the University of Minnesota AIS Research Center to conduct field research on experimental management of AIS.
- 6.3 Coordinate activities with adjacent counties, especially those within the watershed, to develop and implement plans intended to disseminate information about AIS and AIS best management practices.

Objective 7 – Support Evaluation Showing Progress Toward Plan

- 7.1 Develop and administer questionnaires or surveys to assess participant pre- and post-event awareness and behaviors (note: many tools already exist)
- 7.2 Use assessment results to better understand, target and improve management of AIS communication and outreach.
- 7.3 Share results with state agencies, education institutions, and other interested parties.
- 7.4 Report progress made toward plan. Example endpoints: estimate number of acres controlled, amount of invasive species collected, number of waterbodies protected, number of water users exposed to prevention messages (e.g. impressions), increased reductions in violation rates, etc.