



Position Statement – Prevention of Aquatic Invasive Species

Aquatic invasive species, or AIS, if introduced into Lake Minnetonka will result in ecologic, economic and aesthetic harm. Because in most cases, there are no remedies or reasonable control options for these AIS once they get into the lake, prevention is the most rational strategy. Unfortunately, AIS exploit the same avenues of access they we have come to enjoy. Therefore, if we hope to significantly reduce the risk of AIS introductions, we must change the game.

Background

Aquatic invasive species not now in Lake Minnetonka include hydrilla, spiny waterflea, Brazilian elodea, zebra mussel, quagga mussel, and viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS). All of these are already in Minnesota or Wisconsin waters and are transported mainly by boats and trailers. Various federal, state and local programs are aimed at prevention, but these programs rely almost exclusively on education, awareness and voluntary action. Fortunately, the level of awareness among Minnesota boaters is high. As well, the inspection program of the Lake Minnetonka Conservation District using Minnesota Department of Natural Resources Watercraft inspectors plus the ILIDS system cover a significant portion of the lake accesses. However, there remain substantial gaps in coverage and therefore Lake Minnetonka remains highly exposed to AIS introductions.

Imperative

We believe that AIS can be kept out of Lake Minnetonka with minimum hardship. Relying on education, awareness and voluntary actions alone is not adequate. A comprehensive protection program on all accesses (public, private, tributary lakes and special events) is needed now. Because the impact of AIS to Lake Minnetonka is so great and irreversible, we must consider additional costs and inconveniences as a reasonable trade-off to protecting our lake.

Proposed Protection Plan

A prevention plan for Lake Minnetonka that provides comprehensive inspections as well as preserves reasonable rights for access is proposed here. This plan includes six elements:

1. Comprehensive Physical Inspections

Inspections using human or automated approaches are critical. Currently, human inspectors or automated devices are deployed at the four or five busiest public access during high activity periods. This leaves significant gaps during low activity periods or during dark hours. The inspectors are deployed from about mid-May through early-September. There is no enforcement element to these inspections or automatic surveillance – their objective is educational. Thus, even though the risk of any one boat or trailer carrying AIS is small, the high volume of traffic into Lake Minnetonka means the overall risk is high.



Position Statement – Prevention of Aquatic Invasive Species

The inspections also do not physically examine the boats or trailers. New AIS, such as spiny waterflea or VHS are microscopic and therefore invisible. As well, these AIS remain viable in wet areas. This means that watercraft and water containers (like bait buckets) ought to be dry or otherwise free of contamination. Thus, inspections should assure that all waters are drained away from the lake prior to launching.

The LAKE MINNETONKA ASSOCIATION Recommends: All public, private and municipal access have inspectors or automatic surveillance and current LMCD ordinances be enforced.

2. Closure of Some Accesses

Because there are many public and private accesses on Lake Minnetonka, the prospect of comprehensive coverage with inspectors is costly and inefficient. To better facilitate effective inspections, some access should be closed at some times. Because Lake Minnetonka is a public resource, assurances should be provided to permit access to the lake with a minimum disruption and inconvenience.

The LAKE MINNETONKA ASSOCIATION Recommends: Some accesses be closed at some times to facilitate the comprehensive inspections recommended above, but assurances should be provided to not restrict public access overall.

3. Fees

Because AIS are transported via boats and trailers, a fee based on boat/trailer usage is proportional to the risk of introducing AIS. There will be costs for implementing many of the protection elements in this plan, so assessing fees based on boat/trailer usage is reasonable. There are historical, cultural and policy hurdles to overcome for this proposal. As well, there is currently a boat license surcharge assessed by the state and used for AIS-related activities. However, the funds raised are not re-allocated in proportion to the usage on Lake Minnetonka and these funds to not go to direct protection activities or programs.

The LAKE MINNETONKA ASSOCIATION Recommends: Fees be assessed to boats and trailers using Lake Minnetonka to support AIS prevention programs.

4. Tributary Lakes

AIS introductions in lakes that are tributary to Lake Minnetonka will have a ready access to Lake Minnetonka via their surface water connections. Therefore the protection activities we propose should be applied to tributary lakes as well as to Lake Minnetonka.



Position Statement – Prevention of Aquatic Invasive Species

The LAKE MINNETONKA ASSOCIATION Recommends: Prevention activities, such as inspections, restrictions and fees, should be implemented on lakes that are tributary to Lake Minnetonka.

5. Inspections at Special Events

The Lake Minnetonka Conservation District should enforce its AIS provisions for Special Event participants. The LMCD code (Sec. 3.09, Subd. 3) says (in part):

“Within five (5) working days of the issuance of a license, the licensee shall contact the Executive Director to discuss arrangements and scheduling for inspection and washing of participating watercraft.”

To our knowledge, the inspections or washings as required in this provision are not occurring.

Subd. 4 of the same section provides for event participants to sign an affidavit, which in practical effect bypasses any inspections or washings. It has been reported by event organizers to the LAKE MINNETONKA ASSOCIATION and the LMCD that these affidavits are often completed by the event organizer for the participants well in advance of the event.

The LAKE MINNETONKA ASSOCIATION Recommends: The affidavit provision be eliminated and that inspections and/or washing of all watercraft participating in Special Events be required. Further, because participants in Special Events include out-of-state watercraft, we recommend all participating watercraft demonstrate they contain no water in their live wells or no live bait.

6. Enforcement

The Lake Minnetonka Conservation District should upgrade and enforce its prohibitions. The LMCD code (Sec. 4.02, Subds. 1 and 2) says:

Subdivision 1. Definition. For purposes of this Section, the term "weed" means any plant or any cutting, part or fragment of any plant.

Subd. 2. Prohibition.

a) No person shall introduce weeds into the Lake or remove weeds from the Lake to a point more than 50 feet from the shoreline of the Lake.

b) No person shall introduce into the Lake or remove from the Lake to a point outside the defined boat launch area or 200 feet, whichever is less, any vehicle, boat, trailer or any other object which is



Position Statement – Prevention of Aquatic Invasive Species

capable of holding or carrying weeds without first carefully and thoroughly inspecting such vehicle, boat, trailer or other object for weeds and removing all weeds discovered.

To our knowledge, this ordinance has not been enforced. Further, the ordinance should refer to other harmful AIS, such as those listed above, to protect against their introductions.

The LAKE MINNETONKA ASSOCIATION Recommends: The LMCD's ordinance should be amended to specifically include prohibited and regulated invasive species (as designated by the MN DNR). The LMCD should better enforce the above-referenced sections of its ordinances.

Acceptable Risk

Ideally, the overall level of awareness and voluntary actions by those entering Lake Minnetonka would be so low that a lake-specific prevention plan would not be needed. Unfortunately that is not the case, as evidenced by the continued contamination of new lakes and rivers as well as the continued movement of new AIS closer to Lake Minnetonka. This means that meaningful protection for Lake Minnetonka must rely on a local, lake-specific plan, such as we propose.

There is no practical way to reduce the risk of AIS introductions to zero. However, the LAKE MINNETONKA ASSOCIATION believes AIS prevention must substantially reduce the risk of AIS introductions. Furthermore, unless the risks are substantially reduced, half-measures are poor public investments.

The LAKE MINNETONKA ASSOCIATION Recommends: The overall risk of AIS introductions be reduced by at least 90% compared to the present baseline.

* Adopted by the Board of the Lake Minnetonka Association, April 7, 2008.