

## **Aquatic Invasive Species to get increased attention**

Last year the Legislature provided a dedicated annual funding stream of 10 million dollars to prevent the introduction and limit the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in our state. Each Minnesota County received a portion of this money, determined by a formula comparing the number of public water access ramps and parking spots at those ramps in each county. Itasca County will receive over a half-million dollars in staggered payments each year for this important effort. Some of that money has been earmarked for grants to fund local projects proposed by the public.

Itasca County Commissioners requested the recently created Itasca County Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) to provide recommendations on how best to spend the money efficiently and effectively. The CISMA subcommittee for aquatics includes Minnesota Extension, the Soil and Water Conservation District, the Department of Natural Resources, the Itasca Water Legacy Partnership, the US Forest Service, the Itasca Coalition of Lake Associations, and the Itasca County Departments of Land and Environmental Services.

Having now completed their initial work, the subcommittee will present the Itasca County Aquatic Invasive Species Program (AISP) to the public on Wednesday, February 18, at 7pm in the boardroom at the Courthouse in Grand Rapids.

Aquatic invaders have become a very real threat to our way of life in the northland in recent years. Because they come from other parts of the globe, they lack the natural controls found in their native waters, and can reproduce at alarming rates. Various species of plants, such as Eurasian Milfoil or Curly-leaf Pondweed create a real predicament for boaters and swimmers, and jeopardize native species and natural habitat.

The poster-child of AIS is the Zebra Mussel, which attach to hard surfaces such as submerged rocks, boats and docks. They too can cause great damage to our waters, habitat and infrastructure. Mussel shells along the shore make bare-feet impossible. Control of aquatic invasive species is difficult and expensive, and becomes more so the longer we delay. Research to find more effective, long-range solutions has also been funded by the state separately from the county program.

Prevention, slowing the spread, and eradication of each problem species require various strategies for control. Therefore, the CISMA subcommittee recommended several priority areas for deployment of the state funds. These include: Prevention (access inspection/decontamination); Early Detection, Reporting and Verification; Control, Monitoring and Research; Communication and Awareness; Database and Website; and Community Action Projects.

Of special interest to riparian stakeholders in the county is the Community Action Projects (CAP). This is a small grants program that enables citizens, organizations and commercial enterprise to target local areas with supplemental efforts beyond what the other parts of the AISP can do, or to try out new strategies. An application form is available for this purpose, with awards made by the CISMA subcommittee. This part of the AISP will be the focus of our February 18<sup>th</sup> meeting.

For more information, come to the meeting, or contact Bill Grantges, the Itasca County AIS Coordinator, who can advise and assist with the CAP application.

Bill Grantges  
218-256-9100  
[Itasca.AIS.Coordinator@Gmail.com](mailto:Itasca.AIS.Coordinator@Gmail.com)  
Twitter @IC\_AIS  
PO BOX 189, Grand Rapids MN 55744