

Lake residents ramp up fight against invaders

“This article has some interesting thoughts on MN local involvement in fighting invasive species.

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Lake associations and local governments have significantly boosted their spending in recent years against aquatic invasive species, or AIS, according to a statewide survey of local efforts.

Although the dollar amount — about \$3 million a year — isn’t huge, it’s nearly half of what the state government spends on prevention and eradication of invaders like zebra mussels and starry stonewort .

Private residents and lake associations spent nearly \$2 million fighting invasive species in 2015, while local governments spent about \$1 million, according to the survey, sponsored by the Minnesota Coalition of Lake Associations and Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates. That’s nearly double the amount spent five years ago by private groups and local governments.

“Lake associations, if taken collectively, are the hardest-working, most generous, most effective conservation group in the state,” said Jeff Forester, executive director of Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates.

Forester said the statewide spending survey actually understates the amount being spent locally, as fewer than half of the state’s 500-plus lake associations participated.

With the recent tilt toward more conservative leadership at the state and federal government levels, Forester said, it’s even more vital for local groups and individuals to do their part to keep Minnesota’s waters clean.

“People will say to me, ‘Why isn’t the state doing something?’ ” Forester said. “So I’m telling people: We just voted for smaller government, less money, fewer rules. So how do we protect these lakes?”

“We do it on the ground, lake by lake. It is time for you to step forward and claim your responsibility. It is about people acting locally to protect a resource that is critical to their economy and their way of life.”

“Lake associations don’t own the public waters, but when there’s a problem, they own the problem.”

The state welcomes local efforts against AIS, said Heidi Wolf , invasive species supervisor at the state Department of Natural Resources.

“We are very happy to have local partners and we support that,” Wolf said. Only about 5 percent of Minnesota’s waters are infested with an AIS, Wolf said, and local efforts can help keep that number down.

Wolf said the state spends about \$8 million a year on AIS prevention and eradication. That includes inspection, enforcement and education, as well as operation of decontamination stations.

Invasive species “are definitely an issue of concern for all Minnesotans, because we value our water resource so much,” she said. “It is every water user’s responsibility to be sure they’ve cleaned their craft, removed all plants and mud, drained water and disposed of all unwanted bait.”

Efforts on individual lakes can make a big difference, said Joe Shneider , secretary of the Minnesota Coalition of Lake Associations.

The association for Shneider’s lake — Christmas Lake in western Hennepin County — spends about \$80,000 a year on inspections and decontamination of boats at a single public landing. But a regional model could have more widespread impact for not much more money.

Shneider said the lake associations are proposing a regional inspection program, in which a single inspection station would serve many bodies of water.

State law allows for the approach, but it’s never been tried, he said.

“We’re proposing it with Carver County this year,” he said, “but it will take a lot of agreement by governments on the local level.”