

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**Statewide Group Pushes Protecting Public Waters**

*St. Paul, MN - January 7, 2014*

Today, the Minnesota Coalition of Lake Associations (MN COLA) is releasing its Legislative Agenda for consideration in the 2014 Minnesota State Legislative Session.

The overall intention of our 2014 legislative platform is to protect the waters of the state more effectively and more vigorously than in the past. Our waters are a precious natural resource, and they are a critical component of both our way of life and Minnesota's \$11 billion tourism industry. Minnesota must do more to halt the spread of aquatic invasive species (AIS), which can have a devastating impact on water quality, habitat, and recreational use.

Every month the DNR declares more and more Minnesota lakes and sub-watershed systems as infested by one AIS or another. The time is now to increase protection for our lakes by means of increased inspection/decontamination programs, new funding sources, and long-term funding for scientific research. The University of Minnesota has only recently begun working on research that could help stop the spread of AIS, but possible outcomes are years away. We believe these specific legislative changes must be addressed:

- Modification to AIS Minnesota Statute 84D to specifically follow the "Uniform Minimum Protocol and Standards (UMPS) for Watercraft Interception Programs for Dreissenid Mussels in the Western United States" or more restrictive protocols for AIS programs which are substantiated by science-based research;
- Modification to Minnesota AIS Statute 84D to require a certified thermal decontamination process for non-compliance of AIS laws. This process must deliver consistent results, be readily available for public use, and includes:
  - A control mechanism as a means to verify thermal decontamination has been completed after non-compliance;
  - A required certified training program for every decontamination equipment operator;
  - A third-party verification program to ensure decontamination procedures are consistently followed;
  - An annual legislative report by the State Agency administering the decontamination program;
- Use of Outdoor Heritage Fund (portion of 2008 Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment) to protect fish habitat from AIS; with funds available to Local Government Units (LGU) for thermal decontamination equipment and programs;
- Establishment of a long-term funding source for AIS field programs such as an AIS decal purchase for all watercraft;
- Establishment of adequate long-term funding for the Minnesota Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) at the U of M to develop effective prevention and containment methods for invasive animals and more effective control methods to reduce aquatic invasive plant populations;

Minnesota must respond immediately to the AIS threats facing our Land of 10,000 Lakes in order to preserve our outdoor recreational traditions, native fish populations and habitat, and water quality, all of which are essential to our tourism industry. If left unchecked, there may not be an opportunity for reversal. Future generations are counting on us today to do the right thing. We simply cannot rely on "personal responsibility" and our current ineffective solutions.

MN COLA is a statewide citizen network of county lake and river associations, representing the interests of over 40,000 lakeshore property owners, organized to protect and improve the waters and shorelands of the State of Minnesota.

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