



MEMORANDUM

To: MCWD Board of Managers
From: Eric Fieldseth
Date: March 8, 2018 Operations and Programs Committee
Re: 2018 AIS Watercraft Inspection Cost-Share Partnerships

Purpose:

To outline the history of the MCWD's AIS watercraft inspection funds and summarize the 2018 funding recommendations in preparation for final Board decision on March 22.

Background:

AIS Watercraft Inspection Program Background:

As zebra mussels were first found in Lake Minnetonka in 2010, the District began focusing more resources on AIS prevention, and in 2012, began developing an AIS Management Plan that would later be adopted into the District's 2007 Comprehensive Plan in 2013. Watercraft inspections were a primary AIS prevention tool noted in that plan. Pre-2012, watercraft inspections were mainly a tool used by the MN DNR to provide education about AIS to boaters. In 2012, the MCWD was instrumental in working with the DNR to develop a delegation agreement that would delegate the DNR's authority to local government units to conduct watercraft inspections at public boat launches. The delegation agreements required local agencies to use DNR trained and authorized watercraft inspectors, but gave more local control to the hours of coverage at individual boat launches. During that time, the District contributed some nominal funding to local partners to support their watercraft inspection programs. However, in 2013, the District increased its funding to support these inspection programs and encouraged its partners to create more robust watercraft inspection programs to slow the spread of AIS, while also building in more capacity for them to continue this work independently over time.

Delegation agreements between the DNR and local government units are now very common, and watercraft inspections remain the primary tool for state and local agencies to provide AIS prevention. Within the District, watercraft inspection programs are operated by the MN DNR, and several local partners which we have supported both technically and financially since 2012/2013, including Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Lake Minnetonka Conservation District, City of Shorewood, Three Rivers Park District and Carver County.

While watercraft inspections have slowed the spread of AIS, they have not prevented lakes such as Christmas, Minnewashta and Lake Harriet from becoming infested with zebra mussels. New threats have emerged, such as Starry Stonewort and Spiny Waterflea, and inspections remain a primary strategy of our partners to slow the spread and educate users while research catches up. Funding sources have also shifted. In 2014, the state legislature passed a county tax bill that provided \$10 million directly to Minnesota counties to support AIS prevention programs, with annual funding being appropriated in the following years. The District has worked with both Hennepin County and Carver County in using those funds, which is further explained in the Historic Funding section.

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MCWD Strategic Realignment of AIS Programming:

Through the District’s strategic planning process, AIS activities were reprioritized to better align resources with the District’s strategic direction of developing high impact capital projects and changing the land-use and water policy environment. Program activities were recalibrated as follows:

1. Management and control of high impact AIS (e.g. common carp) to improve water quality and ecological integrity, when prioritized and coordinated with organizational planning and project priorities.
2. Early detection and rapid response to identify new introductions and respond with management and control when criteria are met to improve or protect ecological integrity by preventing establishment of a new AIS.
3. Promoting research partnerships to facilitate the use of MCWD aquatic systems as a living laboratory to advance AIS science and inform MCWD management planning and implementation.
4. Support AIS prevention efforts of our partners by developing optimal cost solutions in implementation of their programs

AIS Watercraft Inspection Funding Background:

The District began providing cost-share funds to our partner’s for their watercraft inspection programs in 2012, at varying levels of contributions that totaled almost \$47,000. In 2013, the District increased its available funds to \$178,000 for these partnerships, and formalized the amount awarded to be up to 50% of the watercraft inspection services cost. From 2013 to 2016, the District also paid 100% of the cost for inspection hours at six lakes that had previously received no watercraft inspector coverage, these lakes included Piersons, Wassermann, Parley, Steiger, Zumbra and Auburn. The District contracted directly with Carver County to provide the inspection services at Piersons, Wassermann and Parley, and with Three Rivers Park District to provide the inspection services at Steiger, Zumbra and Auburn, which are all within the Carver Park Reserve.

Through the strategic planning process, AIS activities were reprioritized to ensure resources are better aligned with the District’s strategic goals. It was determined to begin drawing down our funding contributions in a measured way over time that supported partner’s efforts to step into this niche at a more localized level. This would allow the MCWD to focus and align its resources on its strategic priorities, while supporting partner led efforts to engage in programs that slow the spread on a waterbody by waterbody basis.

In 2017, the District began coordinating with our partners on its new strategic direction. Our partners were informed that funds to support individual watercraft inspection programs would be slowly reduced over time, allowing them time to build more capacity to continue individually and to begin exploring other funding opportunities, such as the state funds for AIS prevention which are distributed by the counties. In 2017, funds were reduced from almost \$230,000 to \$175,000 by the District no longer providing 100% of the cost for the six accesses that had no previous inspector coverage, although the District would still be able to provide a cost-share for those lakes. Funds were further reduced in 2018, with \$122,000 available to provide partner support for inspections.

Carver County and Hennepin County have both been receiving state funds dedicated for AIS prevention activities annually since 2014. In 2017, Carver County received \$126,092. They use these funds to combat AIS through three areas: education, monitoring and inspections. In 2017, Hennepin County received \$307,742. They open up most of these funds to an open pass-through grant to local partners, while others were implemented by county staff. Funding has been used for inspections at public accesses, outreach and education, early detection, research and boat cleaning facilities.

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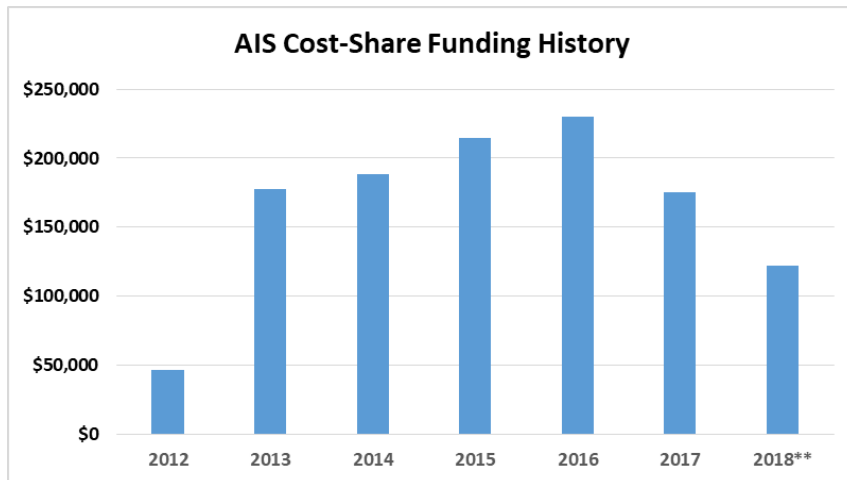


Figure 1. AIS Cost-Share Funding History

2018 AIS Cost-Share Funding

While watercraft inspections can slow the spread of AIS, the District is not positioned to meaningfully operate a watershed scale prevention program that was financially sustainable or effective. Therefore, the program was focused on supporting local efforts where partners were willing to dedicate their own resources in the slowing the spread of AIS. The plan was to get these programs up and running, providing a value added boost that had a finite lifespan. With state funding in place, and local pilot programs growing in traction, the District can continue to reduce our contributions while still remaining fully engaged as a technical partner. \$122,000 was approved in the District’s 2018 work plan for these activities, a 30% reduction from 2017. It’s expected that these funds will continue to lower at a rate that allows our partners to build their capacity to take on this work individually.

We have received requests from partners for cost-sharing of their programs for 2018. With all requests, the District could cost-share up to 36% of each program and be within the \$122,000 budgeted for the activity. A brief description of each partners program is below, along with their proposed total program cost and proposed MCWD cost-share amount.

Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board

The MPRB’s goal is that 100% of watercraft are inspected prior to using the public boat launch at Lakes Bde Maka Ska, Harriet and Nokomis.

14,468 hours of inspections planned to occur May 1 – December 1, 7 day/week at three boat launches.

MPRB program cost: \$181,000

2018 MCWD 36% cost-share capped at \$65,160.

Three Rivers Park District

The TRPD inspection coverage at Zumbra, Steiger and Auburn is limited, but reinforces the potential for watercraft inspections to occur at any time boaters use the access. They also provide additional hours at Lake Minnetonka Regional Park which are focused on outbound inspections to reduce the spread of AIS from Lake Minnetonka.

Zumbra, Steiger, Auburn: 600 inspection hours planned May 26 – September 3

Lake Minnetonka Regional Park: 856 inspection hours planned May 26 – September 23

TRPD program cost: \$15,288

2018 MCWD 36% cost-share capped at \$5,504.

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Lake Minnetonka Conservation District

The LMCD provides inspections at Carsons Bay, Halsted Bay and Wayzata Bay public accesses. The MN DNR provides inspections at higher use accesses on Minnetonka, including Grays Bay, Maxwell Bay, North Arm and Spring Park Bay.

1700 hours of inspections planned to occur May 25 – September 3, Friday, Saturday, Sunday & Holidays

LMCD program cost: \$35,000

Hennepin County Grant: \$10,000

Eligible expenses for MCWD: \$25,000

2018 MCWD funding at 36% eligible expenses, capped at \$9,000.

City of Shorewood

The City of Shorewood partners with the Christmas Lake Homeowners Association to provide inspection and decontamination at the Christmas Lake boat launch. Their goal is to inspect every watercraft entering and exiting this lake.

3200 hours of inspections planned to occur mid-April – October, 7 days/week

Program cost: \$74,734

Hennepin County Grant: \$10,000

Eligible expenses for MCWD: \$64,734

2018 MCWD funding at 36% eligible expenses, capped at \$23,304.

Carver County

Carver County provides inspections at Lake Minnewashta, Piersons Lake and Wassermann Lake.

Minnewashta: 2,083 inspection hours planned from May 12 – Oct 14, 7 days/week

Piersons: 636 inspection hours planned from May 12 – Sept 3, Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays

Wassermann: 208 inspection hours planned from May 12 – Sept 3, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays

Piersons and Wassermann: Shared 552 hours between May 12 – Sept 3, Monday - Thursday

Program cost: \$52,255

2018 MCWD 36% cost-share capped at \$18,812.

2018 Funding Recommendation:

Through the District's strategic planning process, AIS activities were reprioritized to better align District resources to its strategic goals. While we were not positioned to operate a watershed scale prevention program that was financially sustainable or effective, we placed our resources towards local efforts where partners saw slowing the spread as valuable and were willing to dedicate their own resources. As our partners continue to streamline their programs and utilize the state appropriated county AIS prevention funds, the District will continue to gradually reduce our funding while we remain available as a regional technical advisory.

The District's approved 2018 work plan has \$122,000 identified to continue watercraft inspection program support. Our partners, Minneapolis Park and Recreation Board, Lake Minnetonka Conservation District, City of Shorewood, Three Rivers Park District and Carver County have all submitted requests that align with the District's 2018 budget. Staff is recommending to provide a cost-share amount of up to 36% of each partner's watercraft inspection program costs, which comes to a total of \$121,780.

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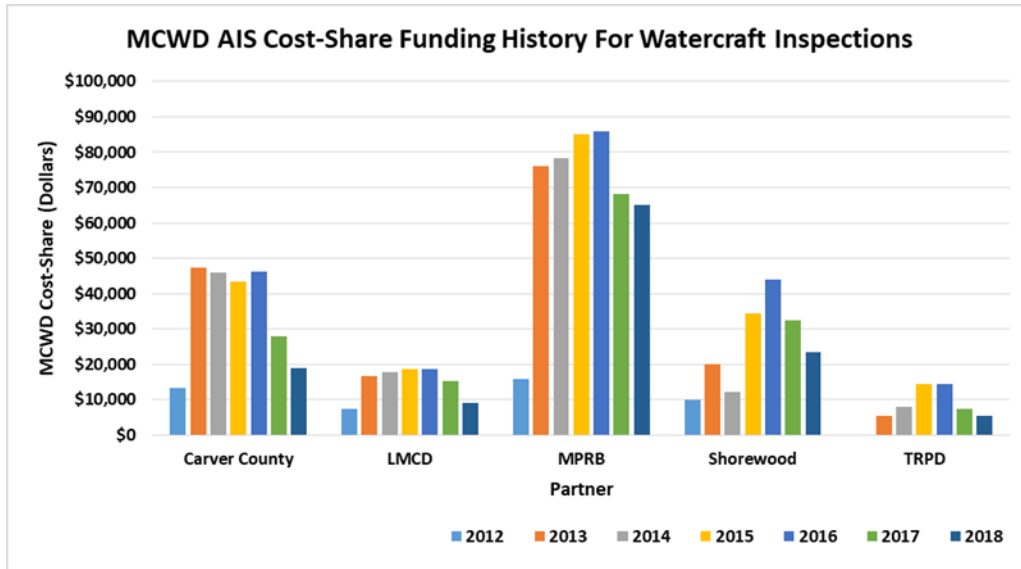


Figure 2. AIS Cost-Share Funding History by Individual Partner

Next Steps:

These requests for funding will be brought to the March 22nd Board meeting for final approval.

Staff will continue to monitor the AIS prevention environment, including our partner’s program evolution, state funding and our strategic direction. Ongoing discussions will continue with the Board around this topic, including upcoming 2019 work plan discussions. The topic is also captured as a required action in the strategic action plan that the Board will be able to closely monitor and engage in.

If there are questions in advance of the meeting, please contact Eric Fieldseth at efieldseth@minnehahacreek.org or 952.471.7873.

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