

MEMORANDUM

To: MCWD Board of Managers
From: Eric Fieldseth, AIS Program Manager
Date: February 11th, 2016 Board Workshop
Subject: Regional Watercraft Inspection Pilot

At the November 5th, 2015 Operations and Programs Committee, staff discussed a concept regarding a Regional Watercraft Inspection Pilot. Present at the meeting were representatives from Christmas Lake and Lake Zumbra, both who had an interest in being involved in a pilot. After discussing the concept, committee members supported moving forward and developing a plan to bring forward to the full Board. The AIS grants through the Initiative Foundation were identified as a possible funding source.

Description of Pilot

Mandatory inspections would be required at Lake Zumbra, Steiger Lake and Auburn Lake as part of Regional Inspection Model. Existing watercraft inspection locations of Christmas Lake and Lake Minnetonka Regional Park would serve as the inspection stations for users wanting to launch at these waterbodies. Decontamination would be available at Christmas Lake.

Where does authority come from?

Minnesota State Statute 84D.105 Subd. 2 describes the authority that can be given to local governments by the Commissioner of the DNR that authorizes mandatory inspections of water-related equipment at specified locations within a defined area before a person places or removes water-related equipment into or out of a water body. For local government to be granted this authority, it must submit a plan to the DNR, and the DNR must approve it.

Partners

Staff is meeting with senior staff from Three Rivers Park District to discuss details of the proposal on Tuesday, February 9th. They have given some initial support and interest. Support from the MCWD Board to continue with the proposal will of course be needed in order to seek grant funding from the Initiative Foundation. The Initiative Foundation has offered to let us present our proposal at its next review committee meeting on February 18th.

Other partners would include the City of Shorewood, Christmas Lake Homeowners Association, Zumbra Ridge Homeowners Association and City of Victoria as an interested party in the area. Both lake associations have offered support, and with MCWD Board support, we will discuss the proposal with the cities. Staff has also been working closely with lead AIS staff from the DNR on the concept. They seemed very interested in pilot, and offered a willingness to work with us on a pilot plan that could gain DNR approval. We will continue to further revise the proposal with them.

Budget implications for MCWD

This pilot requires no new funding. Estimated budget for the District's contribution is below. These amounts could change slightly as final numbers are worked out.

2016 AIS Work Plan Activities	2016 Budget	2016 revised expenditures for MCWD with grant funding	Reasons for decrease with grant funding
AIS Watercraft Inspector Cost-Share and Roaming Inspector Program	\$230,000	\$182,000	Funds budgeted for roaming inspectors at Mtka Regional Park, Zumbra, Steiger and Auburn would not be needed.
Off-Site Inspection/Decontamination Station Pilot	\$45,000	\$10,500	Funds for this pilot would be moved into the Regional Inspection Pilot.
Home-Lake Pilot	\$10,000	\$2,000	A small amount of these funds would be used for Home-Lake Pilot and Proof-of-Inspection
Total	\$285,000	\$194,500	

Year	Estimated MCWD contribution to Pilot
2016	\$49,240
2017	\$42,740
2018	\$42,740

Estimated Initiative Foundation Grant Amount Proposed: \$299,764 (Years 2016-2018)

Goals of the Pilot

- Evaluate the effectiveness of mandatory watercraft inspections for AIS prevention by using a Regional Watercraft Inspection Model.
- Get buy-in from user groups, providing minor inconvenience for greater prevention of spreading new AIS to several waterbodies.
- Determine the appropriate staffing level at the Regional Sites to handle three additional low-use lakes.
- Establish a model for greater AIS prevention at low-use lakes

DRAFT - Regional Watercraft Inspection Pilot

Lead Organization:

Minnehaha Creek Watershed District (MCWD)

Partner organizations:

Three Rivers Park District (TRPD) (tentative)
City of Shorewood (not confirmed)
City of Victoria (not confirmed)
Christmas Lake Homeowners Association (confirmed)
Zumbra Ridge Homeowner's Association (confirmed)

Regional Station Locations:

Christmas Lake Public Access – Shorewood, MN
Lake Minnetonka Regional Park – Minnetrista, MN

Satellite Accesses:

Lake Zumbra, Steiger Lake, Auburn Lake - Victoria, MN

Timeline:

Event	Approximate Dates
Outreach and awareness prior to implementation	February – June 30 th , 2016
Development of Home-Lake Pilot	February – April 2016
Recruitment for Home-Lake Pilot	April – June 2016
Create Signage	February – April 2016
Develop Proof-of-Inspection System	February – April 2016
Develop pilot evaluation plan	February – April 2016
Regional station open and rules in-effect	(July 1 – Oct 31, 2016) (April – Oct 2017-18)
Continued outreach and awareness of pilot	July 1, 2016 – October 31, 2018
Annual Report	January 2017, 2018
Evaluation Report due	March 2019

Description of Regional Watercraft Inspection Pilot

The goal of this pilot is to provide better AIS prevention measures at low-use accesses, which would otherwise have minimal coverage by watercraft inspectors. It's not cost-effective to staff full-time watercraft inspectors at these types of launches, thus incorporating them into existing watercraft inspection services at other launches would provide a more cost-effective solution, and allow for greater AIS prevention measures at these waterbodies. Two existing watercraft inspection locations will be utilized as the Regional Stations that would serve the low-use satellite lakes. The Regional Stations would be the Christmas Lake public access and Lake Minnetonka Regional Park. Inspections at Christmas Lake are operated by the City of Shorewood and the Christmas Lake Homeowners Association, with funding assistance from the MCWD. Inspections at Lake Minnetonka Regional Park are operated by the Three Rivers Park District, with some funding assistance from the MCWD. Both programs would be expanded

slightly to be open from 5:00 am to 10:00 pm daily, from May to October. These hours reflect park hours that are established by Three Rivers Park District, in which the satellite lakes all reside.

Any boaters wishing to launch their watercraft at one of the satellite launches would first need to visit one of the Regional Inspection Stations to receive an inspection. Upon passing the inspection, a proof-of-inspection tag would be attached to their watercraft and trailer, as well as given a receipt that they will need at the satellite launch, and could then proceed to the satellite lake at any time. The proof-of inspection tag and receipt are only valid for one launch, but do not expire until the watercraft is launched. There will be periodic seal-checkers at the satellite lakes, and if present, will help remove the tag and have the user sign and date their receipt. The tag will be placed in the tag drop-box located at the access, and the signed and dated receipt will be placed on the dashboard of their vehicle. Receipts will not be valid unless its signed and dated. Receipts will also only be valid for the day its signed and dated by the user. If a tag-checker is not present, users will be instructed by signage that is located at the access on the steps they need to follow. They would need to manually remove their tag and place it in the drop-box. They would then need to sign and date their receipt, and place it on their dashboard. The receipt should not be signed and dated until the user intends to launch their watercraft. The drop-boxes will be checked frequently and verified with vehicles and trailers parked at the accesses. Local law enforcement will also make periodic checks for compliance, and tickets may be issued for those in violation. Canoes, kayaks and other small non-trailerred watercraft will be exempt, as they typically pose a low-risk to spreading AIS. This will all be clearly communicated through signage at the satellite accesses.

A Home-Lake pilot program will also be incorporated into this regional inspection pilot. There are typically a group of users on every waterbody who only use that particular lake, making them a low risk of introducing a new AIS to that lake. This pilot would recognize a group of those users who only use the three satellite lakes (Zumbra, Steiger and Auburn), and thus are low-risk users for introducing new AIS. Participants in the Home-Lake program would be exempt from having to go to the Regional Inspection Stations prior to launch, but would still be subject to random watercraft inspections and still need to abide by all MN laws relating to AIS. Outreach, including user surveys, will be performed at the satellite launches early in the 2016 boating season, prior to implementation of the regional inspection pilot. This outreach would hope to identify candidate users who would benefit from this program. These candidates will be interviewed further to see if they are a fit and if they are interested. Further details on this pilot program are described later in this plan.

Where does authorization to have mandatory inspections come from?

Minnesota State Statute 84D.105 Subd. 2. Inspector Authority paragraph (g) allows the Commissioner of the DNR to authorize local governments that enter into a delegation agreement to conduct mandatory inspections of water-related equipment at specified locations within a defined area before a person places or removes water-related equipment into or out of a water body. For a local government to be granted this authority, it must submit a plan to the DNR, and the DNR must approve it.

Regional Station Details

Hours of Operation: July 1 – October 31, 2016. May 1 (or ice-out) – October 31, 2017-2018.

5:00am to 10:00pm, 7 day/week

Services Provided by Location:

Christmas Lake: Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination with Proof-of-Inspection issued

Lake Minnetonka Regional Park: Watercraft Inspection with Proof-of-Inspection issued

Christmas Lake Station

The Christmas Lake public access is a small access located in Shorewood, MN. It has 6 available auto/trailer parking spaces, and is located within a City of Shorewood park. The park has open hours from 6:00 am to 10:00 pm, and is closed with a gate outside those hours. This is the only launch on the lake. The MCWD will work with the City of Shorewood to increase their open hours to 5:00 am to 10:00 pm during this pilot, matching the hours of the Three Rivers Park District parks. Watercraft inspections and decontamination already occur at the access, with the program operated by the City of Shorewood and the Christmas Lake Homeowners Association. The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District has provided a cost-share grant the past several years to aid the efforts. Because of the access size and location, it can only handle a small volume of watercraft at a time. Watercraft inspection data from 2015 show there were 0.89 inspections/hour at the launch. It is estimated the launch could likely handle up to 2 inspections/hour, including inbound and outbound watercraft.

Staffing at Christmas Lake: 1 inspector will be staffed Monday – Thursdays, with 2 inspectors staffed Friday afternoons – Sunday and holidays. The Christmas Lake Homeowner's Association own the decontamination unit at the launch, and has indicated that they intend on buying a second decontamination mat so they will have one on the inbound side and the outbound side, minimizing potential traffic issues.

Inspection Protocol at Christmas Lake: In 2015, the Christmas Lake Homeowners Association, City of Shorewood and MCWD agreed to a pilot decontamination program with the MN DNR. The pilot has more stringent requirements for decontamination of watercraft launching at Christmas Lake. This protocol can be found as appendix a, and will be in effect for the 2016 boating season. Decontaminations can add extra time to the process, so users can expect some delays at this access.

Proximity to Satellite Lakes:

Create a map

Lake Minnetonka Regional Park Station

The Lake Minnetonka Regional Park is located near Minnetrista, MN, and is part of the Three Rivers Park District park system. The launch has 30 auto/trailer parking spaces, and has open park hours from 5:00 am to 10:00 pm. Watercraft inspections currently occur at the launch at varying hours. Inspections would increase at this launch to have inspections available during open park hours, which would be the same open hours as the satellite launches. Three Rivers Park District funds inspections at this location, with some funding assistance from the MCWD.

Inspections can occur at the gate house at the entrance of the park, as well as at the boat launch itself. If a gate house attendant is present, they will ask the user where they intend to launch, and will either perform the inspection there, or instruct them to another location in the park where inspections may be taking place. If no attendant is present, a sign will be posted indicating where inspections take place. This launch is typically a busy launch with users going on Lake Minnetonka; 2015 watercraft inspection data showed around 2 inspections/hour. The increased traffic from the three satellite lakes is not expected to be an issue at this location. Decontamination will not be available at this location, any users wishing to receive the proof-of-inspection and requiring decontamination, will need to visit the decontamination station at Christmas Lake.

Staffing at Minnetonka Regional Park: 1 inspector will be staffed Monday – Thursdays, with 2 inspectors staffed Friday afternoons – Sunday and holidays.

Inspection Protocol at Minnetonka Regional Park: The inspection protocol will follow typical MN DNR protocol for watercraft inspections.

Proximity to Satellite Lakes:

Map

Signage and materials at Regional Stations

Both Regional Inspection Stations will have the same signage to create consistency. Signage at the access directing users to the inspection location will be installed, as well as a sign explaining the pilot with a map of the participating satellite lakes. Signs will be developed by staff from Three Rivers Park District, MCWD and City of Shorewood. Each agency may have signage protocols they have to follow, but consistency among signage will be key.

A simple, easy to read brochure will be developed that inspectors can handout to users arriving at the inspection station. Included in the brochure will be a large map of how to get to the satellite lakes, as well as easy to follow steps on actions they need to do at the satellite lakes to be in compliance.

Proof-of-Inspection Process at Regional Stations

The two regional stations will be the only location users can receive the proof-of-inspection tag and associated receipt. They will need both to be in compliance. Upon passing the inspection at either regional station, if users wish to launch at the satellite locations, a seal will be attached to their watercraft and trailer and they will be given a receipt that they will need at the satellite location. Users will also be given information on what they need to do at the satellite launch with their tag and receipt. If decontamination is required, that will only occur at Christmas Lake. If users wish to launch their boat at the Regional Station, they may do so after passing the inspection process, and will not need a tag or receipt.

Satellite Lakes

Steiger, Zumbra and Auburn Lakes

All three of these lakes have one public access and are considered low use. They are located near Victoria, MN in the Carver Park Reserve, which is operated by Three Rivers Park District.

The Minnehaha Creek Watershed District has contracted with the Three Rivers Park District since 2014 to provide around 200 hours of watercraft inspection services at each launch. These launches would not otherwise receive any watercraft inspection coverage. Use data for each lake is below.

Lake	Inspections/hour	Inspection Hours in 2015
Auburn	0.72	204.5
Zumbra	0.35	209.5
Steiger	0.35	205.5

With only around 200 hours of inspections performed during the season at each launch, the launch remains mostly unstaffed, leaving the waterbody vulnerable to new introductions of aquatic invasive species, particularly zebra mussels, which are found in nearby Lake Minnetonka. All three of these lakes are infested with Common Carp, Eurasian Watermilfoil and Curlyleaf Pondweed at varying abundances. A good diversity of native plants remain however, and water quality is good in these lakes. All three lakes are in good ecological condition, and should be a high priority to prevent new introductions of AIS.

Staffing: All three of these lakes will be periodically staffed with “seal-checkers”. 8 hours of service is planned for each day while the regional stations is open, with 4 hour shifts at two different launches each day. Scheduling times and lakes will vary, so users may encounter a seal-checker at any time of the day, at any lake.

How the process will work at the satellite lakes:

Users arriving at the satellite locations may be greeted by a seal-checker, who would verify the proof-of-inspection tag is intact and receipt is in-hand. The seal-checker would then remove the tag, deposit it in the tag drop-box, have the user sign and date the receipt and then place receipt on their dashboard. The user could then launch and be in compliance. If a seal-checker is not present when the user arrives, signage will clearly direct them on what they need to do. The user will need to manually remove their tag and place in the drop box, they will then to sign and date their receipt and place it on their dashboard. The receipt is only valid if it’s signed and dated, and only valid for the day it’s filled out. They can then launch and be in compliance. The user would have been offered a hand-out at the regional station explaining the steps needed to be performed as well.

Signage at satellite lakes:

A sign will greet users at these lakes and inform them that the launch is part of a regional inspection pilot, and that a watercraft inspection with proof-of-inspection tag and receipt are required from the regional station before they can launch trailered watercraft. Canoes, kayaks and other small non-trailered watercraft are exempt. The sign will also feature a map that will show users how to get to the regional stations. A sign will also be placed by the drop-box with clear steps that users need to take with the proof-of-inspection tags and receipts.

Information materials:

Brochures will be placed by the sign for more information, including information on the law utilized for mandatory inspections and contact information for more information.

Enforcement:

The drop-box will be checked frequently by paid staff and volunteers. Tags will be cross-referenced with receipts that are on the dashboards of vehicles parked at the launch with boat trailers. If users are found not in compliance, law enforcement will be called and a ticket may be issued. Law enforcement will also make periodic checks at the launch and look for valid receipts on the dashboards of vehicles parked with boat trailers. If users are found not in compliance, a ticket may be issued.

Three Rivers Police Department: (not confirmed)

Carver County Sheriff's Department: (not confirmed)

Tracking use between regional station and satellite lakes

Use will be tracked by the DNR provided survey application at the Christmas Lake public access and Lake Minnetonka Regional Park by watercraft inspectors. This survey will ask users which lake they plan on launching at (Christmas, Steiger, Zumbra or Auburn). It will then go through the typical survey questions. In addition to this survey data, proof-of-inspection tags and receipts will also be tracked. At the regional station, a log will be created whenever tags and receipts are given out. This data will be entered in spreadsheet by staff from the MCWD or other assigned organization. At the satellite launches, tags in the drop-box will be removed and recorded daily in a log sheet, and entered into the same spreadsheet for tracking. Tags can then be matched up with the data from the regional stations.

Outreach and awareness prior to implementation

MCWD will work with TRPD staff to design user surveys beginning in the spring of 2016 that will serve as awareness and outreach on the upcoming regional station, which would start July 1st, 2016. These surveys will be done by TRPD staff at the satellite lakes, and possibly through other means that may be necessary, and will target users of these lakes. MCWD and TRPD staff will also develop a communications strategy to create awareness on the pilot. This initial outreach will give users time to understand the changes, why they are important for AIS prevention for these lakes, how it may affect them, and to see if they would be interested and be a fit for the home-lake pilot. These surveys will be used in the evaluation of the program as well, and be followed up each year of the pilot to gauge user feedback and acceptance of the pilots.

Home Lake Pilot

This program is targeted towards users who only launch their watercraft on Zumbra, Steiger and Auburn Lakes. Since all three lakes have the same invasive species currently present (Eurasian Watermilfoil and Curlyleaf Pondweed), the risk of introducing a new AIS is low for users going back and forth between the three lakes, so they could be considered the same "home lakes". To recognize these users, they would receive a window decal for their vehicle, and a sticker for their boat and trailer. They would not have to visit the regional inspection station, but they would still legally have to comply with all MN AIS related laws. It would be an honor system; we cannot verify that they haven't gone to other lakes. To minimize the risk, on the sticker would list the home lake names, and instructions to notify the project lead by phone or email if the watercraft is found at a non-home lake. It would also hopefully be self-policing; if users were violating the program, the whole program could be revoked and all users would be required to visit the regional inspection station.

Tracking home-lake users

Users would be required to fill out a log each time they launch their boat, which will include their name, which lake they launched at and time of day. If they encounter a seal checker when they launch, the seal checker will also make note of this information. The logs will be submitted monthly to the program lead, even if no launches occurred. If information is not submitted, that user could lose their home-lake privileges.

Evaluation

An evaluation will be conducted on the pilot, with a report due by March 2019. Details to be determined.