

VILAS COUNTY INVASIVE SPECIES STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT PLAN 2014-2019



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INTRODUCTION:

This invasive species management plan is an update and expansion of a plan adopted by the Vilas County Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) Partnership in 2006. The AIS partnership came into being in 2005 following a grant awarded to Vilas County by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). The objective of the state funded project was to evaluate the concept of county AIS coordinators filling the communications gap between local lake organizations and programs offered by WDNR staff in Madison. The resulting partnership of local stakeholders developed a management plan that has served the area well, but some of which has gradually become outdated.

Local concern over the detrimental environmental and economic effects of invasive plants and animals has since expanded to include non-aquatic species. The Vilas County Board of Supervisors in 2008 authorized revising the position description of the Vilas County Invasive Species Coordinator to include overseeing development of a diverse multi-partner cooperative to address terrestrial invasive species (TIS). That cooperative eventually came to be known as the Wisconsin Headwaters Invasives Partnership (WHIP) serving Vilas and Oneida Counties and presently consists of 14 formal partners include Federal, Tribal, State, and County governmental agencies and other local organizations.

Vilas and Oneida Counties are active partners in the WHIP co-op and benefit from its work, but neither county has direct oversight responsibility of the co-op. WHIP activities are guided by a steering committee of partner representatives. Fiscal sponsorship is provided by the Lumberjack Resource Conservation & Development Council, Inc., also a WHIP partner.

The content of this comprehensive strategic management plan reflects the complexity of actions and diversity of people involved with minimizing the impact of invasive species. Aquatic, terrestrial and wetland objectives and action steps are segregated in the plan due to the unique challenges of each, as explained in executive summaries for each section.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS):

Some wetland invasive plant species classified as aquatic, such as purple loosestrife and yellow flag iris, can be found growing either above or below the waterline of surface waters. This differentiates them from truly aquatic species that thrive only below the waterline. This distinction is important from the standpoint of land ownership, regulatory authority and funding availability.

Surface waters in the state of Wisconsin are publicly owned and regulated by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (WDNR). Therefore, whether plants or animals, truly aquatic invasives are ultimately the responsibility of the state. Only the WDNR can grant authority for manipulation of plants and animals living in surface waters, even when species are classified as invasive. Yet, the state typically takes little or no action to manage AIS populations on its own but will provide partial funding and will grant authority, with restrictions, for organizations of riparian land owners to implement species control efforts in surface waters.

As a result of these dynamics unique to surface water invasive species, a critical working relationship has evolved between the state and riparian landowners who are typically affiliated with lake associations, lake districts, town lakes committees and other forms of property owner organizations, enabling them to act collectively, efficiently and effectively in the best interest of the water bodies they represent. These volunteer groups work closely with the WDNR to obtain funding and authorization to implement AIS educational outreach, prevention, early detection monitoring and species control programs. Additionally, county AIS coordinator positions throughout the state have come into being during the past decade to enhance the working relationships between the state and the people of the state who care deeply about "their" surface waters.

The following objectives and supporting action steps reflect the roles of the Vilas County AIS coordinator, lake organizations and town lakes committees where they exist in maintaining a strong and effective local AIS partnership.

Objective A1 - County Invasive Species Coordinator awareness: Stay abreast of species information; prevention, detection and management developments; state programs; regional developments; and county and state strategic plans pertaining to invasive species	Action step participants			Time goal
	County Coordinator	Town committees	Lake orgs	
Action A1-1: Attend regional invasive species educational events including: 1) Wisconsin Lakes Partnership conventions; 2) Regional and state-wide meetings of AIS Coordinators/WDNR staff; 3) Others as opportunities develop	✓			Ongoing
Action A1-2: Attend meetings to develop/revise state-wide AIS programs including: 1) Clean Boats Clean Waters watercraft inspections; 2) Citizen Lake Monitoring Network protocols; 3) Others as opportunities develop	✓			
Action A1-3: Support and assist in the development of the objectives of the Vilas County Land & Water Resources Management Plan and Wisconsin Strategic Plan for Invasive Species whenever possible	✓			

Objective A2 - Public awareness: Employ methods for keeping area property owners/lake users aware of AIS related information and developments	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	Town committees	Lake orgs	
Action A2-1: Maintain and employ e-mail address list of all persons who wish to receive AIS information via e-mails	✓			Ongoing
Action A2-2: Develop and maintain outreach methods for sharing information received from county coordinator with lake organizations within the community	✓	✓	✓	
Action A2-3: Maintain positive working relationships with local media outlets to sustain high visibility of invasive species topics with the public	✓			
Action A2-4: Attend meetings of Town Lakes Committees and lake organizations when appropriate	✓	✓	✓	
Action A2-5: Attend / encourage attendance at: 1) Annual WI Lakes Partnership Convention; 2) Annual meetings of Vilas AIS partners	✓	✓	✓	
Action A2-6: Deliver public presentations on AIS related topics upon request by various organizations	✓			

Action A2-7: Develop/maintain curriculum relationships with public and private schools to advance student awareness of invasive species	✓	✓	✓	
Action A2-8: Maintain invasive species information on Land & Water Conservation Department website	✓			
Action A2-9: Serve as a point resource for all AIS related topics	✓			

Objective A3 - Prevention: Encourage stakeholder employment of methods for reducing the risk of AIS spread	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	Town committees	Lake orgs	
Action 3-1: Provide coordination of annual Clean Boats, Clean Waters watercraft inspection / boater education program to enable lake organizations to utilize grant funding to obtain reliable employees to perform watercraft inspection/boater education services	✓	✓	✓	Through conclusion of state-wide CBCW program or until local interest ends
Action 3-2: Conduct annual county-wide training of paid and volunteer watercraft inspectors to help achieve a consistent state-wide message to boaters.	✓			
Action 3-3: Sponsor watercraft inspection / boater education activities at priority boat landings	✓	✓	✓	
Action 3-4: Provide guidance to eligible grant sponsors for obtaining / administering grant funding to support AIS prevention programs beyond watercraft inspections	✓			
Action 3-5: Employ a wide range of non-boat landing educational outreach techniques to remind boaters of AIS prevention steps		✓	✓	

Objective A4 - Early detection: Encourage activities intended to detect AIS populations at early stages of development	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	Town committees	Lake orgs	
Action A 4-1: Encourage waterfront property owners, lake users and the general public to engage in one of two levels of in-lake monitoring: 1) formal monitoring and record keeping following the protocols prescribed by the WDNR/UWEX Citizen Lakes Monitoring Network; 2) Less formal observation and reporting of suspicious changes in lakes	✓	✓	✓	Ongoing
Action A 4-2: Offer classroom training in accordance with CLMN AIS monitoring protocols upon request to groups wishing to engage in formal in-lake monitoring	✓			
Action A4-3: Offer classroom and/or field training upon request to groups wishing to engage in lake monitoring of a less formal nature than as prescribed by CLMN AIS monitoring protocols	✓			
Action A4-4: Develop and distribute monitoring protocols for shoreland/wetland plant species of concern for which no state monitoring protocols have been developed.	✓			

Objective A5 - Species management: Provide assistance to lake organizations, town lakes committees, waterfront property owners and other stakeholders with managing established populations of aquatic and shoreline / wetland invasive species.	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	Town committees	Lake orgs	
Action A5-1: Provide assistance to applicants for AIS population control grants and support for control activities.	✓		✓	Ongoing
Action A5-2: Coordinate initial responses to new AIS findings to assure that lake organizations seek and receive guidance from the WDNR and/or private consulting firms as appropriate.	✓		✓	
Action A5-3: Remain involved with groups initially managing established AIS populations until such time they demonstrate they are familiar enough with the annual process and associated support organizations to proceed without assistance.	✓	✓	✓	
Action A5-4: Provide information / demonstrate procedure for raising and releasing purple loosestrife beetles to citizen volunteers who wish to learn about and/or become involved in the process.	✓	✓	✓	

Objective A6 - Partnership building/sustainability:	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	Town committees	Lake orgs	
Action A6-1: Maintain high priority for sharing AIS related information with Vilas County AIS Partners via e-mail messages	✓			Ongoing
Action A6-2: Maintain high priority for accessibility by partners and rapid responses to all partner originated communications.	✓	✓	✓	
Action A6-3: Conduct/attend annual Vilas County AIS Partners meetings with each meeting highlighting at least one topic of current interest.	✓	✓	✓	
Action A6-4: Attend meetings of Town Lakes Committees and lake organizations when appropriate.	✓			
Action A6-5: In general, strive to maintain high visibility and credibility with Vilas County AIS Partners by whatever means possible.	✓			

Objective A-7 - Strategic plan maintenance:	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	Town committees	Lake orgs	
Action A7-1: Review strategic plan and revise as necessary.	✓			Annually

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY Terrestrial Invasive Species (TIS):

Unlike aquatic invasive species that are confined to surface waters, the challenge of terrestrial invasives is complicated by the wide range of Federal, Tribal, State, County, Municipal and private landowners onto whose properties terrestrial invasive species spread and the importance of respecting landowner rights and trespassing laws. These dynamics dictate the manner in which the challenges of TIS must be approached.

Multiple partner, non-profit organizations often referred to as Cooperative Weed Management Areas (CWMAs) have become common across Wisconsin in recent years. The objective of these groups is to enable stakeholders within a defined geographic area to work together to manage invasive species across jurisdictional boundaries.

The Wisconsin Headwaters Invasives Partnership (WHIP), which serves all of Vilas and Oneida Counties, was officially established during 2010 when 13 partners consisting of governmental agencies and non-profit local organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding committing each partner to the concept of working together for the benefit of all. Although WHIP's mission statement does not preclude addressing aquatic invasives, WHIP recognizes that Vilas and Oneida Counties each have long established AIS programs dedicated to all aspects of aquatic invasives. Therefore, in practice, WHIP has historically concentrated its energies and limited resources on terrestrial invasives.

Although the duties of the Vilas County Invasive Species Coordinator encompass the challenges of both terrestrial and aquatic invasives, the manner in which the two categories are approached varies significantly. The following objectives and supporting action steps reflect the roles of the county coordinator and the WHIP co-op.

Objective T1 - County Invasive Species Coordinator awareness: Stay abreast of species information; prevention, detection and management developments; state programs; regional developments; and county and state strategic plans pertaining to invasive species	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	WHIP partners	Others	
Action T1-1: Attend regional invasive species educational events including: 1) biennial Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference; 2) annual Wisconsin Invasive Species Education Summit; 3) others as opportunities develop	✓	✓	✓	Ongoing
Action T1-2: Support and assist in the development of the objectives of the Vilas County Land & Water Resources Management Plan and Wisconsin Strategic Plan for Invasive Species whenever possible	✓		✓	
Action T1-3: Maintain positive working relationships with local media outlets to sustain high visibility of invasive species topics with the public	✓	✓	✓	

Objective T2 - WHIP participation: Maintain active participation in WHIP as a routine Vilas County representative	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	WHIP partners	Others	
Action T2-1: Comply with WHIP bylaws pertaining to minimum meeting attendance to maintain voting eligibility.	✓	✓	✓	Ongoing
Action T2-2: Assist with developing priority objectives for WHIP that are in the best interest of Vilas County as well as other WHIP partners.	✓	✓	✓	
Action T2-3: Demonstrate a regional commitment to TIS management by supporting / participating in WHIP projects whenever possible to the benefit of all WHIP partners	✓	✓	✓	
Action T2-4: Identify TIS projects of benefit to Vilas County and encourage WHIP steering committee support of them.	✓	✓	✓	

Action T2-5: Provide annual TIS plant identification refresher training to Vilas County Highway Department road crew and assist with Highway Department ROW annual operations plan development and implementation in accordance with ROW Invasive Species Management Plan.	✓	✓	✓	
Action T2-6: Be available to serve on the WHIP steering committee and as an elected officer.	✓	✓		

Objective T3 - Public awareness:	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	WHIP partners	Others	
Action T3-1: Maintain positive working relationships with local media outlets to sustain high visibility of invasive species topics with the public.	✓	✓	✓	Ongoing
Action T3-2: Make public appearances to deliver TIS related information upon request by area organizations.	✓	✓	✓	
Action T3-3: Maintain invasive species information on WHIP partner websites and social media outlets.	✓	✓		
Action T3-4: Advise roadside property owners of presence of priority invasive plants when growing beyond ROW and provide information regarding management options.	✓			
Action T3-5: Develop/maintain curriculum relationships with public and private schools to advance student awareness of invasive species.	✓	✓		
Action T3-6: Serve as a point resource for all TIS related topics.	✓	✓		

Objective T4 - Early detection: Encourage activities intended to detect TIS populations at early stages of development	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	WHIP partners	Others	
Action T4-1: Encourage public participation in highway ROW plant monitoring and reporting.	✓	✓	✓	Ongoing
Action T4-2: Encourage town governments to conduct invasive plant surveys and to develop town level TIS awareness programs among landowners/residents.	✓	✓	✓	
Action T4-3: Provide landowners in target areas with information enabling identification of TIS of local concern and when/where/how to monitor for those species.	✓	✓		
Action T4-4: Pursue funding opportunities intended to enhance early detection monitoring efforts.	✓	✓		

Objective T5 - Prevention:	Action step participants			Time line
	County Coordinator	WHIP partners	Others	
Action T5-1: Participate in Vilas County Highway Department ROW management plan annual operations planning meeting.	✓	✓		Ongoing
Action T5-2: Provide information to public via various methods regarding preventing the spread of terrestrial invasive species.	✓	✓	✓	

Objective T6 - Species management:		Action step participants			Time line
		County Coordinator	WHIP partners	Others	
	Action T6-1: Maintain list of area "for hire" pesticide applicators by certification category.	✓	✓		Ongoing
	Action T6-2: Maintain inventory of species management recommendations developed by credible sources and share recommendations as requested.	✓	✓		
	Action T6-3: Pursue funding opportunities as available for species management efforts.	✓	✓		
	Action T6-4: Participate in Vilas County Highway Department ROW management plan annual operations planning meetings.	✓	✓		

Objective T7 - Strategic plan maintenance:		Action step participants			Time line
		County Coordinator	WHIP partners	Others	
	Action A7-1: Review strategic plan and revise as necessary.	✓	✓	✓	Annually

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY Wetland Invasive Species (WIS):

Preserving waterfront property values and surface water recreational interests have prompted Vilas County lakefront property owners to demonstrate a strong and lasting passion regarding the prevention and management of aquatic invasives. However, wetlands preservation and management (excluding surface waters) have historically not been high priority in Vilas County. Concerns about terrestrial invasive species have also been low priority historically and have only recently begun increasing among off-water property owners and woodland managers. Wetlands and their critical relationships to healthy surface waters and uplands are generally poorly understood by county residents. Calendar year 2014 marks the first steps toward raising public awareness of wetland invasive plants. Public uptake of wetland invasive threats is likely to be much slower than has been the case with aquatic invasives.

Development of the 2015-2019 update of the Vilas County Land & Water Resources Management Plan being coordinated by the County Conservationist is likely to include specific goals intended to increase public awareness of wetlands and the need to at least protect if not actively manage them. The county landscape has been described in past management plans as including more than 1,300 lakes with surface waters accounting for 16% of the county. Failure to highlight that wetlands account for an additional 19% of the landscape has tended to result in the conclusion that 84% of the county is uplands when in truth uplands account for approximately 66% of the county's surface. Fully one third of Vilas County's surface is wet and those combined wetlands and surface waters play an important but inadequately understood role in the health and management of the uplands (and vice versa).

Approximately 70% of Vilas County's property taxes are assessed on waterfront properties as the general trend of land development has been to concentrate around surface waters. Waterfront landowners have been engaged in aquatic invasive species prevention, early detection and species management for nearly a decade. Consequently, the County Invasive Species Coordinator is in a key position to advance public awareness of wetlands invasives issues and the link between healthy wetlands and healthy lakes. While the specific goals and supporting action steps of the wetlands invasives program is still in the early development stage, those goals will become more apparent as the Land & Water Department wetlands program becomes more focused.

The follow wetlands invasives goals are offered with the understanding that they will be refined and enhanced during the following five years as the overall wetlands program takes shape.

Objective W1 - Assist in the ongoing development and implementation of a Vilas County Land & Water Conservation Department wetlands program.	Action step participants			Time goal
	County Coordinator	Town committees	Lake orgs	
Action W1-1: Participate in planning discussions regarding the focus and implementation of the department's wetlands program, particularly as it relates to invasive species.	✓			Ongoing
Action W1-2: Become familiar with and raise public awareness of the importance of wetlands and the relationship between different types of wetlands and the health of surface waters.	✓	✓	✓	
Action W1-3: Assist with development and promotion of wetland invasive species prevention, detection and, when appropriate, species management programs.	✓	✓	✓	

Objective W2 - Strategic plan maintenance:	Action step participants			Time goal
	County Coordinator	Town committees	Lake orgs	
Action W2-1: Review strategic plan and revise as necessary to align with department goals and actions.	✓	✓	✓	Annually