

To: Gary Botsek  
cc: Jeff Forester, Michael Hoff, Ann Pierce, Molly MacGregor  
Subject: Sustainable Funding for Local Government Units

Here I go! Please understand that my input is based on our experiences in Hubbard County over the past 8 years...with what as I see as the needs today and looking forward. I want to frame my input around some general thoughts and then get to specifics for LGU's.

#### **CURRENT FUNDING SOURCES:**

As a start, we need to have a baseline on where funding currently comes from and where it is spent. A few questions:

- 1) What are the current sources of funding for the AIS programs in the state? Where does the \$8million in 2014 come from? How is it spent? I know I have a lot of this info buried in my stacks of paper, but a review of these questions would help to frame the needs. My understanding is that about \$250,000 goes to DNR watercraft inspection interns and LGU's grants on an annual basis. Don't know what goes for "full time" DNR inspectors.
- 2) What is source of funding and amount for UM Research?
- 3) What is current support from Federal sources for AIS prevention in Minnesota?

#### **WHO NEEDS ADDITIONAL/NEW FUNDING SUPPORT? :**

I think that when we plan for sustainable funding, we need to realize there are distinct needs for different stakeholders.

- 1) DNR to implement and manage programs
- 2) Metro Area (Unique needs)
- 3) Out-State counties with high concentration of lakes
- 4) Out-state Counties with few lakes
- 5) Mississippi/Minnesota River @tributaries
- 6) University of Minnesota Research Institute (and possibly other research)
- 7) Direct Support to LGU's that already have county-wide structured programs

#### **WHAT ARE THE BIG AIS FUNDING NEEDS? :**

From my "out-state" perspective, I see the following areas of needs.

- 1) Public Awareness and Education of non-residents of Minnesota. Hubbard County's experience is that about 12% of watercraft inspections are for watercraft not registered in Minnesota. I suspect that if we had data from resort owner launch sites, the number would be much higher. Resort owners experience much higher non-conformance to AIS laws and practices from non-residents. Launch site inspections in Hubbard County experience higher violations of "plug-in" from non-residents. Increased "in-coming" roadside checks are needed.
- 2) Substantially higher investment in research at the University of Minnesota. The faster we can find a solution to Zebra Mussel control the better!!

- 3) Resort owner conformance to good prevention practices is needed. My experience is that resort owners get it! They see the threat and impact, but do not have the resources, regulations, and equipment to conduct inspection protocols & decontamination at the same level that is done at public launch sites. There are a lot of options on this one. Good topic for discussion, but some financial help to resorts would be needed. This is especially an issue with the large destination fishing lakes.
- 4) Here is the big one. Dedicated/Sustainable funding to local government units to establish a comprehensive AIS prevention program. This includes Education/Public Awareness, Prevention (watercraft inspection), Early Detection Monitoring, Rapid Response, Containment, Mitigation, and Administration. Access to more decontamination stations is essential (this includes the equipment, Level 2 staff funding, and training). Inspections should be free to the public for this to be successful and change behaviors. Full prevention and behavior change can only be accomplished with quick inspections and convenient cleaning stations. When changing behavior, convenience is required.

#### **PERSPECTIVE ON FUNDING SOURCES:**

- 1) One-time funding sources (Grants, Legacy funds, LCCMR funds, USFW, or selective legislative general funding) are like jostling with windmills. They are politically charged and energy consuming on a regular basis. Their most likely value is to “kick-start” a program, research project, or pilot project. Long Term, I don’t think we should stop the dialogue on obtaining sustainable Legacy Funds for AIS Prevention. \$300+ million collected from taxes and none spent on AIS is simply contrary to the expectations of many Minnesota citizens.
- 2) The current DNR funding level (\$8MM) and the programs it supports should not be changed or reduced. The staffing, inspection, law enforcement, AIS Management, BMP’s for accesses, etc. needs to be maintained while increasing LGU (county level) funding. The funding sources/accounts for these should not change (e.g. Invasive Species Account and General fund)
- 3) A fee based program is the most viable and fair way for LGU funding, e.g.
  - √<sup>1</sup> An annual \$10 decal fee for all watercraft registered in the state (I am sure some modification for resort owners is needed so they don’t have to pay for every watercraft they own)
  - √<sup>1</sup> An annual \$10 decal fee for watercraft not registered in Minnesota
  - √<sup>1</sup> Increased fees on fishing & hunting licenses (\$10?). This money should be dedicated to research and outreach (public awareness) to resort owners and out-of-state watercraft owners. More direct contact with these stakeholders is essential.
  - √<sup>1</sup> Matching funds (ratio TBD) from county government
  - √<sup>1</sup> Matching funds (ratio TBD) from Townships, based on the TMV (taxable market value) of water related property in a township
  - √<sup>1</sup> Other options for the public, in general, to contribute; e.g. vanity License plates, check-off on tax form, etc.
- 4) Any new decal or other fee funding source should guarantee that a minimum of 85% is dedicated directly to LGUs (county level) for AIS prevention work. I will propose a model below.

## **A MODEL FOR LGU AIS PREVENTION MANAGEMENT:**

The core of any local AIS prevention/watercraft inspection program should be established at the county government level. Counties should be given the option (required?) to participate in the process of receiving sustainable funds from a state revenue source with the following requirements:

- 1) The DNR must establish a state-wide process and criteria for LGU funding. This will insure consistent data collection and criteria for allocating funds.
- 2) The County must establish/hire an AIS Coordinator (manager). It can be a stand-alone special department in the county or report to some county manager (ESO Office, SWCD Manager, etc.)
- 3) The County must develop and codify an AIS prevention plan. The content would be established by the DNR. It would be modeled after the state format. (A good recent example is the ACCL plan). It communicates a commitment by the county and establishes actions...the basis for funding needs.
- 4) An "Oversight Committee" would be established by each county to develop long range strategy, needs and direction to insure progress against the AIS plan
- 5) Annually the county must provide an action plan for the year as part of the receipt of sustainable funds. Once a format is established and formula developed, the sustainable fund level could be automatic. An example of a model for funds could be based on the TMV of lake/river property in a county and the number of lakes that are at risk (per a set criteria such as number of public accesses, resorts, resort accesses, etc).
- 6) The County AIS Coordinator would be responsible for hiring and staffing watercraft inspectors, buying supplies/equipment, providing training, data processing/analysis, purchasing and manning decontamination stations, developing a rapid response plan, etc. Report writing and communication of the data to the DNR, County Commissioners, and general public would be required.
- 7) An annual report to the DNR would be required to document the inspection (and other initiatives) levels to justify the funds spent.
- 8) Funding for any LGU (county) AIS program should be shared between the State, County, Townships/Cities, and lake residents, with the majority from state "sustainable" funds. A model to consider:
  - √<sup>1</sup> County Commissioners would be 100% responsible for funding a local AIS Coordinator position (salary, benefits, etc.) and support staff (e.g.data entry/administration). The assigned LGU (SWCD, ESO. Etc.) would supervise the Coordinator.
  - √<sup>1</sup> State Sustainable Funds would provide 100% of the cost for decontamination/wash stations, and the Level 2 Inspectors (wages and training) needed to operate them under the management of the LGU AIS Coordinator. The number of stations would be based on the local LGU AIS Prevention Plan.

- √<sup>1</sup> Direct watercraft inspection time would be funded from 50% State Sustainable funds, 30% County and Townships, and 20% lake residents (lake associations). This could work for large lakes with strong lake associations. However, it is problematic for smaller lake associations which do not have the financial resources to cover 20% of inspection time, while trying to do water quality and lake shore restoration projects. Some cap on the contribution from a lake association could be established. This is a rich topic for future discussion.
- √<sup>1</sup> The funds (applied for) and provided to an LGU for inspections and decontamination facilities would be based on a scoring system based on number of lakes, accesses, and resort accesses in a county.

Overall, I believe that for Minnesota to make progress against AIS we must find a way for sustainable funding to be available to local government units, with overall strategy directed by the DNR.

Ken Grob

11/19/2013