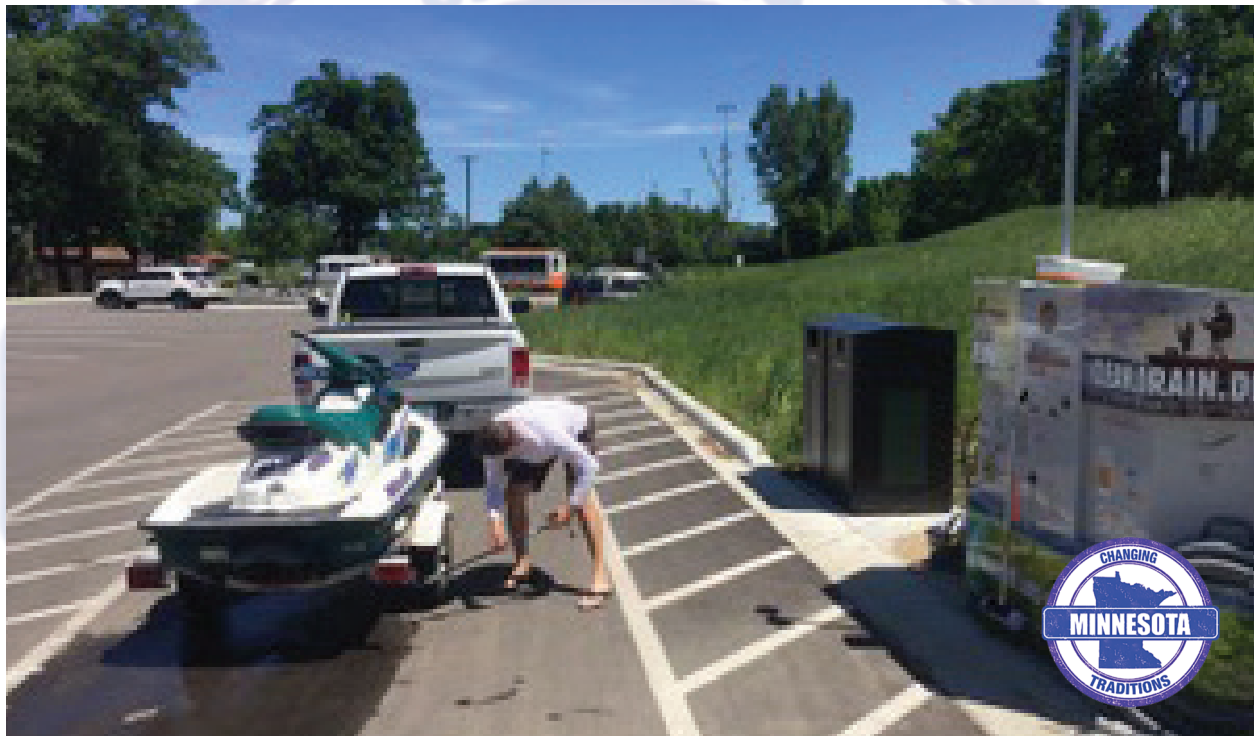


Access Ramp Design Uses Human Nature To Promote AIS Prevention

In 2012 a small social experiment at a public lake-access site in Hennepin County was the spark that fired a positive change in boater behavior.

Any student of psychology will admit that influencing human behavior is, at best, a challenging endeavor, especially when the aim is to break old habits or adopt new ones. The challenge then, as it is today, was to get boaters to build boat-and-trailer inspection and cleaning into their routine when they leave a lake.



Adding cleaning stations like this one, as well as others that are not as complex, was an evolution that makes it easier for boaters to remove and dispose of invasive hitchhikers.

These days the job is aided immensely by the vast amount of information available to the public via billboards, broadcast public service announcements and websites like this one. Back then, however, they were starting from scratch.

Tony Brough (pronounced Bruff), who runs the county's AIS program, was at the spear point of that effort. "That year we had an intern, a graduate student from the UofM, who was involved in community-based

social marketing,” he said. “Together she and I developed a plan for a popular access ramp on Lake Minnetonka.”

This was before counties received state funding for AIS prevention, so out of necessity the beginnings were modest. “We created a designated area with a stop bar on the pavement and a prompt sign that basically said, ‘this is where you stop to remove the drain plug and check your boat and trailer for weeds,’” he explained.



Simple and effective. Using social marketing concepts that suggest a desired outcome, Hennepin County’s pilot program in 2012 successfully steered more boaters to inspect their rigs before leaving the launch ramp.

Observations before and after the change was made showed that, indeed, a higher percentage of boaters drained and inspected their rigs before leaving the parking lot.

“That was the pilot project,” he said, “and it started with the social marketing concept that people, in general, don’t want to appear different.” Designating a special area, out of the way of normal ramp traffic, where boaters could decontaminate their rigs created a new social norm, he explained. When people saw others using it, their natural tendency was to follow the example.

“And we didn’t erect signs that people would have to read, because most people don’t read them anyway,” he added. “Instead, we used simple messages that prompt action, ‘Did you CLEAN? Did you DRAIN? Did you DRY? Thank you.’ It’s all based on proven social marketing strategies. And then, if you add a cleaning station to the equation, you simply make it easier for people to Clean, Drain and Dry.”

A cleaning station might be as simple as a grabber or scraper tool attached by a retractable cable to a post, or as complex as a full-blown AIS prevention unit equipped with a wet/dry vacuum, compressed air blower, long-handle brush and weed grabber.



Hennepin County currently has eight full-service cleaning stations at various public access ramps, as well as 10 outpost units (cleaning tools only) in use—all of which can track the number of times they’re used. “If usage rates remain steady, we’ll log 100,000 tool uses by August 2021,” says Brough.

While the purpose of redesigning access ramps and providing cleaning tools is to prevent the spread of invasive species, the big-picture goal is to change human behavior, according to Brough.

“This is a long-term play,” he says. “Think about it in terms of recycling. A 50- or 60-year-old person might have to remind themselves to recycle a pop can or cardboard box, but 20-year-old does it automatically.

“It might be 10 or 15 years down the road, but eventually boaters will clean-drain-dry because...that’s just what you do.”

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