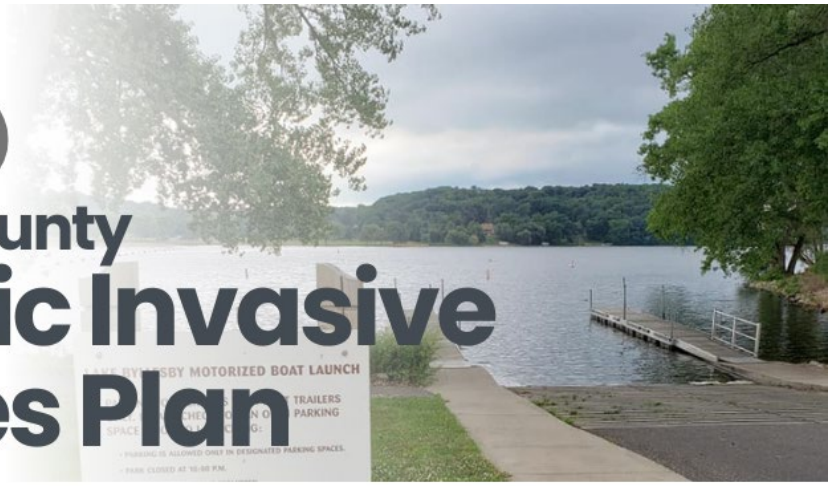
Dakota County
Aquatic Invasive Species Plan



2026-2030

Dakota
COUNTY

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Brad Becker – Dakota County Water Resources
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Cole Johnson – Dakota County Water Resources
Lindsey Albright – Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District

Acronyms

AIS – Aquatic Invasive Species
Committee – Dakota County AIS Advisory Committee
DCSWCD – Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District
Extension – University of Minnesota Extension
LGU – Local Government Unit
MN DNR – Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
VRWJPO – Vermillion River Watershed Joint Powers Organization
WMO – Watershed Management Organization

Special thanks to Dakota County residents, City, township, and WMO staff and representatives for participating in the plan development process. Your insights and assistance have been invaluable at every stage of this process and has been greatly appreciated by all involved!

Dakota County Aquatic Invasive Species Plan: 2026 - 2030
Adopted by the Dakota County Board of Commissioners on [INSERT DATE]

Plan prepared for the Dakota County Environmental Resources Department
by the Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District

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Introduction

Since the early 2000s, the introduction and spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS) has occurred at an alarming rate throughout Minnesota and continues to be a growing concern across the state. Residents in Dakota County are not immune to these concerns. The county is bisected by the Vermillion River (Figure 1), many lakes and wetlands pocket suburban neighborhoods, and three major rivers define all or portions of the County's northern, eastern, and southern borders (the Minnesota, Mississippi, and Cannon Rivers, respectively).

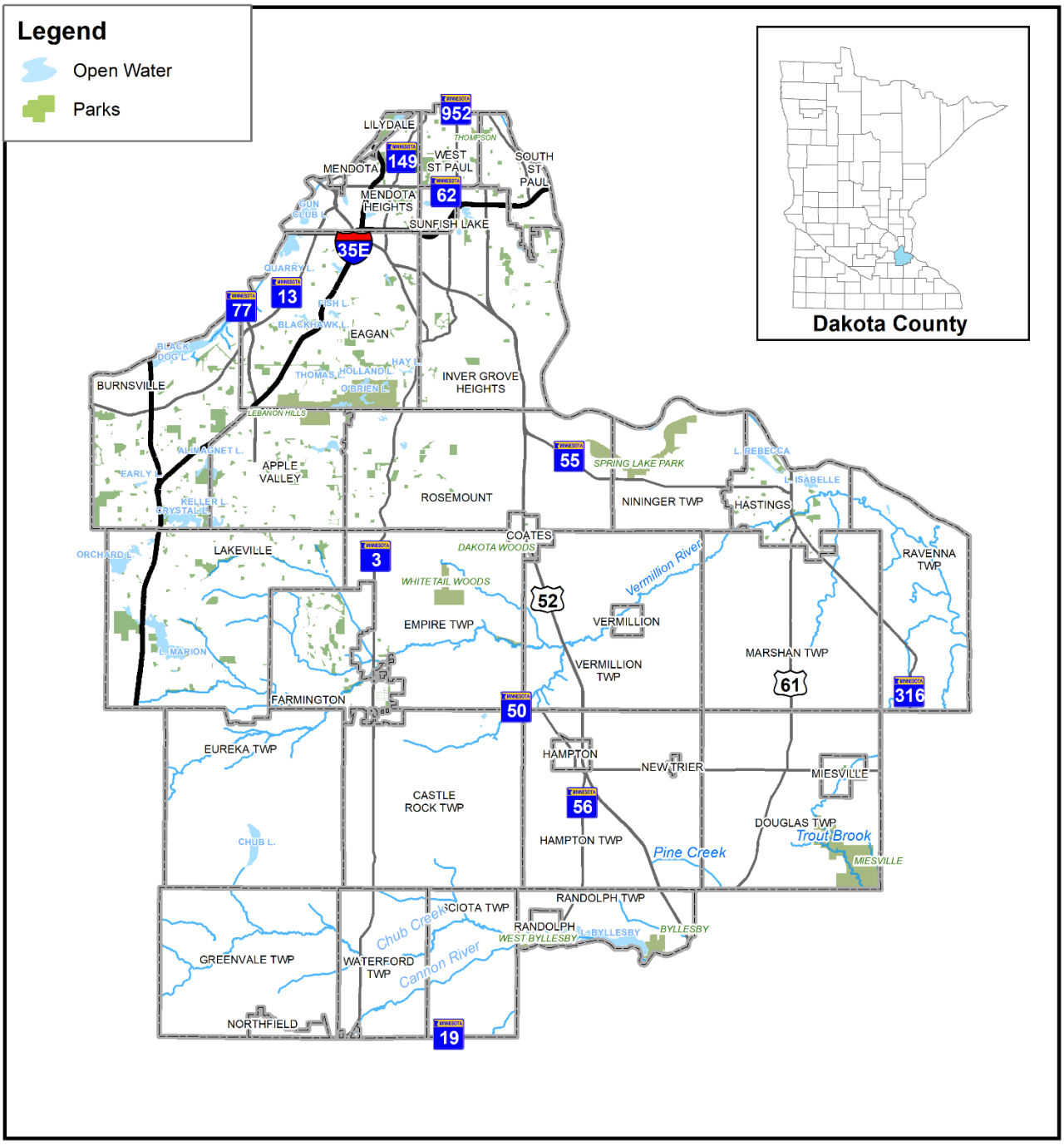


Figure 1. Dakota County waterbodies

The introduction of non-native species (fish, plant, invertebrate, and viruses and disease-causing microorganisms), unhindered by natural predators or disease, can cause quick, permanent, and detrimental alterations to a waterbody's ecosystem. As a result, these changes can have a negative impact on the recreational suitability of the waterbody which in turn, can impact the economic viability of the local community. AIS have already been detected in numerous Dakota County lakes and wetlands, as well as the Vermillion (including its tributaries), Minnesota, and Mississippi Rivers, though it can be assumed that undetected individuals or populations are present. There are several invasive species not currently found in Minnesota that have the potential to negatively impact the health of waters in Dakota County.

The Dakota County Aquatic Invasive Species Plan (Plan) serves to guide the use of annual funding provided to Dakota County from the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' (MN DNR) Local AIS Prevention Aid program. The plan outlines the strategies utilized by the Dakota County AIS Program to help prevent and manage the spread of AIS, within the county and greater Minnesota. Through this program, Dakota County aims to support existing monitoring and implementation efforts by local government units (LGUs), including lake associations and watershed organizations, fill gaps by monitoring waterbodies not currently covered by LGUs, assess AIS suitability within the County parks system (particularly Lake Byllesby), and promote County-wide outreach efforts.

Public boat launch at Lake Byllesby

The AIS program is overseen by the Dakota County Environmental Resources Department. In 2015, the Dakota County AIS Advisory Committee (Committee) was formed to provide ongoing management, oversight, and implementation of programs supported by the state AIS Prevention Aid funding. The Committee consists of Dakota County and Dakota County Soil and Water Conservation District (DCSWCD) staff members, with additional input from a broad range of stakeholders.

The Committee works with local, state and federal governments, as well as nonprofit and private organizations operating in Dakota County, to develop, implement, and support AIS prevention programs. Organizations and interested residents assist the Committee to better prioritize resources and develop workable strategies to prevent the spread of AIS in local waters. The Plan promotes engagement with stakeholders by a variety of methods including developing and coordinating outreach tools, providing training opportunities, and supporting strategies that adhere to best management practices to increase AIS awareness, monitoring, and management.

Dakota County Profile

Dakota County is 587 square miles in area and has a population of approximately 400,000. Situated in the southeast corner of the Twin Cities Metropolitan area, Dakota County is the third most populous county in the state of Minnesota. Founded in 1849, Dakota County was one of the original nine counties created by the Minnesota Territory Legislature, thus, it was established before Minnesota was considered a state. The County seat was first established in Kaposia in 1853, was moved to Mendota in 1854, and then moved to Hastings in 1857, where it currently resides. Mendota, directly across the river from Fort Snelling, became the first European settlement in Minnesota. Before European settlement, Dakota County was part of an expansive territory of the Dakota tribe of American Indians.

Dakota County features a land use ratio of approximately one-third urban, one-third suburban, and one-third rural. The confluence of two major rivers (the Mississippi and Minnesota) that form the county's northern and eastern borders further compliments Dakota County's unique geography. The County's development and history have been greatly influenced by its proximity to these rivers. Between 1990 and 2000, Dakota County's population grew by nearly 30 percent. Development has continued to move outwards from the urban core of Minneapolis and St. Paul into suburban municipalities (Burnsville, Eagan, Inver Grove Heights, Apple Valley, Farmington, Lakeville, and Rosemount), resulting in the dramatic increase in population in recent years.

What are Aquatic Invasive Species

According to the MN DNR, AIS are aquatic organisms that are non-native to Minnesota and cause harm to both the economic prosperity and natural resources of a given community or waterbody, as well as have potentially negative impacts on human health. Not all non-native species become 'invasive.' Some species fail to thrive in their new environment and naturally die off without harming the ecosystem. Others survive, but are unable to outcompete the native species, thus they ultimately coexist without destroying or displacing the native species.

Commonly found invasive aquatic plant species in Dakota County include curlyleaf pondweed, Eurasian watermilfoil, and purple loosestrife. Although less common, aquatic invasive invertebrates such as zebra mussels, rusty crayfish, and mystery snails are also present within the County.

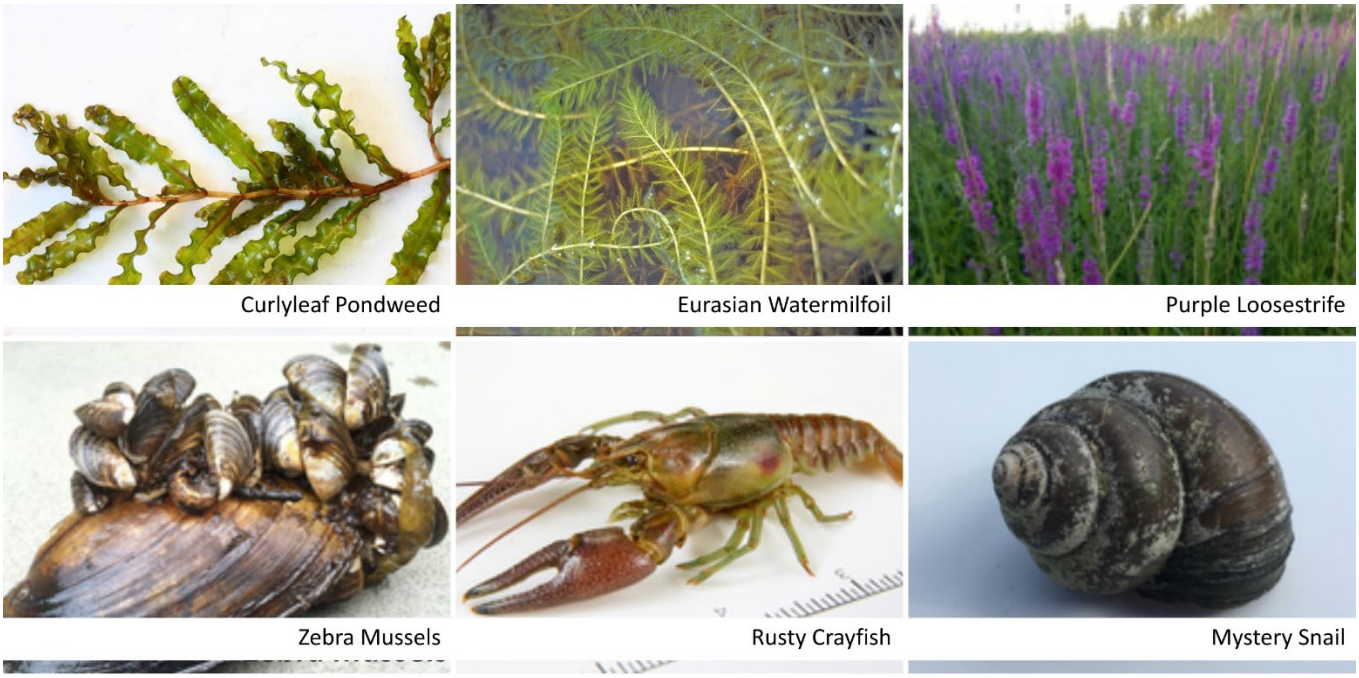


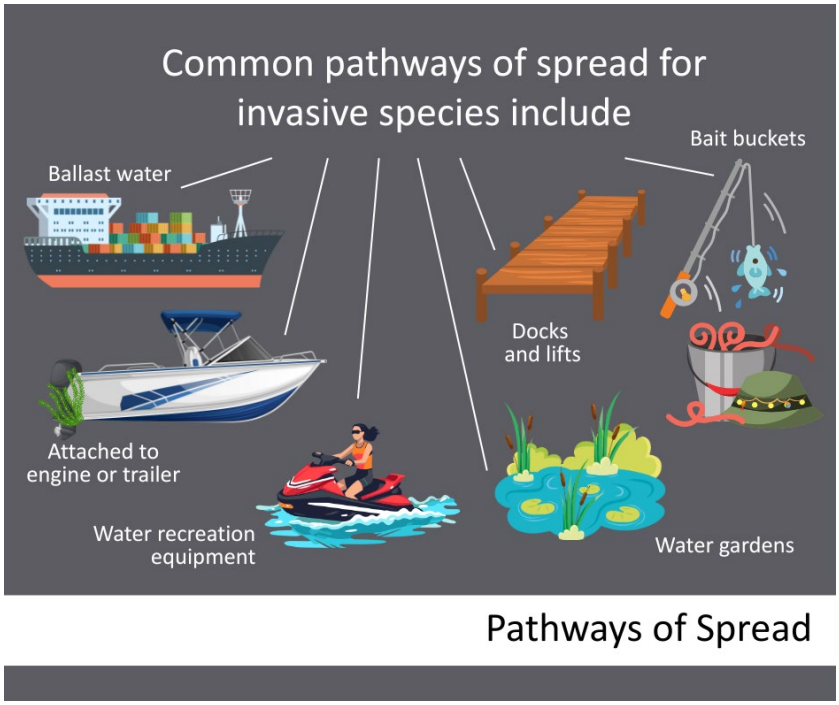
Photo credit (top L to lower R): Steve Eggers, US Fish and Wildlife, University of Minnesota Extension (photos 3-6).

The introduction and subsequent spread of AIS typically results in habitat alteration, ecosystem degradation, and a loss of biodiversity due to intensified competition for resources. AIS typically have few natural predators, reproduce rapidly, and are more aggressive than native species (which ultimately diminishes the success of native species). Along with negatively affecting aquatic wildlife, AIS have the potential to impede recreational opportunities and disrupt industrial, municipal, and agricultural uses of public waters.

AIS infestations often span geographic and jurisdictional boundaries; thus, it is critical to coordinate management and prevention strategies across watershed and political boundaries to address and mitigate the spread of AIS.

Pathways of Introduction and Spread

The means and routes by which species are introduced into new environments are called 'pathways' or 'vectors.' Invasive species introductions can be both unintentional and intentional by nature. Some invasive species are unintentionally imported, arriving through livestock and produce, by transport equipment such as packing material or in a ship's ballast water, or attached to an engine or boat trailer when moving between waterbodies. Other species are intentionally introduced to a lake or river for various purposes, but these species either escape from captivity or are carelessly released into the environment.



Pathways of Spread

Other pathways by which AIS can be introduced to an ecosystem include:

- Docks and lifts (moved from an infested waterbody to an uninfested waterbody)
- Water recreational equipment (i.e. water trampolines, rafts) and vehicles (i.e. tubes or jet skis)
- Waterfowl hunters/angler gear (i.e. waders and boots)
- Water gardens or shoreline restorations
- Bait buckets
- Wildlife

Although several attempts are often made to eradicate AIS from an infested waterbody, it is typically impractical to completely remove a population once it has been established. Working to prevent the introduction and spread of invasive species is the most effective way of protecting healthy, non-infested ecosystems.

Laws and Regulations

Current Minnesota state law prohibits the transportation of most aquatic plants. This law not only helps prevent the spread of Eurasian watermilfoil and other aquatic plants, but it also reduces the risk of zebra mussels or other invasive animal species from being transported while attached to aquatic plants. In addition, it reduces the inadvertent transport of other harmful plants into or within the state.

Under state law, it is unlawful to:

- Transport aquatic plants, except as allowed in statutes
- Transport zebra mussels and other prohibited species of animals
- Place or attempt to place into waters of the state a boat, seaplane, or trailer that has aquatic plants, zebra mussels, or other prohibited invasive species attached

Certain invasive species that can threaten natural resources and their use have been designated as *prohibited invasive species* in Minnesota. According to the MN DNR, it is a misdemeanor to possess, import, purchase, transport, or introduce these species except when under a permit for disposal, control, research, or educational purposes. Some of the prohibited invasive species found in Dakota County include Eurasian watermilfoil, curlyleaf pondweed, and purple loosestrife.

Other invasive species are considered *regulated invasive species*. It is legal to possess, sell, buy, and transport regulated invasive species, but they may not be released or planted in public waters. Both the rusty crayfish and the common carp are examples of regulated invasive species found in Dakota County. Other regulated species not currently found in Dakota County (as of 2025) include water hyacinth and spiny waterflea. A complete list of prohibited, regulated, and unregulated invasive species (both aquatic and terrestrial), as well as information regarding the transport of water and regulated activities in infested waters, can be found on MN DNR's website.

As of July 1, 2012, a boat lift, dock, swim raft, or associated equipment that has been removed from any waterbody may not be placed in another waterbody until a minimum of 21 days have passed. Regulations relating to the transportation of water in boats and other water-related equipment by boaters from all waters in the state include:

- A person leaving waters of the state must drain all water from water-related equipment, including bait containers, live wells, and bilges. They must also remove the drain plug before transporting the watercraft and equipment from the water access or riparian property
- Drain plugs, bailers, valves, or other devices used to control the draining of water from ballast tanks, bilges, and live wells must be removed or opened while transporting watercraft and water-related equipment
- Emergency response vehicles and equipment may be transported on a public road with the drain plug or other similar device replaced only after all water has been drained from the equipment upon leaving the waterbody
- The following are exempt:
    - Portable bait containers used by licensed aquatic farms
    - Portable bait containers used when fishing through the ice, except on waters designated infested for viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS)
    - Marine sanitary systems

Businesses that are defined by Minnesota law as lake service providers must attend an aquatic invasive species training and apply for a lake service provider permit every three years. Employees are also required to take an online training to be certified to work in Minnesota waters. More information about the lake service provider training and permitting process can be found on MN DNR's website.

AIS Best Management Practices

The MN DNR promotes several best practices that everyone can follow to help stop the spread of AIS:

- *Clean* all aquatic plants, zebra mussels, and other invasive species from watercraft, trailers, and water-related equipment before leaving any water access or shoreland
- *Drain* water-related equipment (boat, ballast tanks, portable bait containers, motor) *and* drain bilge, livewell, and baitwell by removing drain plugs before leaving a water access or shoreline property. *Keep drain plugs out* and water-draining devices open during transport
- *Dry* docks, lifts, and rafts for 21 days before moving them from one waterbody to another
- *Dispose* of unwanted bait, including minnows, leeches, and worms, in the trash; refill the bait container with bottled or tap water if planning on keeping bait

Clean In, Clean Out decal at boat launch

Some invasive species are small and difficult to see at the access. To properly remove AIS from your watercraft or other equipment, take one or more of the following precautions before moving to another waterbody, especially after leaving zebra mussel and spiny waterflea infested waters:

- *Spray* with high-pressure water
- *Rinse* with very hot water (120°F for at least 2 minutes; or 140°F for at least 10 seconds to kill zebra mussels)
- *Dry* for at least 5 days before using on another waterbody

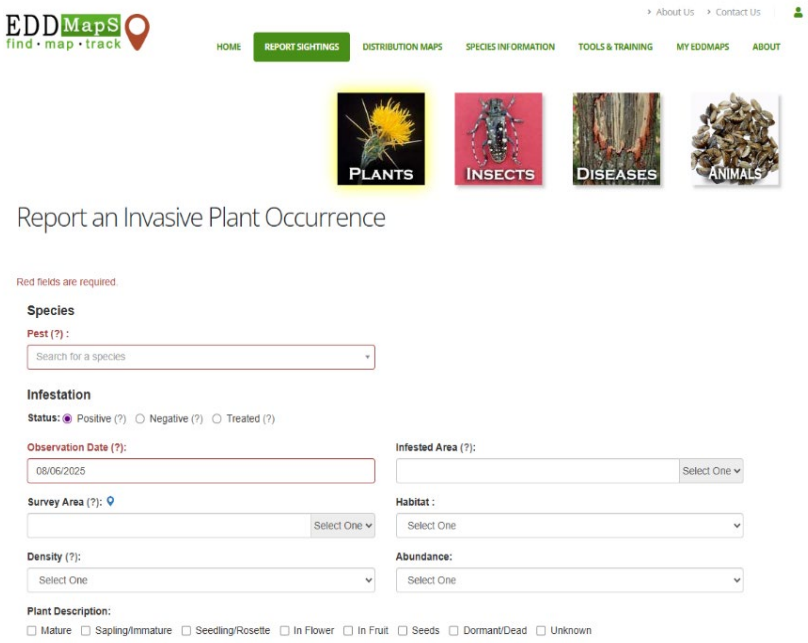
Dakota County has partnered with the MN DNR to make decontamination units available for public use in Dakota County and at other locations around the state. During a decontamination, DNR-authorized watercraft inspectors help boaters comply with invasive species laws and reduce the risk of spreading aquatic invasive species by thoroughly inspecting and cleaning boats, trailers, and other water-related equipment. More information about the decontamination process and locations can be found on the MN DNR's Courtesy Decontamination website.

Reporting AIS

Potential new AIS findings are to be reported to the MN DNR using EDDMapS Midwest, the invasive species reporting platform. The EDDMapS (Early Detection and Distribution Mapping System) is accessible through a desktop website, as well as a smartphone/tablet app to make it easy to report locations of invasive species while out in the field.

All data submitted through EDDMapS is reviewed by state verifiers at the MN DNR to ensure the accuracy of submissions. Once confirmed, infestation reports are freely available to scientists, researchers, land managers, landowners, educators, conservationists, ecologists, farmers, foresters, and state and national parks.

EDDMapS combines data from other databases and organizations, as well as volunteer observations, to create a national network of invasive species distribution data which is used by the MN DNR to track the spread of AIS in Minnesota. For more information about AIS in your area or questions about the AIS reporting process, contact a local DNR invasive species expert.



EDDMapS reporting page

Local AIS Prevention Aid Program

In 2014, the Minnesota state legislature passed a county aid tax bill (Chapter 308, HF3167: Omnibus tax bill. Article 1: Property Tax Aids and Credits. Section 11) providing $10 million annually to Minnesota counties to help prevent the spread of AIS. The distribution of funds is based on a calculation considering each county's share of watercraft trailer launches and watercraft trailer parking spaces. Dakota County is credited with having 15 watercraft trailer launches and 372 watercraft trailer parking spaces (Figure 2).

In July 2014, $4.5 million dollars was distributed to 87 Minnesota counties. In 2015 and thereafter, that value was increased to $10 million per annum. In accordance with the legislative directive (Minnesota State Statute 477A.19, Appendix D), Dakota County received $1,391,420 in state funding between 2014 and 2025.

In 2025, the legislature amended the AIS funding law, altering the available funding available henceforth. For aid payable in 2025 and 2026, $10,000,000 each year is annually allocated, whereas for 2027 and annually thereafter, $5,000,000 will be appropriated. The amount allocated to Dakota County will be consistent with past funding levels for 2025 and 2026 and is expected to be halved starting in 2027.

Counties are required by statute to establish and submit guidelines, either by resolution or through the adoption of a county plan, that detail how the Local AIS Prevention Aid funding will be used. Counties must use the funds to prevent or limit the spread of AIS at all accesses within the county. Funds may be appropriated directly, or a portion of the funds can be directed towards LGUs, park districts, joint powers boards, watershed districts and watershed management organizations (WMOs), as well as lake associations and non-profit groups located in the county, to be used for AIS prevention.

Each county is responsible for deciding how to best use the funds while abiding by all current laws and regulations at the state level. See more information about the Local AIS Prevention Aid Grant.

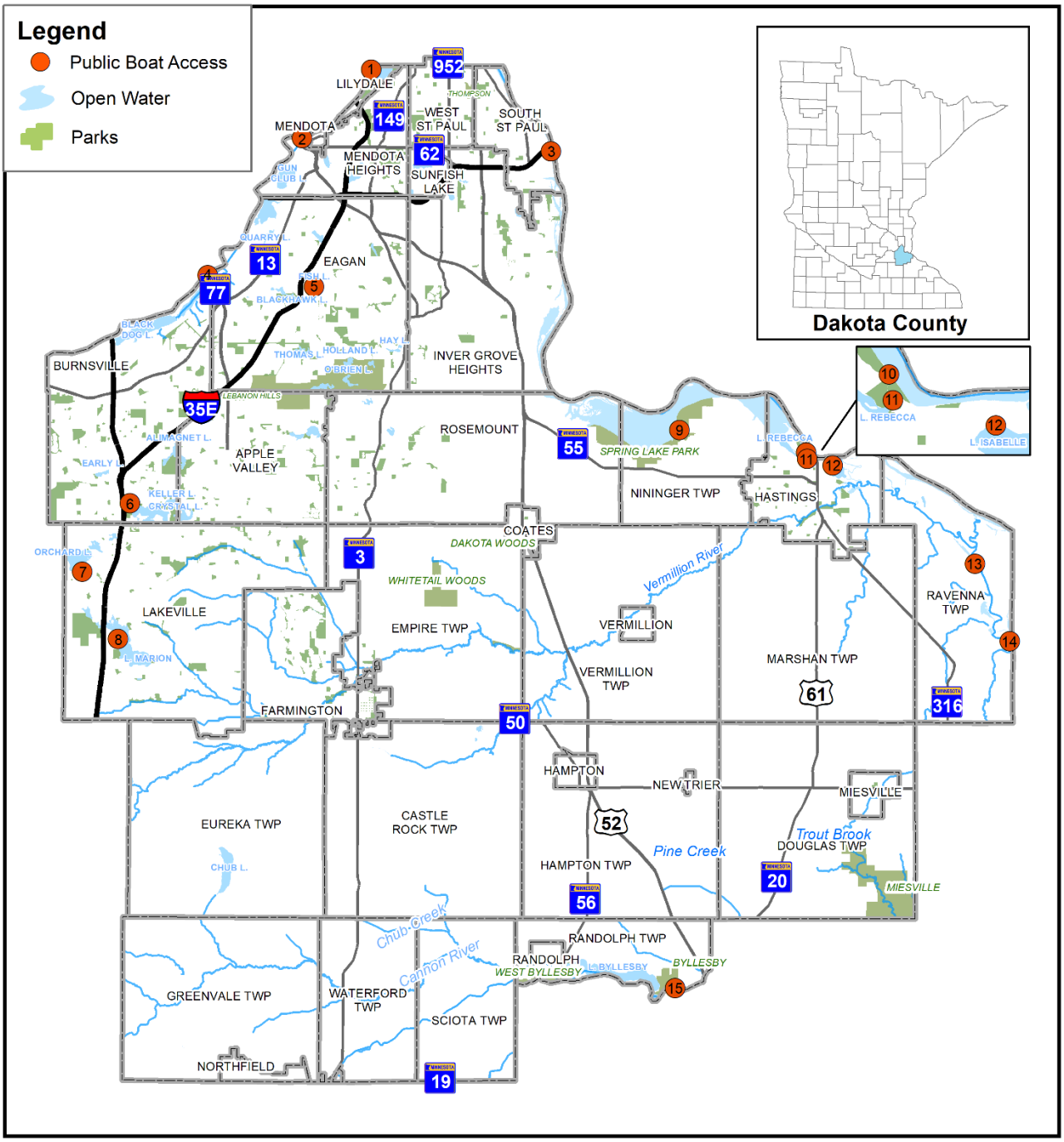


Figure 2. Motorized boat launches in Dakota County

1. Lilydale Regional Park (Lilydale)
2. Minnesota River (Fort Snelling State Park)
3. MN DNR boat launch (South St. Paul)
4. Cedar Avenue Bridge/Blackdog Road (Burnsville)
5. Fish Lake (Eagan)
6. Crystal Lake (Burnsville)
7. Orchard Lake (Lakeville)
8. Lake Marion (Lakeville)
9. Spring Lake Regional Park (Nininger Township)
10. Mississippi River south of Lock and Dam No. 2 (Hastings)
11. Lake Rebecca (Hastings)
12. Lake Isabelle (Hastings)
13. Vermillion River (Ravenna Township Dushane's Landing)
14. Vermillion River (Ravenna Township)
15. Lake Byllesby (Lake Byllesby Regional Park)

Plan Development and Program History

The purpose of the County's AIS program is to prevent the introduction of new AIS, prevent further spread of existing AIS, and reduce the potential for environmental and economic impact brought on by AIS infestations. To this effect, in 2015 the Dakota County Board of Commissioners passed a resolution (14-587) adopting the following guidelines for using the AIS Prevention Aid grant:

- Prepare a comprehensive inventory of boat launches and waterbodies at risk
- Undertake an awareness campaign
- Develop early detection and response procedures
- Manage existing populations of aquatic invasive species
- Establish partnerships with local units of government, water management organizations, Soil and Water Conservation District, or lake associations

2017-2020 First-Generation Plan Development

Dakota County's first-generation plan was approved by the Dakota County Board of Commissioners in December 2016 for the duration of 2017-2020. When the plan was in development, the Committee reviewed existing AIS plans by other Minnesota counties and the MN DNR, hosted a stakeholder roundtable to gather perspectives on AIS work that was being done and what gaps existed. The committee also communicated with the MN DNR AIS Prevention Planner and Invasive Aquatic Plant Specialist to make sure the Dakota County plan included key elements, including current AIS infestations, program goals, and a proposed budget, and did not duplicate existing efforts by the MN DNR or other water-related agencies.

2017-2020 First-Generation Plan Activities

From 2014 to 2020, Dakota County received $797,510 to undertake projects and implement programs to prevent the spread of AIS. During this period, efforts progressed through a multi-faceted approach that included early detection, management and treatment, prevention, outreach. First efforts included enhancement of AIS signage at motorized boat launches, supported using gas station signage and roadside billboards and website development for broader outreach. A consultant was hired to conduct early detection surveys on lakes within the Dakota County Parks system, while youth education efforts received a boost through events like the Metro Children's Festival and the Dakota County Fair. A partnership was established with the Dakota County Sheriff's Office to coordinate and enhance watercraft inspection efforts, ensuring comprehensive coverage at public launches. Goodhue and Dakota Counties worked together on Lake Byllesby related issues including watercraft inspections, aquatic vegetation assessments, and lake association support.

AIS billboard design for Dakota County

These efforts were complemented by support for volunteer monitoring programs like the Wetland Health Evaluation Program (WHEP) and Starry Trek (statewide AIS monitoring event), reinforcing community engagement and awareness in protecting local water bodies from invasive species. Additionally, the creation of various outreach materials, such as a tabletop outreach display, a maze and handhelds featuring AIS, and

tear-proof maps, furthered the efforts of the Committee in reaching the public with information using a variety of means.

2021-2025 Second-Generation Plan Development and Outreach

The development of the second-generation plan for 2021-2025 involved a comprehensive engagement process with stakeholders to ensure the updated strategies and goals met community needs. County and SWCD staff prioritized stakeholder input, initiating discussions in 2019 with representatives from cities, WMOs, and lake associations. A key outcome from these discussions was the affirmation of the effectiveness of existing educational resources and the County-supported inspector program, along with the grant program. Suggestions for improvement included a focused education strategy on specific issues like bait management and more collaboration opportunities.

In 2020, an online survey expanded the audience's reach, gathering feedback on AIS management activities from 65 participants. The survey highlighted strong support for early detection, rapid response, and prevention as top priorities, with the inspection program receiving high praise. These insights were integral to revising the plan, which was reviewed by stakeholders before final submission to the County Board.

2021-2025 Second-Generation Plan Activities

From 2021 to 2025, Dakota County received $474,389 to undertake projects and implement programs to prevent the spread of AIS. During this period, AIS related programming continued with early detection, management and treatment, prevention, and outreach activities. Watercraft inspections continued with local government units (LGUs) and the Dakota County Sheriff's office supporting inspections stations at lakes in Burnsville, Cannon Falls, and Lakeville. The AIS grant program strategically focused on aiding projects that addressed existing infestations through surveys, treatment, and public education, thus prioritizing waterbodies listed as infested. Fostering community involvement and increasing public knowledge about AIS continued to be a major goal of the program. Collaborations with educational institutions and support of volunteer programs like AIS Detectors, WHEP, and Starry Trek amplified these efforts, as well as a new partnership with Dakota County Library.

Watercraft inspection at Lake Byllesby

2026-2030 Third-Generation Plan Development and Outreach

Stakeholder input was key to updating plan strategies and goals so that the plan addressed the needs of the community. The Committee engaged with stakeholder groups during a roundtable meeting in spring 2025 to discuss the current plan and gain insight into desired priorities to be address in the third-generation plan. Attendees included City and WMO representatives, as well as local lake associations and Committee members.

Current strategies to manage existing invasives involve a combination of chemical treatments, harvesting, and replanting native species. Partners expressed interest in reducing chemical reliance and enhancing native plant

communities. However, barriers such as inconsistent funding, regulatory challenges, lack of resources, and limited staff time hinder these efforts. The organizations recognize the importance of ongoing monitoring and treatment programs, while recognizing the need for more effective management strategies that incorporate native restoration and better resource availability for post-removal planting. Collaboration with state agencies and improvement in regulatory frameworks are seen as necessary steps to overcome existing barriers and ensure sustainable AIS management.

Adaptive Management

This plan serves as a working document to guide activities and the use of the Local AIS Prevention Aid funds by Dakota County. The fluid nature of this plan provides a framework from which to establish programs that can best deal with new infestations or promote new outreach opportunities with community partners.

The management of AIS continues to grow as an important field in water resource management, particularly at the County level. With that, experience and research findings will be incorporated into future actions to prevent and manage the presence of AIS. As such, this plan will be reviewed by the Dakota County AIS Advisory Committee on a yearly basis; any necessary amendments will be made to plan priorities at that time.

Inventory and Assessment

Various types of AIS have been present in Minnesota over the last 200 years, but the rate of reported infestations is increasing at an alarming rate. Since the 1950s, public awareness of the importance of preventing new AIS introductions into Minnesota and managing existing infestations also increased. Public demand for AIS research, management, and education strategies has been particularly intensified the last 20 years.

For management and prevention activities to be as effective as possible, the types and extent of AIS within Dakota County and surrounding areas must be known. This section highlights known AIS infestations in the state and specifically Dakota County, focusing on priority species currently studied by state researchers, and provides information about the MN DNR's Infested Waters List.

AIS Infestations in Minnesota

At this time, there are [INSERT NUMBER WITH PENDING END OF YEAR DATA] species of aquatic animals and [INSERT NUMBER WITH PENDING END OF YEAR DATA] species of aquatic plants known to be invasive in Minnesota[OBJ] Many of these species, such as the common carp, have been present in Minnesota for several decades. Others, such as the spread of zebra mussels, along with growing concerns about the spread of invasive carp, have brought AIS-related issues to the forefront more recently.

Photo credit (top L to lower R): Wisconsin DNR, Paul Skawinski, Michal Maňas, Bradley Rasmussen, Konrad P. Schmidt, University of Minnesota Extension

As of August 2020, the MN DNR Infested Waters list includes 8 percent of Minnesota's public waters. [INSERT UPDATED NUMBER WITH PENDING END OF YEAR DATA]. The List features selected *prohibited invasive species* (including Brazilian elodea, brittle naiad, Eurasian watermilfoil, faucet snails, flowering rush, New Zealand mud snails, round goby, ruffe, white perch, and zebra mussels), selected *regulated invasive species* (spiny waterflea), and *diseases* (Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia (VHS)). Lakes, rivers, ponds, and wetlands are added to the infested waters list by the MN DNR if it contains an aquatic invasive species that could spread to other waters. The MN DNR may also list a lake, river, pond or wetland as infested if it is connected to a body of water where an aquatic invasive species is present.

For more information about AIS infested waterbodies in Minnesota, visit the Infested Waters List to find the official list of infested waters, including all rivers and stream segments of infested waterbodies. A map option is also available through EDDMapS Midwest, though it only displays infested lakes, wetlands, and major river pools.

Current AIS Research in Minnesota

Researchers at the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC), a research center based in St. Paul and working in cooperation with the MN DNR and University of Minnesota Extension, are studying detection, prevention and control techniques for forty AIS that are considered high-risk for Minnesota. Several of the key species being studied by MAISRC are increasing in distribution across the state.

The following tables identify AIS of concern for 2025 and are grouped by fish, plant, invertebrate, and disease species (Tables 1-4 respectively). Researchers evaluated each species' existing distribution throughout (or near) Minnesota, their distribution potential, and their potential to adversely impact ecosystems once established. MAISRC focuses its research efforts on species that have been prioritized based on their proximity to Minnesota, pathway of spread, and impact and in need of research into their detection, prevention and control.

Table 1. Priority invasive fish species in Minnesota as designated by MAISRC

Common Name	Scientific Name	Distribution	Risk of Spread	Potential Impacts
Common carp/Koi	*Cyprinus carpio*	Widespread	High	High
Bighead carp	*Hypophthalmichthys nobilis*	Localized	Spreading	High
Silver carp	*Hypophthalmichthys molitrix*	Localized	Spreading	High
Grass carp	*Ctenopharyngodon idella*	Localized	Spreading	High
Sea lamprey	Petromyzon marinus	Localized	Spreading	High
Ruffe	*Gymnocephalus cernua*	Localized	Spreading	High
Round goby	*Neogobius melanostomus*	Localized	Spreading	High
Goldfish/Prussian carp	*Carassius auratus/gibelio*	Localized	Spreading	High
Northern snakehead	*Channa argus*	Not found in MN	Presumed High	Presumed High
Zander	*Sander lucioperca*	Not found in MN	Presumed High	Presumed High
Black carp	*Mylopharyngodon piceus*	Not found in MN	Presumed High	Presumed High
Common rudd	*Scardinius erythrophthalmus*	Not found in MN	Presumed High	Presumed High

Plant species with control potential (i.e. chemical treatment or mechanical harvesting) are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Priority invasive plant species as designated by MAISRC

Common Name	Scientific Name	Distribution	Risk of Spread	Potential Impacts	Control Potential
Curlyleaf pondweed	*Potamogeton crispus*	Widespread	High	High	Yes
Eurasian watermilfoil, hybrid watermilfoil	*Myriophyllum spicatum, M.spicatum x sibiricum*	Widespread	High	High	Yes
Hybrid/narrow leaf cattail	*Typha x glauca, T. Angustifolia*	Widespread	High	High	Yes
Purple loosestrife	*Lythrum salicaria*	Widespread	High	High	Yes
European haplotype-common reed	*Phragmites australis*	Localized	High	High	
Pale yellow iris	*Iris pseudacorus*	Localized	High	High	
Flowering rush	*Butomus umbellatus*	Localized	High	High	
Starry Stonewort	*Nitellopsis obtusa*	Localized	High	High	
Hydrilla	*Hydrilla verticillata*	Not found in MN	High	Likely High	
Yellow-floating heart*	*Nymphoides peltata*	Not found in MN	Moderate	Likely High	
Cabomba*	*Cabomba caroliniana*	Not found in MN	Moderate	Likely High	
European frog-bit*	*Hydrocharis morsus-ranae*	Not found in MN	Moderate	Likely High	

*Species not likely to be found in MN, but have spread and caused impacts in inland waters of regions with a climate like that of MN

Table 3. Priority invasive invertebrate species as designated by MAISRC

Common Name	Scientific Name	Distribution	Risk of Spread	Potential Impacts
Spiny water flea	*Bythotrephes longimanus*	Established	High	High
Zebra mussel	*Dreissena polymorpha*	Established	High	High
Quagga mussel	*Dreissena rostriformis*	Established	High	High
Faucet snail	*Bithynia tentaculata*	Established	High	High
Chinese mystery snail, banded mystery snail	*Cipangopaludina chinensis malleata* *Viviparus georgianus*	x	x	x
Rusty crayfish	*Orconectes rusticus*	Established	Unknown	Unknown
New Zealand mud snail	*Potamopyrgus antipodarum*	Established	Unknown	Unknown
A Ponto-Caspian amphipod	*Echinogammarus ischnus*	Established	Unknown	Unknown
Bloody red shrimp	*Hemimysis anomala*	Not found in MN	Unknown	High
Golden clam	*Corbicula fluminea*	x	x	x

Table 4. Priority invasive diseases as designated by MAISRC

Microbe Species	Potential Impacts
Viral Hemorrhagic Septicemia virus (VHSV)	Species fit into one or more of the following categories: 1). Species that generally harm multiple species 2). Pathogens that cause high mortality or morbidity 3). Species with high economic impact 4). Species that can transform ecosystems
Asian Fish Tapeworm (AFT)	
Bacterial kidney disease	
Largemouth Bass Virus (LMBV)	
Whirling disease	
Chytrid fungus	

More information about MAISRC's mission to "develop research-based solutions that can reduce the impacts of aquatic invasive species in Minnesota by preventing spread, controlling populations, and managing ecosystems; and to advance knowledge to inspire action by others" can be found by visiting MAISRC's website.

AIS Infestations in Dakota County

As of June 2025, there are [INSERT NUMBER WITH PENDING END OF YEAR DATA] waterbodies in Dakota County listed on the MN DNR's Infested Waters List (Figure 3; Table 5). Since 2017, 18 new infestations have been recorded around the county.

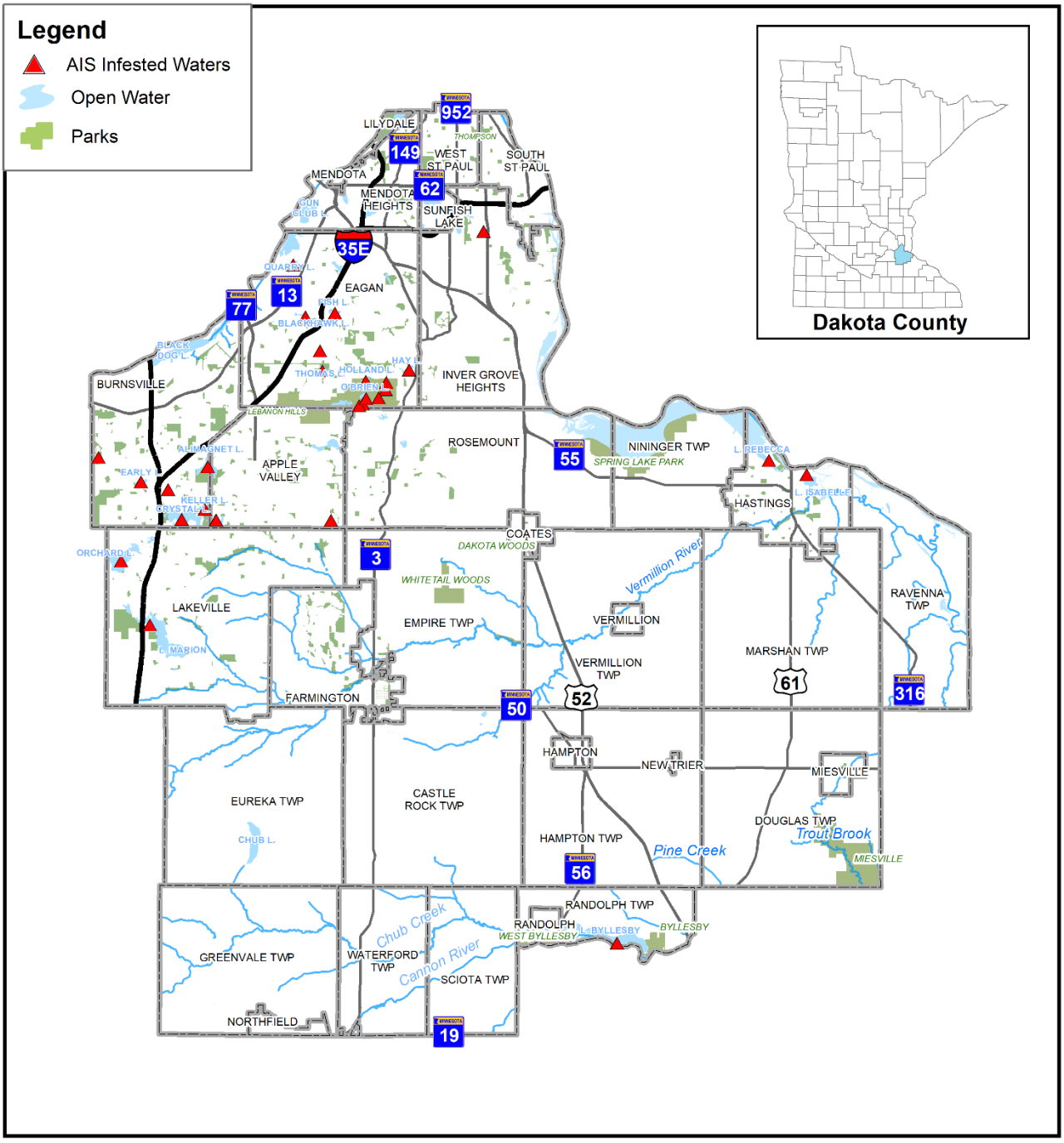


Figure 3. Dakota County Aquatic Invasive Species Infested Waters

Table 5. MN DNR Infested Waters in Dakota County

Waterbody Name	City or Jurisdiction	Invasive Species	Year Listed	Dow Number
Alimagnet	Burnsville	Eurasian watermilfoil	2014	19-0021
Blackhawk	Eagan	Eurasian watermilfoil	2017	19-0059
Bridge	Dakota County	Eurasian watermilfoil	2016	19-0179
Byllesby	Dakota County	flowering rush	2016	19-0006
Byllesby	Dakota County	zebra mussel	2024	19-0006
Cobblestone	Apple Valley	Eurasian watermilfoil	2012	19-0456
Crystal	Burnsville	Eurasian watermilfoil	2007	19-0027
Earley	Burnsville	Eurasian watermilfoil	2007	19-0033
Fish	Eagan	Eurasian watermilfoil	2009	19-0057
Hay	Eagan	flowering rush	2018	19-0062
Heine Pond	Eagan	Eurasian watermilfoil	2010	19-0153
Holland	Dakota County	Eurasian watermilfoil	2009	19-0065
Isabelle	Hastings	zebra mussel	2018	19-0004
Keller	Burnsville	Eurasian watermilfoil	2007	19-0025
Lac Lavon	Burnsville	Eurasian watermilfoil	2007	19-0446
Lac Lavon	Burnsville	brittle naiad	2007	19-0446
Lily	Dakota County	Eurasian watermilfoil	2016	19-0180
Marion	Lakeville	Eurasian watermilfoil	2007	19-0026
Marion	Lakeville	zebra mussel	2017	19-0026
McDonough	Dakota County	Eurasian watermilfoil	2016	19-0076
O'Brien	Dakota County	Eurasian watermilfoil	2016	19-0072
Orchard	Lakeville	Eurasian watermilfoil	2017	19-0031
Portage	Dakota County	Eurasian watermilfoil	2016	19-0074
Quarry	Eagan	Eurasian watermilfoil	2007	19-0128
Rebecca	Hastings	zebra mussel	2009	19-0003
Schwanz	Eagan	Eurasian watermilfoil	2022	19-0063
Schultz	Dakota County	Eurasian watermilfoil	2007	19-0075
Sunset Pond	Burnsville	Eurasian watermilfoil	2007	19-0451
Thomas	Eagan	Eurasian watermilfoil	2012	19-0067
Thompson	Dakota County	Eurasian watermilfoil	2021	19-0048
Twin Lakes	Burnsville	Eurasian watermilfoil	2007	19-0028

It is important to note that not all AIS identifications will trigger a listing on the infested waters list by the MN DNR. Of this subset of species, curlyleaf pondweed, reed canary grass, yellow iris, purple loosestrife, rusty crayfish, and mystery snail species have been found in Dakota County but are not included in Table 5.

Curlyleaf pondweed, reed canary grass, and purple loosestrife have been present in the County for a significant number of years, whereas rusty crayfish and Chinese mystery snails were found by volunteer groups in 2016. Rusty crayfish were found in the Vermillion River (Farmington and Hastings) and North Creek (Farmington) in the fall of 2016. Specimens were collected as part of routine biomonitoring activities performed by DCSWCD staff and by Hastings High School students participating in the VRWJPO's Vermillion River Watch program. The mystery snails were discovered while monitoring Thompson Lake (West St. Paul) by volunteers participating in Dakota County's Wetland Health Evaluation Program (WHEP).

Several other prohibited and regulated AIS are known to be present within Dakota County or are in adjoining or high use lakes in other parts of the state. These species (Table 6) are a growing concern due to their potential to spread to new waterbodies in Dakota County.

Table 6. Common AIS in Dakota County and greater Minnesota/Wisconsin

Common Name	Type	Status	Nearest Infested Water	Location
Banded, Chinese mystery snail	Invertebrate	Regulated	Thompson Lake	West Saint Paul, MN
Bighead carp	Fish	Prohibited	Mississippi River – Pool 1, 2, 3	
Brittle naiad	Plant	Prohibited	Lac Lavon	Burnsville, MN
Common carp, koi	Fish	Regulated	Lake Marion and East Lake	Lakeville, MN
Eurasian, hybrid watermilfoil	Plant	Prohibited	Widespread	Northern Cities
Faucet snail	Invertebrate	Regulated	Mississippi River – Pool 4	
Flowering Rush	Plant	Prohibited	Cannon River	Goodhue County, MN
Goldfish	Fish	Regulated	Vermillion River	Farmington, MN
Grass carp	Fish	Prohibited	Mississippi River – Pool 1, 2, 3	
New Zealand mudsnail	Invertebrate	Prohibited	Lake Superior	Duluth, MN
Rusty crayfish	Invertebrate	Regulated	Vermillion River	Farmington, MN
Silver carp	Fish	Prohibited	Mississippi River – Pool 1, 2, 3	
Spiny waterflea	Invertebrate	Regulated	Lake Mille Lacs	Mille Lacs County, MN
Starry stonewort	Plant	Prohibited	Medicine Lake	Plymouth, MN
Yellow iris or yellow flag	Plant	Regulated	Kingsley Lake	Lakeville, MN
Zebra mussel	Invertebrate	Prohibited	Lake Marion	Lakeville, MN

Management of AIS on the Mississippi and Minnesota Rivers is a collaborative effort between several state and federal agencies including the MN DNR, the US Army Corps of Engineers, the National Parks Service, and others. The MN DNR leads all AIS management and monitoring activities on the Mississippi River within Minnesota jurisdiction, so management of those species identified as inhabiting the Mississippi River (namely the three carp species listed in Table 6) will not be addressed in this Plan.

Coordinating AIS efforts in Dakota County

Since its inception, the Committee has sought input from external partners to make the AIS program as productive and comprehensive as possible. Engagement focused on monitoring and outreach efforts as these are integral to preventing activity overlap and identifying AIS-related programmatic gaps that could be filled with financial, logistical, or programmatic support from the County through Local AIS Prevention Aid funding.

The Committee has used online surveys and roundtable meetings to learn about local efforts for AIS management and outreach. These have guided the development of this plan, strategies for dealing with AIS, and determining management responsibilities. To prevent overlap, LGUs and Dakota County Parks lead AIS management activities on all waterbodies (lakes, stormwater ponds, and wetlands with a MN DNR identification number) within their jurisdiction. Dakota County directs the grant program and coordinates outreach material development and purchasing. Dakota County is also responsible for managing the watercraft inspection program at County-owned launches as well as partnering with LGUs to support inspectors at local launched.

Implementation Plan

This section of the Plan describes strategies proposed by Dakota County to prevent, detect, and manage AIS infestations and increase public awareness. Proposed strategies are divided into the following categories:

- Prevention – watercraft inspections and lake service provider
- Early Detection – monitoring and assessments
- Rapid Response Plan and funding
- Outreach and Education – material development, outreach events, volunteer program support
- Grant Program

Using funds made available through Local AIS Prevention Aid, as well as supplemental funds from Dakota County, Dakota County will work to prevent the infestation and spread of AIS in the county by supporting watercraft inspection and decontamination activities, as well as annual monitoring surveys, public awareness campaigns, and volunteer programs.

Local interest in efforts to counteract the spread of AIS within Dakota County has led to the development of monitoring, management, and outreach partnerships between lake associations, city and county governments, local watershed management organizations, and the MN DNR. Funding from the Local AIS Prevention Aid will also be used to support AIS-related projects undertaken by LGUs and non-profits that operate in Dakota County through the grant program.

As mentioned previously, it is important to consider this plan to be fluid in nature, in that implementation activities discussed in this plan are subject to change over time due to advances in research on AIS management, the detection and potential establishment of new AIS in the county, and future opportunities for various educational or outreach programming or partnerships.

Local AIS Prevention Aid Funding Allocation

The Local AIS Prevention Aid annual funding amounts are not set for 2026 – 2030 at this time, but an overall reduction in funds for a portion of this period is expected. With the expenditures shown in the proposed budget in the Appendix, the current budget level will be maintained for 2006 and 2027 (~$118,000). As the reduction of state funds expected starting in 2028, the proposed annual budget for 2028-2030 was halved ($59,000). If Dakota County receives less than that amount in the coming years, fewer funds will be allocated to the grant program to maintain the budget.

Prevention

AIS can be spread via numerous pathways including via recreational watercraft, fishing equipment, contaminated water, ballast, maintenance equipment, wind, and water. Each pathway poses varying levels of risk depending on the water body and the AIS of interest. The highest risk pathways through which AIS spread include boat accesses, docks and boat lifts, and attached to water recreational gear.

To prevent the spread of AIS in Dakota County, watercraft inspections at County-owned watercraft launches and support of inspections at launches owned by LGUs will be continued. Dakota County Parks will also maintain their

lake service provider certification and Dakota County will work with LGUs and other entities to ensure compliance within their organizations.

Watercraft inspection

Since 2017, Dakota County has implemented a watercraft inspection program using contractors to hire and train inspectors on MN DNR inspection protocols. Level 1 inspectors have been deployed at the motorized watercraft boat launch at Lake Byllesby Regional Park and at motorized watercraft launches in Burnsville (Crystal) and Lakeville (Marion and Orchard).

Watercraft inspection and reporting at Lake Byllesby

The Committee views watercraft inspections and boater education as key to preventing the spread of AIS. Interactions at the access serve to teach people about invasive species, to provide information on how to properly clean, drain and dry their watercraft or other water-related equipment after each use, and to dispose of unwanted bait in the trash.

Partnership with the Dakota County Sheriff's Department

The Committee formed a strategic partnership with the Dakota County Sheriff's Department beginning in 2019. Sheriff's Deputies were trained to perform AIS inspections and enforce regulations at various boat launches and through roadside checks in key areas. As Lake Byllesby is key recreation resource in the southern part of the County, partnering with Goodhue County's law enforcement program would further bolster the program's impact at Lake Byllesby.

Lake Service Provider Certification

In 2011, the Minnesota state legislature introduced a law related to the prevention and management of AIS that apply to lake service providers businesses (marinas, dock haulers, lawn irrigators and others who install or remove equipment; 2013 update includes businesses that rent or lease any type of boats or other water-related equipment). The law requires service providers to obtain a MN DNR permit to legally work in lakes and rivers throughout the state. Service providers can obtain the permit by attending an AIS training hosted by the MN DNR and passing the certification test. Re-certification is required every three years.

The Dakota County Parks Department has various watercrafts (canoes, kayaks, paddleboards) available for rent during the summer season at the Lebanon Hills Visitor Center for use in Lebanon Hills Regional Park. In accordance with the updated law, County parks staff continue to attend certification trainings every spring and are in possession of the MN DNR service provider permit. Dakota County will also work with LGUs and other entities in Dakota County to ensure compliance within their organizations.

Dakota County Parks canoe rental

Early Detection

Early detection monitoring provides opportunities to detect new AIS introductions before they become established in a waterbody, ultimately increasing the feasibility of a rapid response/eradication effort. Significant cost-savings can be realized by adopting an effective early detection monitoring program in the form of reduced long-term control and management expenses, in addition to protecting existing natural resource investments.

Dakota County recognizes LGUs and WMOs as the responsible entities for primary management of the water resources within their boundaries. Such responsibilities include surface water monitoring and tracking water quality trends, vegetation surveys (in-water and riparian), and implementing other lake and river water quality management actions. Because of the high level of water resources management currently undertaken by LGUs and WMOs, Dakota County staff will prioritize AIS monitoring and detection efforts on waterbodies that are within the County Parks system (particularly Lake Byllesby). Dakota County continues to support LGUs with their monitoring activities and will assist with monitoring and assessment activities if assistance is requested.

Monitoring and Assessments

Early detection monitoring activities on lakes with County-owned accesses have included:

- Aquatic vegetation surveys (point-intercept)
    - Species of interest: Eurasian watermilfoil, curlyleaf pondweed, flowering rush
    - Visual observations for cylindro (blue-green algae), common carp, zebra mussels
- Suitability Assessments with reference to lake bottom sediments for AIS
    - Hydrilla, purple loosestrife, rusty crayfish, spiny waterflea, starry stonewort, Chinese and banded mystery snail, faucet snail, invasive carp, and snakehead
- Installation of zebra mussel plate samplers at boat launches or fishing accesses

Aquatic vegetation monitoring

The goal of the program is to monitor the presence of AIS in county parks and assess the potential for spread between waterbodies within the parks system. Plans for upcoming monitoring and assessment activities are undetermined at this time. The Committee will work with Dakota County Parks to establish program objectives and develop and implement a monitoring strategy that can be used going forward.

Lake Byllesby

Because of the potential for an AIS infestation in Lake Byllesby to negatively impact the Byllesby Dam, preventing an AIS introduction (particularly zebra mussels) in Lake Byllesby is a top priority for Dakota County. Unfortunately, in August 2023, MN DNR native mussel staff found one live adult zebra mussel attached to a native mussel enclosure in Lake Byllesby. Due to abundant algal growth at that time, veliger tows were conducted instead of visual SCUBA searching. No zebra mussel veligers were found during this search. A follow-up zebra mussel monitoring survey was conducted in June 2024. Veliger tows were collected at four sites across the lake and a snorkeling search was conducted near the initial report location. No adult zebra mussels were

observed, but four zebra mussel veligers were found. Dakota County hired a consultant to conduct additional monitoring in the fall of 2024. High priority landing spots were targeted, and a single adult zebra mussel was found at that time. Lake Byllesby was listed as infested for zebra mussels due to these findings.

A collaborative effort to prevent further infestations is necessitated by the fact that both Dakota County and Goodhue County own lakeshore property and operate public water accesses on Lake Byllesby. Goodhue County financially supports the Lake Byllesby Improvement Association annual aquatic vegetation monitoring effort.

Metropolitan Council Environmental Services conducts regular water monitoring activities on Lake Byllesby on a rotating schedule. Monitoring efforts are conducted bi-weekly from April through October. Common water quality issues and characteristics are monitored for, including:

- Basic lake characteristics such as water clarity and vertical depth profiles of dissolved oxygen, temperature, conductivity, pH, and turbidity
- Excessive nutrient enrichment – phosphorus and nitrogen
- Chloride
- Visual assessments for AIS at the boat launch and near the monitoring location(s)

Though not looking for AIS specifically, any observations by Metropolitan Council staff are reported to EDDMapS, Dakota County, DCSWCD, and the MN DNR.

Volunteer Monitoring Network

Providing volunteers with the necessary training to identify and report potential infestations is one strategy to help prevent the spread of AIS within Dakota County. Each year, the County supports public involvement through their participation in volunteer programs including the University of Minnesota Extension's AIS Detector program, Starry Trek, and the Wetland Health Evaluation Program. Supporting volunteer engagement through these programs has increased the number of volunteers trained in AIS identification and reporting who can then support local AIS efforts.

Participants with the AIS Detectors program learn general principles of aquatic ecology; AIS identification and monitoring methodology; reporting protocols. Upon completing the course, participants eligible to participate in the AIS Detectors volunteer program by completing annual AIS-related volunteer activities of their choice. The Committee has funding available to cover registration fees for interested Dakota County residents.

Starry Trek is an annual statewide event coordinated by the MAISRC and hosted by local organizations. Dakota County hosts this event which includes training volunteers and providing them with equipment and directions to monitor local lakes. Any species found (native and invasive) are collected for identification and reported to the MNDNR. During this event, Starry Trek volunteers have discovered previously unknown populations of various invasive species (including starry stonewort, zebra mussels, Eurasian watermilfoil, and Chinese and banded mystery snails) in lakes all around the state.

Starry Trek volunteer throwing rake (photo credit - University of Minnesota Extension)

Dakota County coordinates the Wetland Health Evaluation Program (WHEP), a volunteer program focused on determining the health of wetlands in the County. WHEP volunteers are trained and work on community-based teams to collect data on wetland plants and macroinvertebrates, providing valuable information to local governments and decision makers. Beginning in 2016, and annually thereafter, Dakota County provided AIS funds to WHEP to incorporate AIS plants and macroinvertebrates into the training materials, monitoring protocols, and reference guides used by the volunteers.

WHEP volunteers monitoring wetland vegetation

Rapid Response

Rapid assessment and response involve assessing the size of the AIS infestation relative to the resources and tools available to completely remove the infestation ("eradication"). The best defense against an AIS infestation in a local waterbody is utilizing strong preventative actions, like boat inspections at launch sites and educating the public about rules and regulations relating to AIS, to prevent AIS from ever entering the waterbody in the first place. Early detection of a new infestation, and a subsequent response to that infestation, are considered the "second line of defense," following prevention.

Early detection and rapid response are core tenets of any effective invasive species management program. When the introduction of new AIS is detected, a prompt and coordinated response to contain the affected area (and, if feasible, provide treatment to eradicate the species) can reduce the potential establishment, spread, and harmful impacts of a given species. Early detection and response to a new infestation can result in lower overall costs and reduced damage to the resource than implementing a long-term control program after an invasive species is established in the waterbody. Regular monitoring is necessary to detect new infestations in a timely manner so that the response plan can be as effective as possible.

To deal with new AIS infestations, Dakota County utilizes the MN DNR's Rapid Response Plan developed a rapid response plan outlining different response strategies to employ when a new infestation is reported and a rapid response contingency fund that is available for use by LGUs and other concerned organizations when responding to a new infestation.

Rapid Response Plan

Eradication is always the primary goal of a rapid response plan. Failing to completely eradicate AIS from a waterbody means that the infestation will be a reoccurring problem in future years. Unfortunately, as is often the case, once AIS is established in a waterbody, successful eradication is unlikely, which further emphasizes the importance of prevention and early detection monitoring. Early detection and rapid response are the critical second line of defense to minimize the economic and ecological impact of an AIS infestation.

A rapid response plan may have one of several possible goals relating to dealing with an infestation, such as containing the entirety of the AIS infestation within a given area, suppressing the population to slow its spread to other parts of the lake or river, or containing the AIS and preventing its spread to new locations by completely eradicating it. It is important to keep in mind that not all AIS infestations will necessitate a rapid response effort

going into effect and no two rapid response plans are alike so each new AIS infestation will be responded to on a case-by-case basis.

The Dakota County AIS Advisory Committee recognizes the MN DNR's Rapid Response Plan (2021) for use in local implementation when dealing with new AIS infestations. This Plan:

- Outlines the process for early detection of new infestations
- Focuses on rapid response for new and isolated AIS occurrences
- Is adaptable to be useful in a variety for different species and waterbody types

This MN DNR's plan provides background on Minnesota experiences with Rapid Response, related Federal plans and requirements, an incident command system to clarify the organizational and decision-making structure, a summary of available resources, and a process for acting. The Dakota County response team includes representatives from Dakota County, DCSWCD, and local representation from LGUs and lake association members.

For more information about the rapid response plan, see MN DNR's Invasive Species Program, go to the subheading 'Responsibilities.'

Rapid Response Contingency Fund

A portion of the funding provided to Dakota County through the Local AIS Prevention Aid Grant has been set aside to assist with rapid response activities in the county. A minimum balance of $20,000 will be maintained starting in 2026. Because all AIS infestations are unique, rapid response procedures will be initiated in partnership with, and following recommendations by, state and/or local agencies.

Once a response plan for a new infestation has been decided upon, contingency funds are made available to partner organizations. These funds can be used for direct response activities such as monitoring or treatment (chemicals, staff, supplies) or for public engagement (community notifications, outreach activities, educational materials).

Outreach and Education

One of the keys to successfully preventing AIS from spreading is to engage the public on AIS issues (major species of concern and their potential impact) and to communicate the importance of personal responsibility regarding prevention. In doing this, Dakota County will continue to explore partnership opportunities with internal partners, local businesses and community organizations; strengthen existing relationships with LGUs and lake associations; and support established outreach campaigns (including those developed by the MN DNR and Minnesota Sea Grant) to promote consistent messaging across the County.

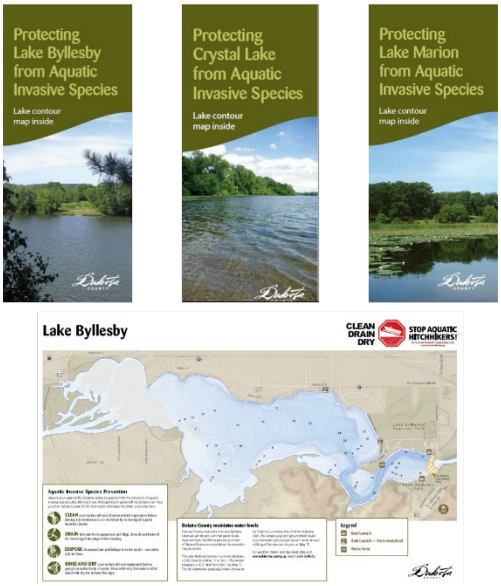
Dakota County will also look to expand its role with and act as a central hub for information, coordinating outreach materials, and ensuring effective communication through regular updates on grants, resources, and webinars with LGUS, lake associations and other partners. The County also hopes to collaborate with others through the establishment of a local workgroup among cities, lake associations, and other stakeholders. The County's role would be to host presentations and trainings and facilitate roundtable discussions.

Outreach Materials

Roundtable discussions with LGUs often focus on partnership opportunities. Discussions indicated that all parties would be best served by the County developing AIS-related outreach materials and supporting educational programming that could be used by partner organization. Using this direction, the County has created or purchased a variety of AIS outreach materials including AIS identification guides, brochures, and specialty items. These materials have been handed out at the Dakota County Fair, provided to Starry Trek volunteers and attendees of other outreach events, and distributed by watercraft inspectors at local boat launches.

Some of the outreach materials available include:

- Waterproof bathymetric maps for Lake Byllesby, Crystal Lake, and Lake Marion
- AIS identification books and ID cards
- Temporary tattoos and sunglasses
- Bags, towels, key chain floats



Waterproof maps for popular Dakota County lakes

In 2020, Dakota County hired a consultant to develop an educational display and supporting materials (maze, chalkboard, ID cards) for use at public events including in libraries and building atriums. The purpose of the display was to inform and educate the community and promote positive behavior changes when dealing with AIS issues. The display and supporting materials, as well as the other outreach and swag offerings, are available to partners for use at community events and presentations. Future consideration is also being given to the creation and sourcing of new outreach materials and giveaways.

Youth and Family Outreach Programs

The Committee has in the past and will continue to participate in various outreach events including Hastings' Party in the Park and the School of Environmental Studies' Earth Day celebrations, as well as Dakota County Parks' Take a Kid Fishing Day and the City of Eagan's LakeFest. Opportunities to promote and support education activities that serve various groups within local communities including Metro Children's Water Festival, Starry Trek, and Dakota County Library programming will also be sought out.

AIS display at Hastings Party in the Park

Participating in these events is an easy way to engage directly with a given audience (school age, youth or the general public), promote AIS information, and inform people on how they can best help to prevent the spread of AIS and educate others. In the future, Dakota County will continue to attend these events or support by providing the host organization with educational displays and outreach materials.

For the past several years, Dakota County has contributed both financially and in-kind to the Metro Children's Water Festival. The purpose of the festival is to educate fourth grade students from local schools about water related topics including water quality and quantity, macroinvertebrates, and AIS. Each year, 200 to 250 students from schools in Dakota County participate in hands-on and virtual opportunities to learn about water and its importance to people and the natural environment. The goal is to engage students about ways they can help ensure future protection and management of water quality and quantity. In recent years, AIS has taken on a larger focus at the festival, so this event serves as a first point of contact for many children to not only learn about AIS but also learn how they can help prevent the spread.

Starry Trek is a single day AIS volunteer monitoring event organized by the University of Minnesota Extension and MAISRC. Dakota County has hosted a local training site since it began in 2017. The statewide monitoring effort has averaged over 220 volunteers (including individuals of all ages, families, Scout and 4H groups) monitoring local lakes for AIS each year and has resulted in 99 new infestations being reported across the state (18 of those have been in Dakota County). During Starry Trek, volunteers participate in a brief AIS identification and monitoring training before heading to local boat launches to search for AIS. Suspected AIS are collected and returned to the coordinator at the rendezvous site for identification confirmation and reporting. Dakota County volunteers have discovered a zebra mussel infestation in Lake Isabelle in Hastings and multiple Eurasian watermilfoil and mystery snail populations. The importance of this event is highlighted by the fact that infestations that would probably not have been discovered had there not been volunteers out monitoring for AIS as part of the event. The Dakota County training site has had the highest (or close to the highest) number of volunteers participate in the event each year and feedback from the event continues to be positive as volunteers are excited to learn more skills and want to continue to be engaged in other monitoring activities in the county.

Starry Trek volunteers after training

Over the last few years, the Committee has developed a strong partnership with Dakota County Library. Focusing on National Invasive Species Week in February and National Water Quality Month in August, the Committee has provided library branches with outreach materials and purchased AIS-related books to be displayed at the branch entrance for a set time. This partnership helps to increase the visibility of the AIS program as it provides the community with easily accessible educational materials and information about AIS volunteer efforts on their local waterbodies.

AIS display at Galaxie Library, Apple Valley

Grant Program

In 2017, the Committee launched a AIS grant program with the goal to promote and support AIS prevention, management, and education efforts by local organizations within the county. Those eligible to propose projects and compete for available funds include local municipalities, townships, watershed organizations, lake associations, and non-profits located in Dakota County. Collaborative proposals between partner groups are recommended to strengthen the effectiveness and positive outcomes of a given project. Projects must be conducted on waterbodies or waterways within Dakota County.

- Early detection and population assessment
- Management of new or established AIS populations
- Watercraft inspection and decontamination programs
- Education and outreach activities and resource development

The grant program is held on an annual basis in late winter/early spring to align with field season planning and permit application due dates. Adjustments to the grant program have occurred over time due to funding availability, program goals, and the number of applicants. Since its inception, the program has funded [INSERT NUMBER] different projects at [INSERT FUNDING AMOUNT] and leveraged [INSERT FUNDING AMOUNT] in matching funds contributed by partner organizations.

Grantees have included cities, watersheds, and lake associations. Funded projects include watercraft inspections on local lakes, outreach materials, rapid response plan development, early detection monitoring, and vegetation management.

Photo credit (top L to lower R): Blue Water Science, City of Burnsville, Dakota County, Dakota County, City of Eagan

The grant program has been a successful tool for supporting partner organizations as they are on the frontline for AIS management and outreach activities in the county. Even with the reduction in the annual budget, the program will continue to be a key strategy employed by the Committee to support AIS prevention and management activities and promote education opportunities.

Appendix A - Dakota County AIS Implementation Plan 2026 – 2030 Budget

	Dakota County Actions	***2026***	***2027***	***2028***	***2029***	***2030***
Prevention	Level 1 AIS watercraft inspectors at Lake Byllesby launch	$26,000	$26,000	$26,000	$26,000	$26,000
	AIS grant program - prevention (inspectors at local launches)	$35,000	$35,000	$19,000	$19,000	$19,000
Early Detection	AIS monitoring assessments (including volunteer)	$5,000	$15,000	$2,500	$2,500	$2,500
Rapid Response	AIS Rapid Response Contingency Fund	Maintain minimum balance of $20,000				
Outreach and Education	AIS outreach and education activities	$4,000	$4,000	$1,500	$1,500	$1,500
Grant Program	AIS grant program - lake surveys and outreach	$40,000	$30,000	$10,000	$10,000	$10,000
Administration	AIS program administration	In-kind	In-kind	In-kind	In-kind	In-kind
	Dakota County AIS Plan development	$8,000	$8,000			
	Total	**$118,000**	**$118,000**	***$59,000***	***$59,000***	***$59,000***