

2024-2028



Words used by Wright County stakeholders to describe aquatic invasive species.

**Prepared by the Wright County Soil and Water Conservation District with assistance from the
Wright County Aquatic Invasive Species Advisory Committee**

First Developed: 2015

Last Revised: 2023

Approved by the Wright County Board of Commissioners **Date**

Approved by Wright Soil and Water Conservation District Board of Supervisors **Date**

Introduction

According to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MNDNR), aquatic invasive species (AIS) are species that are not native to Minnesota and cause harm to economic prosperity, the environment, and human health. Some prevalent examples of these species include curly-leaf pondweed, Eurasian watermilfoil, purple loosestrife, rusty crayfish, New Zealand mud snail, starry stonewort, and zebra mussels. The spread of these species has led to habitat alteration, ecosystem degradation, and a loss of biodiversity due to intensified competition for resources. AIS typically have little-to-no natural predators in their new environment, reproduce very quickly, and are more aggressive than native species. Along with negatively affecting aquatic wildlife, AIS impedes recreational opportunities and disrupt industrial use of public waters. As a result, it is illegal to possess, transport, and/or introduce any aquatic plants or animals within Minnesota that are designated as “prohibited and regulated” invasive species by the MNDNR.

In 2014, the Minnesota legislature authorized the Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Aid for counties, allocating \$10 million annually to AIS activities. Funds are distributed to the counties based 50% on the number of “watercraft trailer launches” and 50% on the number of “watercraft trailer parking spaces”. Wright County receives approximately \$240,000 each year. Wright Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) serves as the administrator of the county AIS program.

This plan outlines how the AIS Prevention Aid and other monies will be spent to prevent the introduction or limit the spread of aquatic invasive species at all access sites within the county. Wright County utilizes the following strategies: treatment, inspection, decontamination, education, and contingency. Each strategy has multiple goals related to reducing invasive species. Additionally, many actions suggested in this plan address multiple strategies.

This Wright AIS Prevention and Management Plan is in accordance with the goals set for in MN Statute 477 A. 19.

Accomplishments since 2017

- Annual participation in Starry Trek, AIS early detection program
- Increased inspections per hour and license plates per hour
- Provided decontamination services free of charge May through September
- Installed of 5 CD3 self-service cleaning stations
- Continued support of lake association treatment efforts
- Supported 5 AIS detectors within the county
- Annual attendance at MAISRC showcase to keep up with current research
- Created an Aquatic Invasive Species Advisory Committee in 2020

County Background

Currently home to approximately 145,000 residents, Wright County is one of the fastest growing counties in Minnesota. Located in central Minnesota, many of the lakes in Wright County are less than an hour drive from the Twin Cities Metro. The City of Buffalo, situated in eastern Wright County, is the County Seat. The County shares its border with Stearns County and Sherburne County to the north, Carver and McLeod Counties to the south, Hennepin County to the east, and Meeker County to the west (Figure 1).

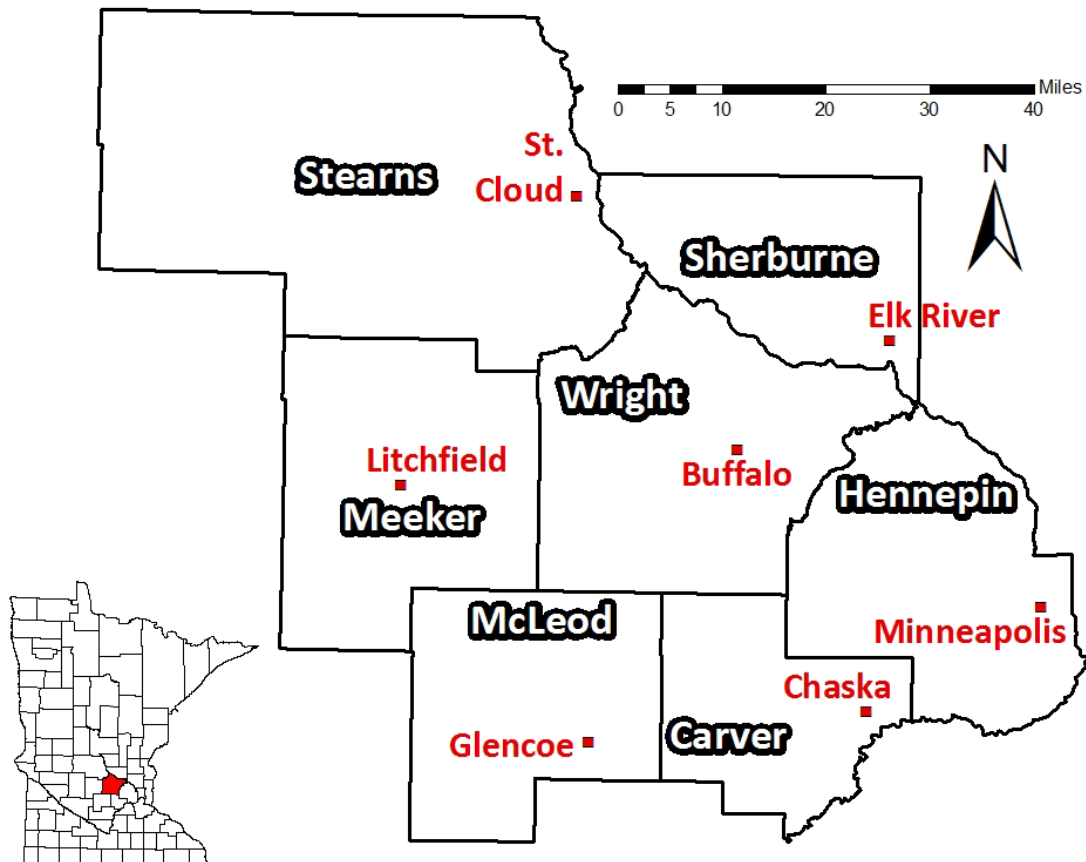


Figure 1. Wright County and surrounding counties

Current Lake Information

There are 163 lakes in Wright County, 61 public launches and countless private accesses (Figure 2). There are 45 known AIS infestations of Eurasian watermilfoil in Wright County, five more than in 2016. Three lakes are known to be infested with starry stonewort (West Lake Sylvia, Pleasant, and Clearwater), two more than in 2016. Thirty-three waterbodies have known population of zebra mussels, 24 more than in 2016. A full list of Wright County infested waterbodies is available through the DNR infested waters list

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/ais/infested.html>

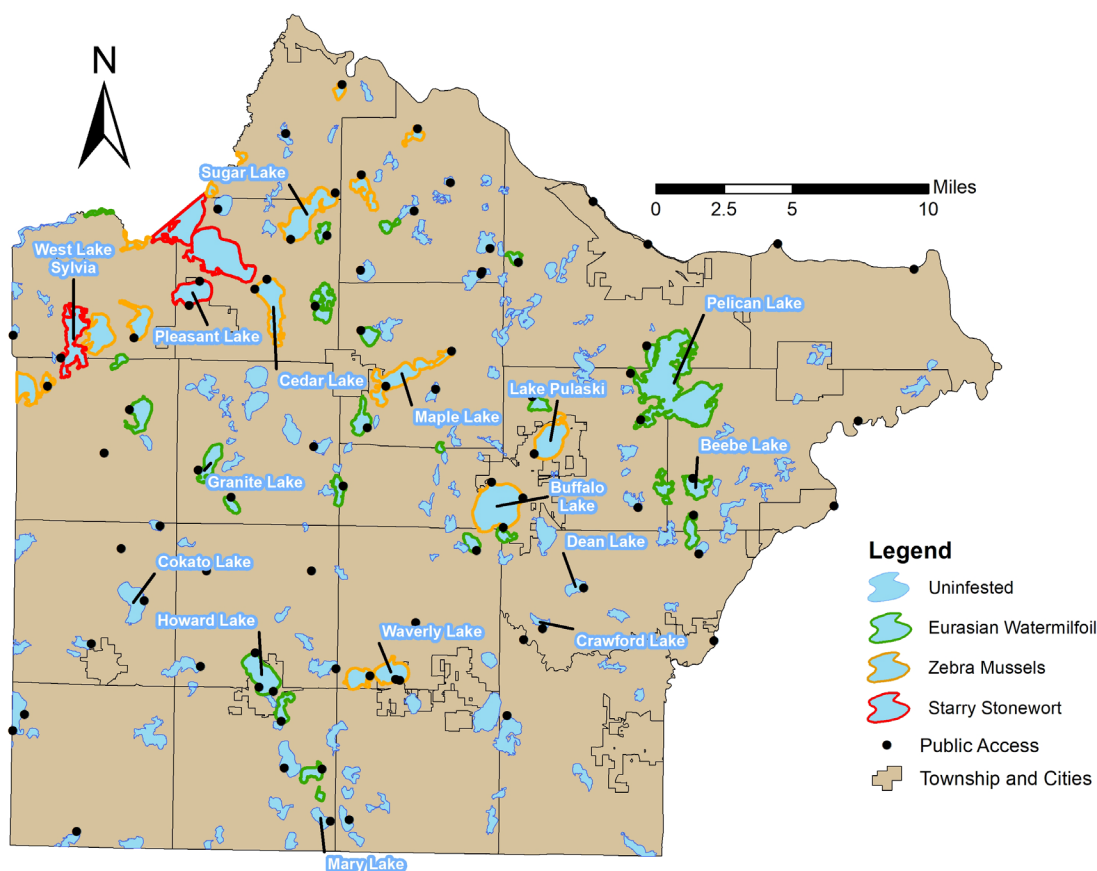


Figure 2. Wright County AIS infestation status and public access locations

Budget

There are two accounts associated with AIS for Wright SWCD. The first is an annual account that comes from the state AIS Prevention Aid. For the past several years Wright County was allocated about \$240,000 per year. This is the annual budget that pays for the standard programs such as inspections. The second account is a local general fund. This fund is composed of unused funds from previous years and returned funds. This fund pays for contingency and capital expenditures.

Table 1. Spending by category in 2022

| Category | Spending |
|-----------------|---------------|
| Education | \$ 2,825.00 |
| Treatment | \$ 52,007.80 |
| Decontamination | \$ 28,780.18 |
| Inspection | \$ 108,926.26 |
| Administration | \$ 25,000.00 |
| Capital | \$ 17,092.50 |
| Total | \$ 234,631.74 |

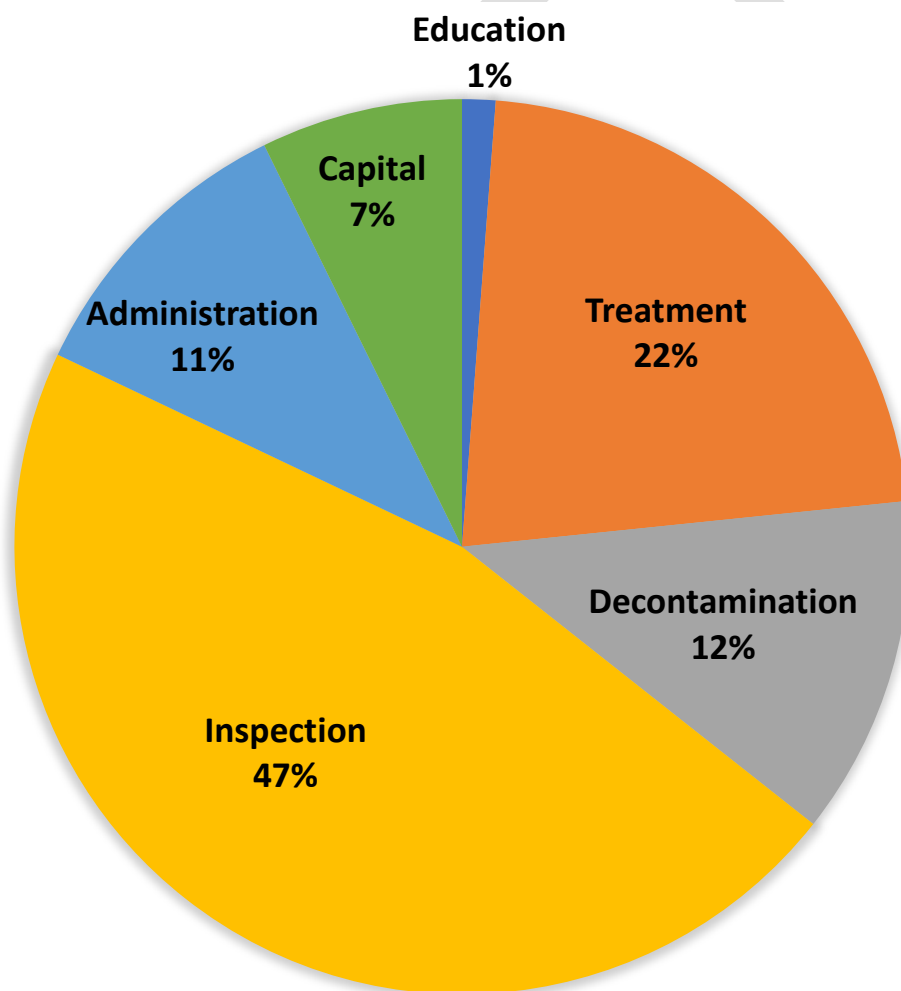


Figure 3. Percentage of spending in each category in 2022

Goals and Strategies

Treatment Goals

Treatment is management of aquatic invasive species that are present in Wright County waterbodies. This includes known populations and undiscovered populations.

1. Reduce the size of existing AIS populations
2. Discover new infestations before they become unmanageable

Inspection Goals

Inspections are the checking of water-related equipment for aquatic invasive species as it moves in and out of waterbodies.

1. Work under a delegated authority to hire authorized level 1 inspectors at public landings
2. Provide tools for individuals to self-inspect their equipment

Education Goals

Education is the distribution of information on AIS and how to prevent their spread

1. Provide education on AIS impacts to Minnesota waterbodies to children and adults
2. Provide education and reminders of best practices that prevent the spread of AIS

Decontamination Goals

Decontamination is the removal of aquatic invasive species from water-related equipment.

1. Provide tools and services for individuals to remove and dispose of plants, animals, water, etc. from their equipment.

Ordinances/Legislature

Ordinances and Legislatures is passing and implementation of laws and regulations with the intention to limit the spread of AIS.

1. Enforcement of state AIS laws and regulations
2. Considerations of local AIS ordinances

Contingency

Contingency is efforts that take place outside of the normal budget.

1. Provide funding sources for a new infestation
2. Build and maintain a fund for the unexpected repair to existing equipment
3. Build and maintain a fund for planned capital expenses
4. Build and maintain a fund for other unplanned expenses.

Public Involvement

In response to the need for more public involvement in AIS activities Wright SWCD separated the AIS Advisory Committee from the Water Management Task Force in 2020. The AIS committee is made up of two SWCD supervisors, two county commissioners, one other elected official, two lake association members (one voting, one alternate), and two sportsman representatives (one voting, one alternate). The committee is entirely advisory to the SWCD board of supervisors but allows for in depth discussion on AIS issues. The committee meets

four times per year in January, April, July, and November. Meetings take place at the USDA service center and are open to the public.

Prior to the revision of this plan a public survey was published to seek opinions and comments on AIS issues in Wright County. Responses were used to create actions in the implementation table and will be used to consider future budget allocations. A full summary of the survey results is in Appendix A.

Upon completion of this plan, it was made available to the public for comment for no less than 30 days. The AIS committee reviewed all of the comments and revisions prior to the final plan being sent to the SWCD board of supervisors for final approval.

Relationship to Other Plans

Numerous completed studies illustrate the potential for economic and environmental harm caused by the infestation of aquatic invasive species. AIS issues are not included in the 2006-2025 Wright County Water Plan. There are three comprehensive watershed management plans for Wright County. The North Fork Crow River Plan was approved in 2018. The South Fork Crow River Plan is expected to be approved in early 2024. The Mississippi River-Saint Cloud Plan is expected to be approved in late 2024. Each of these plans address AIS but AIS management is not currently eligible under the watershed-based implementation funds.

The DNR has an established response plan for new infestations ([available online](#)) Providing information on how to react to a new infestation is helpful to citizens in a difficult and stressful time. It can also offer Wright County constituents peace of mind knowing that reactions to new suspected infestations are quick and thorough.

Community Partners

Lake Associations

Many lakes in Wright County have lake associations or lake improvement districts, groups of homeowners that coordinate efforts to maintain and improve local lakes. Additionally, Wright County has a well-established Coalition of Lake Associations (COLA) that has been working with Wright SWCD to implement water quality improvement projects and AIS treatment. The financial burden of controlling AIS over and above the AIS Prevention Aid falls on the local residents.

Clearwater River Watershed District (CRWD)

Established in 1975 by citizen petition in order to address concerns with declining water quality in the Clearwater River Chain of Lakes. The CRWD is active in the prevention and management of AIS infestations, providing funding and technical assistance to local community groups working on AIS issues. Learn more about the CRWD at: www.crawd.org.

Hunting/Fishing Groups

Many anglers and hunters are active in special interest groups such as Ducks Unlimited, West Metro Walleye League, informal fishing leagues, high school fishing leagues and more. Wright SWCD continues to strive to make more connections with these groups.

Implementation Table

Table 2. Potential actions to prevent the spread of AIS in Wright County including estimated cost and likely funding sources

| Objective/Activity | Inspection | Education | Decontamination | Treatment | Legislation | Contingency | Estimated Annual Cost | Funding Source | Time Line |
|--|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|
| SWCD at-the-ramp inspections | X | X | | X | | | \$100,000 | State Aid | May-September Annually |
| Local funded at-the-ramp inspections | X | X | | X | | | \$80,000 | Local Interest Groups | May-September Annually |
| Staffed High Pressure/Hot water unit | X | | X | | | | \$40,000 | State Aid | May-September Annually |
| Maintain Self-Service CD3 units | | X | X | | | | \$6,000 | State Aid | April-October Annually |
| Purchase a new High Pressure/Hot water unit | | | X | | | X | \$25,000 | Local AIS Fund | 2026 |
| Refer AIS inspection violations to enforcement | X | | | | X | | \$1,000 | State Aid | May-September Annually |
| Track budget of Wright SWCD AIS Programs | X | X | X | X | X | X | \$25,000 | State Aid | Continuous |
| Produce AIS Give-a-aways | | X | | | | | | | |
| Maintain/Purchase Equipment for AIS Inspectors | X | | X | | | | \$4,000 | State Aid | April, October Annually |
| Provide AIS educational materials at specials events such as Annandale Expo and County Fair | | X | | | | | \$1,000 | State Aid, SWCD | April, July Annually |

| Objective/Activity | Inspection | Education | Decontamination | Treatment | Legislation | Contingency | Estimated Annual Cost | Funding Source | Time Line |
|--|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Provide Scholarships for AIS educational courses | | X | | | | | \$1,000 | State Aid | Continuous |
| Provide Scholarships for AIS Detector Trainings | | X | | X | | | \$2,000 | State Aid | As offered |
| Provide financial support and coordination for children's education of AIS | | X | | | | | \$1,800 | State Aid | Continuous |
| Purchase Additional Self-service AIS tools | X | | | | | X | \$1,500-\$35,000 | State Aid/Local Interest Group | Varies |
| Provide financial support for treatment of known AIS populations | | | | X | | | \$40,000 | State Aid/Local Interest Group | January, April, November Annually |
| Provide financial assistance for professional surveys of know AIS populations | | | | X | | | \$10,000 | State Aid/Local Interest Group | January, April, November Annually |
| Provide financial assistance for professional searches of new AIS infestations | | | | X | | X | \$10,000 | State Aid/Local Interest Group | January, April, November Annually |
| Participate in annual Starry Trek search | | X | | | | X | \$500 | SWCD | August Annually |
| Provide technical assistance and coordination of citizen scientist early detection efforts | | X | | X | | X | \$500 | SWCD | As requested |
| Provide technical assistance for policy makers | | | | | X | | \$500 | SWCD | As requested |
| Provide financial assistance for treatment of newly identified infestation | | | | X | | X | varies | State Aid/Local Interest Group | As requested |

| Objective/Activity | Inspection | Education | Decontamination | Treatment | Legislation | Contingency | Estimated Annual Cost | Funding Source | Time Line |
|---|------------|-----------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|-----------------------|----------------|-------------------------|
| Maintain/Repair high pressure, hot-water decontamination unit | | | X | | | X | \$6,000 | State Aid | April, October Annually |
| Analyze decontamination program for cost/benefit, consider alternative | | | X | | | | \$1,000 | State Aid/SWCD | 2024, as needed |
| Give presentations at local events regarding AIS | | X | | | | | \$1,000 | SWCD | As requested |
| Produce annual AIS activities report | X | X | X | X | | X | \$2,000 | State Aid | November Annually |
| Create more connections with fishing leagues and other sportsman interest groups | X | X | X | | | | \$500 | SWCD | Continuous |

Appendix A

2023 Survey Results

To gather public input on the AIS Management Plan and the annual budget Wright SWCD put out a public survey it was available online from 7/13/23 through 7/23/23. The survey was designed to take less than five minutes. A copy of the survey and a summary of the results is as follows.

1. Do you own lakeside property in Wright County
2. Do you recreate on lakes in Wright County
3. What best represents you (select all that apply)?
 - a. Angler
 - b. Waterfowl Hunter
 - c. Motorized recreator
 - d. Nonmotorized Recreator
 - e. Swimming
 - f. Other
4. How many Minnesota lakes do you visit each year with the same watercraft?
 - a. Stay on one all year
 - b. 2 to 5
 - c. 5+
5. Please drag and drop the following AIS Species for the most concerning (1) to the least concerning
 - a. Starry Stonewort
 - b. Curly-leaf pondweed
 - c. Eurasian watermilfoil
 - d. Flowering rush
6. Please list any other AIS that Concern you
7. Please prioritize the following AIS project categories. You have 10 points to distribute among options based on their level of importance.
 - a. Treatment
 - b. Inspection
 - c. Decontamination
 - d. Education
 - e. Legislation
 - f. Contingency
8. What three words come to mind when you think of AIS in Wright County?
9. Would you like to provide any other comments?

The first two questions were designed to ensure that respondents were in fact stakeholders of

Wright County lakes. There was one respondent that answered “no” to both questions and therefore the response was removed from analysis.

The third question was to identify special interest and activities enjoyed by the stakeholders. Of the 60 accepted respondents they identified as the following: anglers (56%), waterfowl hunters (10%), motorized recreator (69%), nonmotorized recreator (64%), swimming (70%). Additionally, 18% of respondents marked “other” which generally referred to leisure activities near the lake (e.g. “sitting lakeside”, “observer”, “...float on inflatables”, etc.)

In starting this survey, we made the hypothesis that respondents that stay on one lake all year have different priorities than those who travel to multiple Minnesota lakes. The fourth question was used to identify these different stakeholder groups and subsequent questions answers were analyzed based on the answer to this question. Additionally, were able to normalize answers based on the answer to this question. So that the opinions of one stakeholder group would not dominate the analysis. In fact, 67% of respondents reported that they stay on one lake all year (Figure 4).

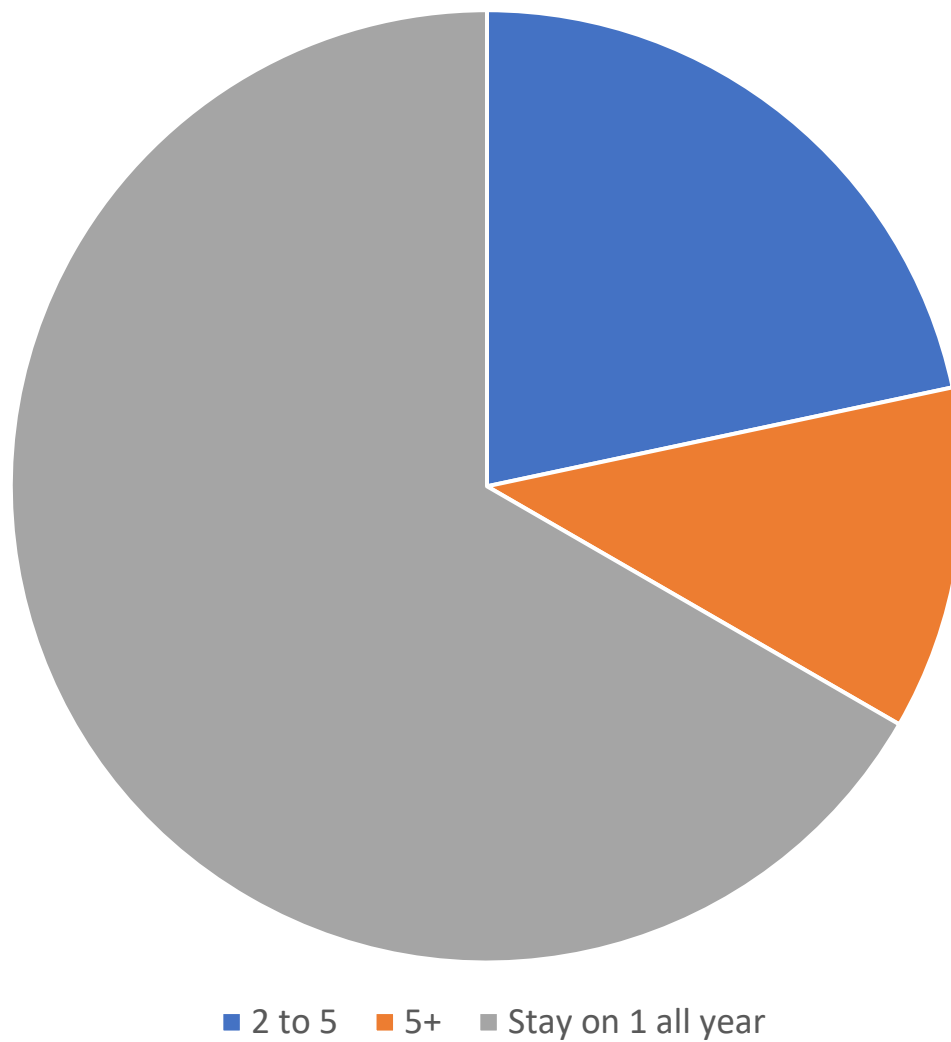


Figure 4. Percentage of survey respondents that travel among different Minnesota lakes

Species Priority

We wanted to know which species our stakeholders are most concerned about, so we asked respondents to rank the most prominent species currently in Wright County (Table 3). Notably, those that travel to 2 or more lakes were more likely to skip the question. Overall, in each group it was very likely that starry stonewort was chosen as a very concerning species. But respondents who stay on one lake all year were slightly more likely to choose Eurasian watermilfoil as their most concerning species. Species that were listed in the “Other species of concern” question included carp and spiny waterflea. Additional species were listed that are not considered AIS.

Table 3. Responses of the most concerning AIS based how many lakes stakeholders travel to each year.

| Most concerning species | Starry Stonewort | Eurasian watermilfoil | Zebra Mussel | Curly-leaf Pondweed | Flowering Rush | Did Not Answer |
|--------------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Stay on 1 all year | 35% | 40% | 15% | 8% | 0% | 3% |
| 2 to 5 | 23% | 8% | 15% | 15% | 8% | 31% |
| 5+ | 43% | 14% | 29% | 0% | 0% | 14% |
| Total | 33% | 30% | 17% | 8% | 2% | 10% |

Priority Categories

For the priority categories we had to further restrict the list of accepted answers. We removed responses that did not total the maximum value of 10. After this exclusion there were 45 accepted responses.

Most of the categories were ranked similarly over the different stakeholder groups (Table 4, Figure 5) with a few exceptions. Boaters that traveled to five or more lakes more highly valued education and legislation but showed less value for inspections. Generally, treatment was given the highest point value.

Table 4. Average point value assigned to different priority categories by how many lakes stakeholders traveled to in one year. Count reflects the number of responses accepted in each group.

| | Count | Treatment | Inspection | Decontamination | Education | Legislation | Contingency |
|---------------------------|-------|-----------|------------|-----------------|-----------|-------------|-------------|
| Stay on 1 all year | 32 | 3.4 | 2.1 | 1.3 | 1.2 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| 2 to 5 | 8 | 2.4 | 2.4 | 1.6 | 1.0 | 1.6 | 1.0 |
| 5+ | 5 | 2.0 | 1.2 | 1.4 | 3.4 | 1.2 | 0.8 |
| Total | 45 | 3.1 | 2.0 | 1.3 | 1.4 | 1.2 | 1.0 |

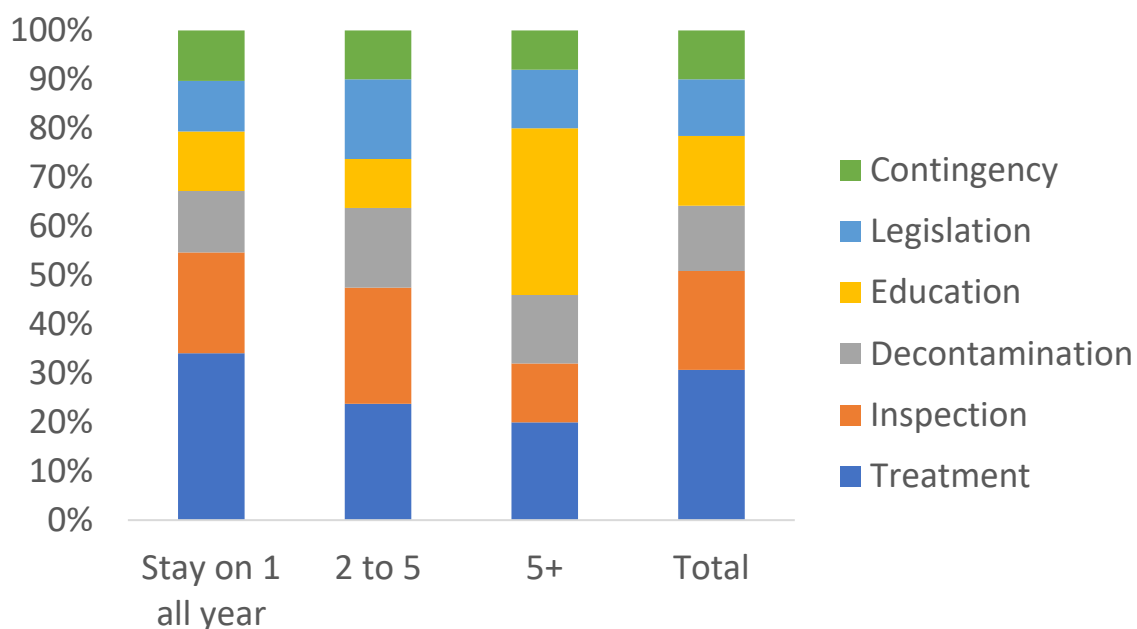


Figure 5. Stacked percentage chart of percentage assigned to each priority category for each stakeholder group.

Three Word Descriptions

We asked all respondents to use three words to describe Wright County AIS in three words. The answers are listed below. A note that while we strive to include verbatim responses a few were redacted for vulgarity. These responses were used for the word cloud on the front page of the report.

Table 5. Responses to the describe AIS in Wright County in three words.

| |
|--|
| Spreading, expensive, prevention |
| Angry/stuck up people sitting at lake accesses telling you what to do !!! |
| ground zero |
| Out of control |
| Aquatic Invasive Species |
| Festering time bomb |
| What a shame |
| Growing problem |
| Out of Control |
| Stupid as h |
| Water quality problems |
| stop the spread |
| zebras, starry, curlyleaf |
| Lack of education |
| PAIN IN THE A |
| Prevention Education Inspection |
| Trying our best |
| Boat landing inspections |
| Many lakes infested |
| Entitled, Ignorant, Weekenders (EIW) |
| Can't stop |
| stop farm pollution |
| All around us |
| Little cooperation with resident and their CLPO association on Clearwater Lake. Being Wright county holds not lake access to Clearwater, your funding contributions a small. Very small. |

| |
|---|
| Spreading, dangerous, scary |
| Treatment, contamination control, education |
| Needed. |
| wide spread issue |
| Little known resource |
| Stinky and difficult to swim through |
| Protecting our lakes |
| Out of control |
| Weeds, expensive, ongoing |
| Annoying, prevalent, inhibitive |
| Milfoil curly-leaf zebra-mussel |
| Careless, self serving, doom |
| Spray everyone's area |
| Farmers run off |
| Inspect bass 'clubs' |
| Ruins our lakes |
| Doing great work |
| No |
| Protect important prevent |
| Stupid county commissioners |
| Milfoil control monitoring |

Other comments

The final question was simply to ask stakeholders to give any other comments. Those are listed here.

Table 6. Other comments provided to the survey.

| |
|--|
| Focus and more resources should be spent on stonewort and mussels...not chemical treatment of milfoil and pondweed. |
| I appreciate all that WSWCD does to help with AIS management and prevention efforts in our county. I just wish they had more money and staff to have an even greater impact! |
| No thanks |
| Keeping the decon unit in Annandale should remain a priority. I think investing in one or |

| |
|--|
| more roaming units to keep at popular boat launches to offer a decon prior to launch or removal would be a good investment by the county. |
| Close the landings to small lakes - we tend to keep our boats on the same lake, and it's others bringing in AIS - which we can't treat because we lack the funds a large, well populated lake can raise. We need more education for lake associations on fighting AIS - what to do, who to call, who can help, how to pay for it, etc |
| Monetary help in keeping these AIS at bay is crucial. Bullheads are also a large problem in our lake. I know they aren't technically Invasive; however, they sure diminish our water quality. Help in removing those would be greatly appreciated. |
| DNR should be much more proactive |
| Need more inspections on more wright county lakes |
| Wright County lakes are its biggest resource and we need to do all we can to protect it. Controlling rainwater runoff should be a top priority. Second is trying to control AIS or should I say manage as I am sure 90% of all water bodies have a least one. |
| more DNR cooperation |
| I think another unfortunate result from Covid was the further spread of AIS since there were so many people getting into boating and other outdoor activities that were not restricted in MN |
| I couldn't get the list in order section to work. All AIS affect the lakes and impact is different yet similar in that it changes the natural dynamics of the lake. Education is important and getting the message out to all users of the water is important. Fingers are pointed at boat owners that don't live on the lake but my experience has been the majority of avid boat users are the most cautious. It's lakeshore owners that don't think they need check the used dock, lift or other equipment. Or the ones that don't have to constantly be checked going in and out of the lakes. I grew up on a lake that just this past month zebra mussels were discovered. The the 1st comment out of my mothers mouth was wondering if they will still have AIS check station. YES!!! Now it is just as important to check boats going out as it had been to check going in. She hasn't owned a boat for 3 years but still should be reminded/educated that now that the lake is infected it is vital to check what comes out. |
| MY CUSTOMERS DO NOT LIKE THE BOAT INSPECTORS TELLING THEM WHAT WHERE WHEN THEY CAN GO INTO ANY BODY OF WATER . THEY CAN LOOK TO SEE IF THERES WEEDS ON A BOAT TRAILER . AND ASK WHAT LAKE BUT THATS IT . |
| Excellent AIS Work Wright County ! |
| I wish education and decontamination were effective. The same people who won't take the time to learn also will not take time to decontaminate. DNR or counties need to come up with permitting programs to use a public access. It's free, as long as you pass the 10 question test every 2 years. Must have your permit in your boat, just like your registration. It gets rid of the "I didn't know" excuse and makes violations enforceable. |

| |
|---|
| Talk to the Koronis Lake Association they have been working on this for years with Professors from other states. They know and have experienced alot. |
| These species are in our lakes and no amount of money can eradicate them; look no further than Minnetonka for proof. Please save our time, money, and the the dumping of chemicals in our lakes from this pointless cause. |
| Do not re-instate the watercraft decontamination station in Annandale. |
| Progress is being made, yet spreading continues. |
| seems like a endless issue and will get worse |
| The best path is mandated force prevention. |
| We all need to do our best to prevent AIS. |
| Not sure if this matters, but my property is on Waverly Lake. I know the lake is treated based on grants and, obviously, those funds are limited. I've always wondered why the city/county has not attempted to gather funds from residents to more thoroughly and quickly treat the issues in the lake. Of course, not everyone would agree to this, but I would think enough money could be raised to at least double the funds invested via the grant (I believe it's only about \$3000?). |
| Give out information on where we can buy the chemicals to clean our lake shore up from all the disgusting weeds year after year |
| No |
| There is at least one group of 15 or 20 bass boats that hop from lake to lake to lake every weekend. They hold informal contests at each lake where they launch. It would make sense to find and inspect those boats. |