

# Apply for grant – spread the word – not aquatic invasive species

By Jeanne Schram for the Aitkin County Aquatic Invasive Species Committee

Now is the time to apply for a grant to for a project to raise awareness about aquatic invasive species.

Other than Mille Lacs Lake, the DNR's Infested Waters List for Aitkin County only lists Big Sandy with flowering rush (2008), Big Pine with a zebra mussel infestation (2018) and Eurasian watermilfoil at French Lake (2019).

"I think this discovery (at French Lake) highlights the importance of early detection of AIS and programs like U of M Extension's AIS Detectors," said Tim Plude last summer. Plude is an invasive species specialist with the Minnesota DNR in Brainerd. "Although Aitkin County is mostly not infested, this is the second listing in two years for the county so everyone needs to follow the laws and do the right thing when boating and recreating on lakes."

## **Grant opportunity**

Lake associations, cities or townships and other organizations are invited to apply for the limited funds available in Aitkin County. There are two project categories: Education/prevention and watercraft inspections.

Available since 2015, past grants were awarded for newsletters, informational meetings, placemats, signs, coasters, tackle boxes, posters, fourth grade educational events and some training, all intended to increase knowledge about AIS so its spread can be halted.

Each year, the Rivers and Lakes Fair has received a grant for its booth providing education about AIS.

Applications will be evaluated based on available funding, project budget, distance from known infested waters, current AIS status of the lake and other factors as determined by the AIS Committee. A minimum 10% local match is required, which may be cash or in-kind, which is counted at \$18/hour.

Applicants must describe the project or activity they are requesting funds for as well as the estimated budget. For watercraft inspection hours requested, there is a limit of 420 hours per lake access, with the same local match required.

## **Protecting lakes, rivers**

The largest threats to rivers and lakes in Aitkin County are zebra mussels, Eurasian watermilfoil and the scariest possibility, starry stonewort, according to Steve Hughes, district manager of the Aitkin County Soil and Water Conservation District.

"The best defense for everyone is education," said Hughes. "This year we are doing even more inspections, a bait water program and a boat left/dock bounty."

*As always, stopping the spread of invasive species to other lakes and rivers, protects habitat for native species. Overall lake and river health is better without*

*invasive species. Healthy lakes and rivers benefit fish, wildlife and people. Remember, "Clean, Drain, Dry and Dispose."*

*CAPTION FOR PHOTO OF PLACEMAT: In past years, grants to the Big Sandy Area Lake Watershed Management Area produced informative placemats used at area restaurants.*