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Hubbard County Rapid Response Plan for Aquatic Invasive Species

Preface

Aquatic Invasive Species have spread across many lakes and water bodies in Minnesota and they continue to spread every year. As of 2015, Hubbard County lakes have fortunately avoided a major AIS infestation (zebra mussel, starry stonewort, spiny water flea, or Eurasian watermilfoil) although we do have curly-leaf pondweed, faucet snails, and banded mystery snails in several lakes and rivers.

The Minnesota DNR prepared a statewide Rapid Response Plan (1-29-13) that provides direction for detection and management of newly detected infestations, including containment strategies where eradication is impractical.

A Rapid Response Plan (RRP) is needed for Hubbard County to identify County and Lake Association rapid response actions as a partner with the DNR. This plan will also support initiatives for funding assistance at the Local, State, and Federal level.

Background and Purpose

Hubbard County, Hubbard County COLA, and Lake Associations have implemented a strong AIS prevention program in major Hubbard County lakes. Major elements of this program include an awareness campaign, AIS monitoring, and a locally managed watercraft inspection program. This work has been funded through Lake Associations, Townships, Hubbard County, the Minnesota DNR, and the State. Hubbard County SWCD has managed our large watercraft inspection program up until 2015. As of 2016, the watercraft inspection program is now managed by Hubbard County under the Environmental Services Department.

Unfortunately, prevention measures are imperfect and even the most aggressive efforts will not stop all introductions. In 2014, 13% of the watercraft inspected at local launch sites had last been in use on AIS infested waters (3.6% from ZM infested waters).

Early detection and rapid response are the critical second line of defense to minimize the economic and ecological impact of an AIS infestation.

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Rapid Response Plan

The Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has created a Rapid Response Plan for Minnesota that provides a framework for the Hubbard County Plan. This plan provides background on Minnesota experiences with Rapid Response, related Federal plans and requirements, an incident command system to clarify the organizational and decision making structure, a summary of available resources, and a process for taking action.

The Hubbard County plan follows this framework and outlines additional plan elements that are critical for success, not part of the State Plan, and within the control of Hubbard County.

Early Detection

Reporting new infestations when they first become detectable is critical when managing invasive species, both to control the infestation within a water body and also to prevent the spread of the infestation to other bodies of water. An infestation that develops for several years before it is detected will be very difficult to control or influence.

While DNR Invasive Species Specialists may conduct visual inspections of healthy waters throughout the open water season, their capacity to thoroughly monitor each Hubbard County lake on a frequent basis is far less than what is needed. Therefore, the primary system for early detection will be the AIS Monitoring Programs and Watercraft Inspection Programs existing on each lake. These programs are normally led by Lake Associations; however, they can be organized and sponsored in various ways.

Rapid Response Plan Steps

(from DNR RRP Appendix B with Hubbard County Actions)

Investigate Reports and Confirm Identity

The State and Local Rapid Response Procedure begins with a report of a *potential* new AIS Infestation. The primary responsibility for investigating AIS reports is the Minnesota DNR and primary contact is the Northwest Region DNR Aquatic Invasive Species Specialists. Following notification of a potential AIS sighting, the organism and geographic location of the discovery must be positively identified.

(While the DNR manages this process, Hubbard County workers or volunteers can help by providing details of the discovery, specific locations, specimen samples and pictures.)

Updating State Database and Designating Infested Waters

Information about confirmed occurrences should be sent to the DNR Invasive Species Coordinator to be added to the Minnesota published list of infested waters, updating of GIS data, and inclusion in the USGS-NAS database.

The waters are then officially designated infested waters via the MN DNR Commissioners Order.

(Hubbard County AIS leadership including representatives from impacted lake[s] to review local [Hubbard County] action list and prepare to launch local effort.)

Rapid Assessment of Species and Distribution

The positive confirmation of a reported sighting as a new occurrence of a non-native species in the state (a new introduction) will result in a rapid assessment of the species that includes information gathering to determine if a response action is warranted. Managers will consult with experts from academia, as well as state and federal agencies as needed to complete the assessment.

If the infestation is new to the state, the DNR may commission a Rapid Assessment Group to review available science and information and determine the species' potential to be invasive. If a full risk assessment is not conducted

prior to the rapid response, a rapid risk screening will be completed to quickly evaluate the species for detrimental impacts.

Once the assessment phase is finished, a field inspection is completed to confirm introduction, determine distribution, and to understand the potential for further distribution.

The infested area is quarantined if possible. If the field assessment determines that the distribution is sufficiently limited to allow an attempt at eradication or other control options, then the assessment effort expands to review various management options for the size and location of the infestation. If the infestation distribution is too wide to employ eradication or other control actions, then alternative management options and containment actions should be recommended to decision maker.

The outcome of the assessment phase is a recommendation for “rapid response action”, “containment action”, or “no action”.

Decision for Action

The final decision for action (a DNR decision) will direct future activity toward one of three categories.

- Rapid Response/treatment
- Alternative managerial actions
- No action

Effective treatment actions need to consider the type of invasive, the size of the introduced population, and the affected area to be controlled. Large populations and large affected areas are more expensive to treat and have a lower chance for success.

The DNR Rapid Response Plan (3.0 Decision for Action, DNR Plan) provides important background on the various factors to be considered for a treatment action.

A decision by the DNR to implement rapid response/treatment will initiate the formation of an Incident Command System (ICS) organizational structure that brings in appropriate agencies for funding, jurisdiction (tribal/county) and direction. An Incident Management Team is organized by the DNR to set rapid response objectives and assign responsibilities.

(Hubbard County and a representative from the infested waterbody should have input on this decision.)

The major treatment response actions include:

1. Determine treatment method
2. Obtain treatment permits
3. Arrange funding for treatment
4. Contracting for the treatment

Public Awareness

The goal of public awareness is to raise awareness of the infested location(s) aimed at preventing and containing the spread.

Containment

Conservation Officers can enforce state laws at water accesses and also utilize checkpoints to ensure that water related equipment is not carrying AIS away from infested waters. The DNR may actively support watercraft inspection activity at public water access points on newly infested waters.

(Hubbard County will be actively involved in the containment action phase through our watercraft inspection program and locally managed action to inform, contain and prevent the spread to other area lakes.)

Hubbard County AIS Rapid Response Program County and Lake Association Actions

Hubbard County, with support from the local Lake Association and Hubbard County COLA, will initiate actions to contain an AIS infestation when identity has been confirmed by the DNR.

A response team will be formed by Hubbard County to work with the DNR. The role of this group is to not only support the DNR's Rapid Response effort, but also to implement actions that Hubbard County has the authority and capability to manage. The proactive involvement of local stakeholders in this process is intended to increase the impact of the DNR Rapid Response effort and to minimize the impact to other lakes in the area.

Local Rapid Response Action List:

- 1. Aggressively communicate to all in the county and those on infested waters.**
 - Direct mailing to all property owners on infested waters**
 - Local news media**
 - Hubbard County COLA and Lake Association websites county-wide**

(Statewide communication on infestations is a DNR role.)

- 2. Work with resorts, planned unit developments (PUDs), and other private access points on infested waters to implement containment initiatives including launch site inspections, watercraft decontamination and closely managed access at their launch sites.**
- 3. Increase public launch site watercraft inspection activity on the infested lakes to prevent the spread of AIS to other waters.**
 - This will be planned on a case by case basis depending upon the type and level of infestation, amount of launch site traffic, number of launch sites, and availability of funding/staffing.**
- 4. When applicable, implement a “user friendly” decontamination process located as close as possible to launch sites on infested waters and decontaminate watercraft leaving the lake.**

(The DNR will be involved in this activity for authorization if located at the launch site.)

- 5. Initiate actions to protect (or delay) the spread to adjacent lakes for lakes in a chain when one lake is infested.**
 - **Increased lake monitoring for AIS on lakes connected to infested waters**

- 6. Implement special restrictions for Lake Service Providers working on infested lakes.**
 - **Decontamination when leaving infested waters**