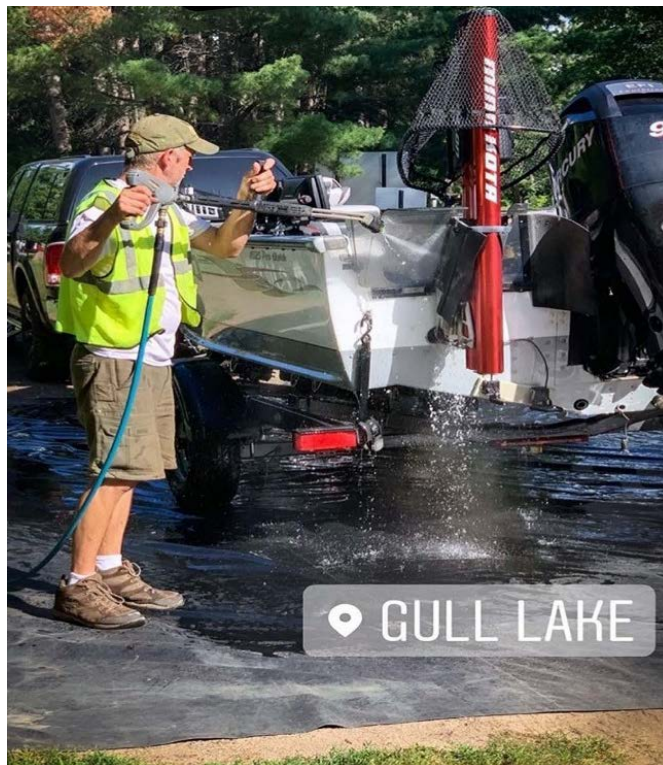


Cass County

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention & Management Plan



In Cooperation with:

Minnesota Department of Natural
Resources

and the

Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe

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Mission Statement:

“The mission of the Cass County Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Task Force is to collaborate on the development, enhancement and implementation of a comprehensive County-Wide AIS Prevention and Management Plan to progressively work towards minimizing the spread of AIS throughout Cass County and the State of Minnesota. “

I. Introduction

Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) are an increasing threat to Minnesota’s lakes and rivers. AIS change aquatic ecosystems and disrupt water recreation. Since many of the species of AIS have very few known predators, they are very difficult to control. Minimizing the number of new infestations is the main purpose of this plan.

Continue to Clean, Drain, Dispose and Dry strategy at all the accesses and having inspectors educate the public will help reduce introductions. Implementing these three strategies will increase protection to Cass Counties water resources.

Cass County currently has 525 lakes with public accesses and fourteen of these lakes are currently infested with AIS. The county has established a county wide inspection program that conducts around twenty thousand inspections each year. Based upon previous data, violations in 2017 were 1.8% and in 2018 were at 2.4% which may have been the result of the increase in the number of inspections. Violations for the 2019 season were at 1.9%, this meets the overall program goal to reduce the number of violations along with educating the public. The number of inspections in 2018 and 2019 were comparable. The county assists with inspections and decontaminations at five fishing tournaments and two boat races. As new opportunities arise Cass County will continue to be an integral part of preventing new aquatic invaders from reaching our waters.

Cass County formed and continues to utilize an AIS Task Force to develop a collaborative approach towards the management of AIS within Cass County. The AIS Task Force partners represent, but are not limited to, the Association of Cass County Lakes and its member lake associations and their collective memberships; the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources as well as other local, state and federal units of government and agencies; the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe; Chippewa National Forest; USACOE; Cass County Association of Townships and, the business community who benefits directly from the lakes, rivers and streams in Cass County.

II. Strategies

A. Education

A key component of Cass County's Prevention and Management Plan is to educate the public on the importance of reducing the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS).



1. Public Communication/Education

- Utilize local communication services including radio, TV, newspapers, billboards, social media, and other media outlets.
- Expand partnership opportunities with businesses and existing outreach efforts developed by the DNR, Sea Grant and other AIS informational distribution outlets.
- Employ resorts, service providers and other seasonal entities to educate the public by handing out county provided materials.
- Continue to expand the audience for public education literature and strengthen awareness of AIS issues in the county.
- Explore AIS education in schools and provide curriculum for interested teachers or schools.
- Provide opportunities to educate people on the importance of AIS during local events in Cass County.
- Provide AIS information to school systems across the County.
- Organize information for fishing tournaments and fishing league directors.

2. Educate businesses, lake access owners and local governments

- Educate appropriate lake related businesses and local government staff on how they can help prevent the spread of invasive species.
- Support lake association by providing educational materials and relevant AIS information.

- Develop educational materials that will describe the best management practices to be implemented in their businesses' daily activities to prevent the spread of AIS.
- Continue the AIS Resort Ambassador program. Continue to provide materials and educated resort owners on the dangers of AIS.
- Work with Lake Service Providers (LSP) businesses to make sure they are certified by the MNDNR. Promote Certified LSP's and other businesses.
- Develop a program for identifying private accesses.
- Support businesses and private access owners' prevention and educational AIS programs.

3. Collaborate with partners to help coordinate invasive species related efforts.

- Continue the development and participation of local partnerships (e.g., Mississippi Headwaters Board, Soil and Water Conservation Districts, lake associations, counties, municipalities, townships, and other citizen groups) to address invasive species using landscape and watershed approaches.
- Develop and maintain contacts with other organizations and government entities. (Bemidji State University, One Watershed One Plan, Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center, Minnesota Association of Cass County lakes, and Minnesota Lakes and Rivers).
- Maintain open lines of communication between federal, state, Leech Lake Band and local governments to encourage the sharing of up-to-date information on new AIS research, outreach and education methods, and monitoring/survey data for AIS on County lakes and rivers.

4. Prevention

- Implement established protocols for the inspection and decontamination process.

5. Risk Review

- Review the risk for each waterbody. If we know what waterbodies are at the highest risk, we will be able to focus limited resources to better prevent new infestations.
- Installation of traffic counters will help Cass County determine which lakes receive the most pressure by tracking boating traffic that enters and exits lakes and rivers. It will also help evaluate the risks for lakes by quantifying recreational tendencies
- Review the variety of pathways of introduction to local waters and educate businesses, local governments, and the general public.

6. Work with DNR to publicize new infestations

- Publicize in lake association newsletters.
- Notify the general public in local and regional publications.
- Notify local Lake Associations.
- Follow up with LSP's to make sure they are aware of new introductions or infestations.

7. Promote healthy lakeshore habitats to prevent Aquatic Invasive Species Infestations

- Promote healthy shorelines and enhanced stewardship among private lakeshore property owners through education and outreach.
- Work with Cass County and other resource agencies to strengthen and enforce shoreland ordinance requirements.

B. Inspections/Decontaminations

Cass County has conducted more than 70,000 inspections since the start of the program in 2015. Public accesses are a main point of contact for the County's lake users. Face to face interaction with the public is one of the best ways to ensure lake users are informed on the AIS laws. The program is constantly enhancing the program by adding inspectors and decontamination units. Collaborating with lake associations and townships has been crucial to the success of and will continue to enhance the program.

1. Watercraft inspections

- Conduct watercraft inspections at water accesses use, trained and certified level 1 and level 2 inspectors. Emphasize the educational aspect of the inspections will help people understand that it is their responsibility to prevent the spread of invasive species.
- Using risk identification guidelines and car counter data to produce a list of high risk and high use accesses including non-public accesses.
- Deploy inspectors at high risk and high use accesses.
- Utilize inspectors for special events and fishing tournaments as needed. Connect with tournament directors to utilize inspectors for their events.

2. Decontaminations

- Staff and maintain the established decontamination sites: Federal Dam, Gull Lake Dam, and Crooked Lake Town Hall in Outing.
- Work with lake associations and townships to acquire more decontamination units.
- Establish a written agreement for each new unit on staffing and maintenance of the unit.
- Cass County will send the required inspectors to level two training conducted by the MN DNR. Decontaminations will be done according to the DNR standards.
- Work with the Leech Lake Band on the acquisition of a decontamination unit.

C. Enforcement

Enforcement can have a major influence on how a local population conforms to AIS laws and regulations. The support of local law enforcement can help reduce the threat of spread by providing informational guidance of what is acceptable and/or unacceptable behavior regarding AIS laws and regulations. It is important for the public to be informed, understand, and be held accountable to the laws and regulations set in place.

1. Peace Officers

- Utilize peace officers to conduct level 1 inspections.
- Use peace officers from various jurisdictions/agencies to enforce state regulations (e.g., M.S.84D - civil penalties) and conduct training where appropriate.
- Increase AIS law enforcement by ensuring peace officers within the county have been trained to enforce AIS laws.
- Train an enforcement officer to specialize in AIS laws and serve as a point of contact subject matter expert for other county staff. This action contributes to the efficient use of allocated resources, and time, to extend the reach of public awareness and regulatory compliance with AIS laws. These efforts do not supplant other government units in the provision of watercraft inspections, but rather seek to expand and/or complement their efforts.
- Create, renew or expand patrolled enforcement by AIS trained peace officers.
- AIS enforcement officers patrol various roadways near infested lakes to issue compliance checks with AIS laws. This service can be effective at communicating the presence of law enforcement and help to educate lake users on the seriousness of AIS laws and the penalties for infractions.

D. Early Detection and Management

1. Utilize the Cass County Sheriffs Dive Team

- When AIS is reported, the Cass County Dive Team will be utilized to confirm the infestation.
- Searching non-infested lakes based on the proximity to infested lakes will also help catch infestations early.
- Dive team will use a grid pattern system to find possible AIS.
- Training will be provided to keep the team informed of techniques of finding new AIS.



Cass County Sheriffs Dive Team after diving for AIS in 2019

2. AIS Detector Program

- Continue scheduling detector trainings at least once
- Partner with ACCL to keep attendance up and keep them aware of the program.

3. Develop management strategies to detect new invasive species

- Identify local people and agencies that could identify invasive species.
- Perform routine vegetation sampling at each Public Access yearly and keep records of the species found.
- Develop communication and reporting mechanisms for citizen monitoring of lakes and rivers.
- Develop a program for shoreline residents to monitor for AIS.
- If AIS is discovered, make sure it is properly reported to MNDNR and confirmed quickly.
- Increase AIS identification and surveys by using lake associations, Resorts, and other entities. Handout early detection devices and equipment to do plant surveys
- Provide inspectors equipment to preform vegetation sampling.



Zebra Mussel found in leech lake by the Sherriff's dive team in 2019

4. Develop a Rapid Response Plan

- Work with local and government agencies to have a chain of command in place
- Obtain any additional equipment that will be needed.
- Utilize the Cass County Dive Team to determine the extent of the infestation

III. Appendix

List of Infested Waters in Cass County

Waterbody	Type of AIS	Year listed	Year confirmed/ connected
Bass (or Ray) Lake	Zebra Mussel	2010	Connected to Gull (11-0305)
Cass Lake	Starry Stonewort	2016	2016
Cass Lake	Zebra Mussel	2014	2014
Girl Lake	Eurasian Watermilfoil	2017	2017
Green's Lake	Zebra Mussel	2010	Connected to Gull (11-0305)
Ten Mile	Zebra Mussel	2019	NA
Gull Lake	Zebra Mussel	2010	2010
Gull River	Zebra Mussel	2010	2014
Leech Lake	Eurasian Watermilfoil	2005	2004
Leech Lake	Zebra Mussel	2016	2016 (veligers)
Leech Lake River between Mud Lake and Mississippi River	Faucet Snail	2010	2010
Margaret Lake	Zebra Mussel	2010	Connected to Gull (11-0305)
Pike Bay	Zebra Mussel	2014	2016
Spider Lake	Zebra Mussel	2010	Connected to Gull (11-0305)
Steamboat Lake	Zebra Mussel	2017	2017
Town Line Lake	Eurasian Watermilfoil	2009	2009
Unnamed stream connecting Pike Bay and Cass Lakes	Zebra Mussel	2014	Connected to Cass (04-0030)
Upper Gull River	Zebra Mussel	2010	Connected to Gull (11-0305)
Washburn Lake	Eurasian Watermilfoil	2009	2009
Lake Winnibigoshish	Zebra Mussel	2013	2012
Lake Winnibigoshish	Faucet Snail	2009	2008
Lake Winnibigoshish	Starry Stonewort	2017	2017
Hand Lake	Zebra Mussel	2019	2019