

VILAS COUNTY AIS PARTNERSHIP

The Vilas County Board of Supervisors authorized the Land and Water Conservation Committee in 2004 to pursue a WI Department of Natural Resources (WDNR) cost share grant for the purpose of creating a temporary (three year) employee position to coordinate AIS activities throughout Vilas County. Funding for the project was awarded in the fall of 2004 and the position was filled effective December 1.

The project required creation of a broad based partnership of concerned people representing a wide variety of resources and interests. The partners were to draft and implement a strategic plan for combating AIS in Vilas County.

The WDNR regarded the project as a pilot program to determine if State AIS resources could be better utilized by lake organizations and waterfront property owners within Vilas County if a county coordinator was present to serve as a liaison between the County and WDNR and to assist in the development of local AIS prevention and management plans. Response from local citizens concerned with lakes protection and preservation was such that the Vilas County AIS Coordinator pilot project was regarded by the WDNR as successful within the first year of the three year program. WDNR grant funds quickly became available to support other county AIS coordinator positions across the State. By the beginning of 2011, 35 of Wisconsin's 72 counties had AIS coordinators.

Upon conclusion of the three year grant funding in late 2007, the Vilas County Board of Supervisors chose to continue the AIS Coordinator position within the Land & Water Conservation Department without WDNR funding, but with whatever financial support could be brought to the position to help defray costs from county taxpayers. Much of the cost for the position has since been paid by annual grant awards from the WI Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer

Protection (DATCP). The position was also expanded in 2007 to include coordination of county terrestrial invasive species in addition to aquatic invasive species.

With initiation of the project in late 2004, public awareness of AIS, especially among Vilas County property owners, began rising. Awareness was followed quickly by citizen involvement in a wide variety of AIS prevention efforts, early detection monitoring for the spread of AIS into previously un-infected lakes, and aggressive management of high priority species that had become established prior to creation of the AIS Coordinator position. The collective result of this public response has been a dramatic reduction in the spread of AIS across Vilas County, significant reduction in the volume of species such as Eurasian watermilfoil in area lakes (eradication has been an elusive goal), and the strengthening of the working relationship between the WDNR and local lake organizations and concerned waterfront property owners.