

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Aid Guidelines 2026-2030

Background

Hennepin County has received funding from the State of Minnesota since 2014 to implement plans to stop the introduction or limit the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS). AIS are “non-native, aquatic organisms that invade water beyond their natural and historic range” (Minnesota Statute 477A.19). AIS may harm economic, environmental, or human health and threaten our natural resources. A list of prohibited, regulated, and unregulated non-native species is available at dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/laws.html.

The Minnesota State Legislature appropriates \$10 million annually to Minnesota counties (Chapter 308, H.F. No. 3167: Omnibus tax bill) for this work through a program called Local AIS Prevention Aid, through which Hennepin County receives approximately \$315,000 annually. To receive funding, the county must establish, by resolution or adoption of a plan, guidelines for the use of the proceeds. A copy of the county’s guidelines must be submitted to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) by December 31 of the year funding was received. In 2014, the county board approved the first version of AIS prevention aid plan and guidelines (Resolution 14-0438) and delegated authority to the county administrator to approve and submit future guidelines to the DNR. There have been two previous versions of the guidelines covering from 2014 through 2025.

To encourage innovation and flexibility, state statute provides few limitations on how the funds can be used. Counties may appropriate the funds directly or provide any portion of the proceeds to other groups, such as local units of government, park districts, joint powers boards, watershed districts, and lake associations. Approximately \$100,000 has been used annually to supplement existing partner inspection programming at water accesses, \$100,000-\$150,000 for grants, and the remainder has been distributed for other AIS needs by county staff and leadership. Learn more about grants and program accomplishments at hennepin.us/aisprevention.

In late 2024, Hennepin County began the process of updating the AIS prevention aid guidelines for a five-year period beginning in 2026. Stakeholder engagement was led by Hennepin County’s Strategic Planning and Initiatives department.

As part of this effort, 161 stakeholders provided feedback through surveys and focus groups. Participants included youth, general water users and subscribers of the county's AIS early detection volunteer newsletter as well as stakeholders actively working on or connected to AIS prevention efforts in Hennepin County. These stakeholders represent cities, local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, nearby counties, Hennepin County, private businesses, state agencies, universities, and lake associations.

Stakeholders broadly support Hennepin County's current AIS prevention programming, recognizing its effectiveness, innovation, and strong partnerships. They encouraged continued collaboration with other counties, universities, and underrepresented communities and increased advocacy and support for resources to increase AIS prevention efforts countywide.

They also emphasized the importance of maintaining a comprehensive funding approach, with flexibility to adapt if state funding is reduced. Full details of the public engagement efforts are posted at beheardhennepin.org/aquatic-invasives-species-guidelines.

The guidelines outlined in this document reflect feedback the county received during public engagement that is feasible to implement with funding provided by the State of Minnesota. A draft of the 2026-2030 guidelines was shared with 2,477 stakeholders in October 2025. The county received 13 survey responses and five participants attended a meeting to provide final comments on the draft. The county reviewed the comments and made final edits to these guidelines. They were approved by the County Administrator and submitted to the DNR in December 2025, as required.

Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Aid Guidelines 2026-2030

The following guidelines serve as the basis for strategic planning and implementation of the state AIS prevention aid. Additionally, projects must also align with the county's natural resources strategic goals:

- Hennepin County waters are clean and healthy
- Hennepin County landscapes are diverse and functional, and natural areas are preserved
- Hennepin County fosters effective partnerships
- Hennepin County motivates environmental stewardship
- Hennepin County leverages financial resources

Goal: Prevent the introduction or limit the spread of aquatic invasive species.

The county's AIS program supports projects that are consistent with current science, sound cost-benefit analysis, and reflect Minnesota's water values and traditions.

Addressing pathways

AIS can be spread throughout the county via numerous pathways and behaviors. The risk of introduction varies by water body and species. As with previous county AIS prevention aid guidelines, the county will take a comprehensive approach to address all major pathways with state AIS Prevention Aid funds. The pathways will now be grouped into two categories:

Pathway category 1: water recreation

- Recreational watercraft

- Fishing gear and equipment
- Live bait
- Equipment (docks, boat lifts)

Pathway category 2: pets, hobbies, and landscaping

- Aquarium trade
- Retail plant trade

Funds will be distributed based on the risk of introduction from each pathway. Most funding will focus on water recreation, reflecting priorities shared during the county's engagement with stakeholders.

Funding mechanisms

The county will use three mechanisms to distribute AIS prevention funds.

80% of funds will be passed through to partners through two methods:

1. Supplement watercraft inspections

Up to 50% of AIS Prevention Aid allocation will be used to supplement watercraft inspection programs. Each year, the county will work with partners to identify inspection needs across lakes and allocate resources through a Request for Proposals or similar process.

2. Grants for partners

Approximately 30% of the total allocation will be awarded as grants to support partner projects. The county will solicit applications annually through a Request for Proposals process and evaluate proposals based on criteria aligned with these guidelines.

- If less than 50% of the total funds are used for supplementing watercraft inspections, the remaining amount will be added to the grant pool, ensuring 80% of received funds are available to support partner work.

20% of funds will be for county-directed work including:

3. County-directed work

The remaining funds (~20%) will be used to support county-directed AIS prevention work. This may include rapid response and treatment of new infestations, enforcement at public water accesses, programmatic and technical assistance, trainings such as AIS Detectors, early detection lake surveys, research collaboration, equipment maintenance, education and outreach, and other services needed to implement these guidelines.

- None of the state-provided AIS funding will be used to pay for county staff time or overhead costs to administer the AIS program or other county programs.

Funding priorities

Hennepin County has historically funded AIS prevention work in the following categories.

- Design public access points with an AIS prevention emphasis

- Early detection inspections
- Education – displays, outreach, media
- Education and/or assessments at pet stores, bait stores, and nurseries
- Enforcement
- Expand decontamination facilities
- Online tools/challenges to build prevention habits
- Rapid response and treatment for new infestations
- Research and innovation
- Watercraft inspections

The county will continue a comprehensive funding approach by supporting projects in each AIS prevention category. To guide funding decisions, the categories are now organized into tiers based on stakeholder feedback about their importance and the strength of support stakeholders have for their funding. This determination was based on the totality of the stakeholder engagement feedback, which balanced varied results to questions stakeholders responded to throughout the engagement process. These tiers will help inform the allocation of AIS prevention funds to specific projects. A description of the work for each category is provided below.

Tier 1

- Supplement watercraft inspections
- Early detection
- Rapid response and treatment for new infestations

Tier 2

- Enforcement
- Decontamination facilities
- Design public access points with an AIS prevention emphasis
- Education
- Research and innovation

Tier 1 categories received strong support across all engagement efforts and are considered the highest priorities. These categories are supported through the first 50% of AIS prevention funds being set aside for watercraft inspections, along with early detection and rapid response being supported in partner grants and through county-directed work, respectively.

Tier 2 categories were also well supported and seen as valuable, though they ranked lower in priority. These categories will be supported primarily through grants for partners and other county-led project activities.

The county also recognizes the need for flexibility. If state funding is reduced, the county may need to focus prevention aid dollars on the highest-priority categories to maximize AIS prevention efforts.

Tier 1 details

[Supplement watercraft inspections](#)

- Pathway category 1: water recreation
- Funding mechanism: supplement watercraft inspections

Having inspectors on site at public accesses is an effective way to ensure people are taking the necessary actions to prevent the spread of AIS. Predictable inspection hours can create gaps when boaters know inspectors won't be present. These gaps reduce accountability and increase the risk of AIS introduction.

To address this, the county will establish a process for partners to outline their inspection plans and protocols at lakes across Hennepin County. Partners will be able to request additional support to extend inspection hours at priority sites and/or partners may propose creating new inspection efforts at lakes and over periods where inspections are not yet occurring.

This would be implemented annually, likely through a Request for Proposals each fall, to determine inspection support for the following year.

Early detection

- Pathway category 1: water recreation
- Pathway category 2: pets, hobbies, and landscaping
- Funding mechanisms: grants to partners; county-directed program funds

Early detection efforts train volunteers to work alongside scientists to survey lakes and look for signs of AIS. These efforts focus on early detection of AIS, when management and treatment options may still be available.

Rapid response and treatment for new infestations

- Pathway category 1: water recreation
- Pathway category 2: pets, hobbies, and landscaping
- Funding mechanism: county-directed program funds

Once AIS is introduced into a lake, there is a limited window of time to remove it before it becomes established. This requires a rapid response by the county and its partners.

For any rapid response action, the county will work with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the Minnesota AIS Research Center, and local units of government to develop and implement treatment plans when effective treatments are available. Hennepin County will reserve county-directed funds each year for rapid response needs identified by partners, backed by scientific advisors, and supported by local units of government.

Tier 2 details

Enforcement

- Pathway category 1: water recreation
- Funding mechanism: county-directed program funds

Funds may be used to provide additional AIS enforcement at unpredictable times at public water accesses and on roadways throughout the county through a direct allocation to Sheriff's water patrol or other law enforcement agency.

Decontamination facilities

- Pathway category 1: water recreation
- Funding mechanisms: grants to partners; county-directed program funds

Decontamination facilities are an effective way to remove AIS from boats and trailers. These portable or permanent structures typically use hot water to remove or kill AIS attached to boats and trailers.

Funds may be used to help partners purchase new decontamination units or retrofit existing ones. This support helps improve AIS removal from infested lakes and to ensure that boats leaving the decontamination facility aren't carrying AIS to other uninfested waterbodies.

Design public access points with an AIS prevention emphasis

- Pathway category 1: water recreation
- Funding mechanism: grants to partners

The county works with partners, both private and public, to redesign public water accesses and improve facilities to make it easier for boaters to take the right actions. The county's current behavior change strategies at public water accesses include:

- Self-service waterless cleaning systems that provide the tools for boaters to take appropriate actions
- Pavement markings to influence traffic flow
- Designated locations to take AIS prevention actions
- Signs to prompt desired behaviors

Education

- Pathway category 1: water recreation
- Pathway category 2: pets, hobbies, and landscaping
- Funding mechanisms: grants to partners; county-directed program funds.

To be most effective, educational efforts should engage audiences where they make decisions, such as at boat launches, water access points, and other locations.

Education strategies may include broadcast messaging, outreach at events, interactive displays, challenges, and youth environmental education. These efforts should aim to raise awareness and encourage AIS prevention behaviors.

The most successful projects use proven behavior change strategies that are tailored to how AIS spread and are culturally relevant to the audience.

Research and innovation

- Pathway category 1: water recreation
- Pathway category 2: pets, hobbies, and landscaping
- Funding mechanisms: grants to partners; county-directed program funds

Funds can be used to support research and innovation and/or to reduce risk associated with trying new ideas. They can also be used to make incremental improvements that are backed by current research, program evaluations, and cost-effective methods.

These funds aren't meant to replace work that is already being done with other resources.

Program approach

Stakeholders shared some insights that didn't apply to specific changes in funding tiers, mechanisms, or categories, offering suggestions for how the county could improve its approach in managing the program to advance AIS prevention work overall. The following section outlines enhancements to the county's program approach:

Foster partnership

Hennepin County will strengthen partnerships with other counties, universities, and water user affinity groups such as those involved in fishing, windsurfing, paddleboarding, and sailing.

The county will strengthen its engagement with the general public, individuals who care about water more broadly, and communities that aren't currently represented or actively involved in AIS prevention efforts.

Over the 5-year plan the county will:

- Host work group meetings with interested stakeholders at least once a year to review results from the past year and identify AIS Prevention funding priorities for the following year.
- Attend local and regional AIS practitioner and research conferences. Work with partners to share Hennepin County outcomes more broadly and apply successful strategies from other regions locally.
- Expand the range of stakeholder groups applying for and receiving AIS prevention aid funds. This includes engaging more non-traditional groups and those best positioned to implement AIS prevention actions with residents.

Increase advocacy

Stakeholders see opportunity for Hennepin County to build on its influential presence in Minnesota by increasing collaboration with other Minnesota counties on AIS programming. This includes advocating for stronger statewide interventions and increased funding.

There is a strong possibility that state AIS prevention aid funding for Minnesota counties will be reduced by half during a legislative session within the 2026-2030 guideline period. This would significantly impact the amount of AIS funding Hennepin County receives to support its AIS prevention work.

To address this, the county will work with partners to advocate for maintaining current funding levels and advancing policies that prevent the spread of AIS.

Over the 5-year plan the county will:

- Increase advocacy for AIS prevention aid funding at the state legislature. The county's proposed 2026 state legislative platform includes restoring AIS prevention aid. County staff will advocate at the Capitol for continued local funding.
- Join coordinated partner efforts by offering letters of support, participating in conversations with legislators, and engaging in other advocacy efforts as invited.

Increase transparency

Stakeholders expressed an interest in receiving more information about programming decisions and outcomes to better understand how funds are utilized.

Over the 5-year plan the county will:

- Use scheduled work group meetings to share program decisions and outcomes at least once a year.
- Publish an annual report including accomplishments and funding spent by pathway, tier, and funding mechanism. Also, annually summarize accomplishments for the Department of Natural Resources statewide AIS Prevention Aid Metrics report.
- Regularly update the county's AIS webpage to list active and recently completed program activities.
- Feature relevant and interesting program activities and outcomes on the county's social media channels (and make that content available to partners to use and re-post).
- Continue to broaden partner participation in program activities such as proposal review panels, presentations, and other activities supported by funds.

Stakeholder engagement

To help inform the development of the AIS prevention aid guidelines for 2026-2030, Hennepin County conducted a stakeholder engagement process. Participants included subscribers to the county's AIS early detection volunteer newsletter, young people, and individuals actively working on or connected to AIS prevention activities in Hennepin County.

The engagement process included two parts:

1. Surveys: two surveys were distributed. One to newsletter subscribers and another to stakeholders working on AIS prevention. A total of 2,477 individuals were identified as interested stakeholders and were kept informed of engagement efforts and progress on the development of the guidelines.
2. Focus groups: small focus groups were held to dive deeper into survey responses and gather detailed perspectives from a wide variety of AIS prevention stakeholders. A separate youth-specific focus group was also conducted to ensure youth voices were included.

In total, 161 people responded to the surveys, representing 64 organizations. Of those, 94 were newsletter subscribers and 67 were individuals actively involved in AIS prevention work.

While some subscribers to the county's AIS newsletter may be actively involved in AIS prevention, the list primarily includes general water users who are interested in receiving updates about AIS in Hennepin County, invitations to trainings, and other related information.

People actively working on or connected to AIS prevention include individuals from cities, local government agencies, nonprofit organizations, nearby counties, Hennepin County, private businesses, state agencies, universities, and lake associations.

Survey respondents who expressed interest in participating in a focus group were invited to join a session or provide written feedback. These stakeholders represented nonprofit organizations, state agencies, local government agencies (including watershed and park districts), lake associations, cities, and private businesses.

The focus groups provided an opportunity to gather more detailed feedback and gain a deeper understanding of stakeholder perspectives. Including the youth-specific session, 16 people participated across four focus groups. An additional three individuals who were unable to attend submitted detailed written feedback.

How engagement feedback was used to draft guidelines

The AIS prevention aid guidelines for 2026-2030 incorporate extensive stakeholder feedback.

What the county's AIS prevention programming does well

There is a broad consensus from participants in the stakeholder engagement process that Hennepin County's current AIS prevention program is important and running well. It is widely viewed positively. Many stakeholders shared that they believe the county is in a unique position to implement innovative approaches and believe the county should continue to fund these creative and innovative strategies and partnerships. Additionally, stakeholders shared that the county is well situated to utilize existing relationships with colleges and universities to support research and evaluation of AIS prevention activities.

Additional opportunities for the county's AIS prevention efforts

Hennepin County has an opportunity to capitalize on its influential presence in Minnesota to increase collaborations with other counties around the state on AIS programming, including advocating for more statewide interventions and funding. Stakeholders shared a desire for the county to open and foster regular engagement and communication with local and regional partners to stay current on the changing needs of Minnesota's diverse bodies of water.

Recommendations for how to improve partnerships

Stakeholders shared opportunities for Hennepin County to improve partnerships in its AIS prevention work. These include building stronger partnerships with other counties, universities, and water user affinity groups such as those involved with fishing, wind surfing, paddle boarding, and sailing. Stakeholders also shared that there are opportunities for the county to increase and strengthen its engagement with the general public, those who care about water more broadly, and communities not currently represented or actively engaged in AIS prevention work.

Stakeholder feedback on comprehensive vs. focused programming

Most stakeholders support continuing the county's current comprehensive funding approach for AIS prevention grant dollars. However, there was also an acknowledgement and understanding that flexibility is needed to account for any potential reduction in state funding that might require the county to focus prevention aid dollars on a few higher priority AIS funding categories to maximize AIS prevention efforts.

Survey results

Overall, there is very little opposition to the various categories of AIS prevention work. The categories of AIS prevention work that have the highest level of strong support from respondents include:

- Early detection inspections
- Rapid response and treatment for new infestations
- Research and innovation
- Watercraft inspections
- Enforcement
- Design public access points with an AIS prevention emphasis

Most pressing AIS issues

Respondents most commonly indicated a specific invasive species (i.e., zebra mussels, invasive carp, starry stonewort, etc.) as the most pressing AIS issue facing the region. Respondents also most frequently mentioned education/public knowledge and awareness, spreading of AIS via watercraft, and lack of funding as most pressing AIS issues.

[Read the full survey results summary \(PDF\)](#)

Focus group results

AIS funding approach

Focus group members were presented with 10 categories to consider as part of a comprehensive approach to prevent AIS introduction. Eight out of the 14 stakeholders (57%) think that the county should take a more focused funding approach rather than its current comprehensive funding approach. The remaining six out of 14 stakeholders (43%) think the county should continue distributing funding comprehensively across the categories it currently funds. This breakdown was the opposite in the survey where 51% of survey respondents think the county should continue distributing funding across the various categories of AIS prevention work and 34% think the county should focus funding on a few priority categories.

Most pressing AIS issues

Most participants felt that the county's current guidelines already address the most pressing AIS issues. Stakeholders tended to focus on the issues they personally considered most important.

Based on the analysis of responses, the most pressing AIS issues were grouped into the following buckets:

- AIS funding
- Early detection
- Impact of AIS (water quality)
- Management of AIS
- Miscellaneous
- Pathways (general)
- Prevention
- Public engagement
- Watercrafts as a pathway

[Read the full focus group results summary \(PDF\)](#)

Responding to public comment

A draft of the plan was made available for public comment between October 22 and October 31, 2025. The county sent the guidelines to 2,477 individuals actively working on or connected to AIS prevention activities in Hennepin County. Individuals were encouraged to take an online survey and/or attend an online meeting to learn more about the guidelines and provide feedback. The county received 13 responses to the survey. Of those who participated, 92% indicated that the guidelines were clear and 75% reported satisfaction with Hennepin County's stakeholder engagement in developing the guidelines.

The county received nine specific comments on the guidelines. Edits to expand or clarify were made to the guidelines based on this feedback:

- Added a program goal statement.
- Clarified that none of the state-provided AIS funding will be used to pay for county staff time or overhead costs to administer the AIS program or other county programs.
- Provided additional explanation of the process to organize the categories of AIS prevention work into two tiers.

Additional comments asking for additional clarity on how the guidelines will be applied will be addressed with the release of the request for proposals for the grant funding to partners. Other comments were outside of the scope of the development of the guidelines. These comments have been heard and shared with county leadership.

Hennepin County Aquatic Invasive Species prevention

hennepin.us/aisprevention