

2026 Crow Wing County Aquatic Invasive Species Prevention Plan

Mission:

To provide leadership in preventing the introduction and limiting the spread of Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) in Crow Wing County by coordinating inspections, decontamination, targeted treatment, and education efforts.

Partners:

Crow Wing County has developed a network of public, private, state, and local partners that enables a strategic use and prioritization of resources to combat the spread of AIS in our waters. This plan will continue to build upon this network to increase awareness of AIS and limit their spread.

Public Input:

This plan was developed with input via a public comment period for concerned citizens and other stakeholders from November 10th to December 10th, 2025.

Plan Activities & Budget:

The 2026 allocation of State AIS funds \$471,391 and rollover funds from 2025 of \$900 is proposed as follows:

- **\$369,302 = Watercraft Inspections.** Crow Wing County proposes to allocate 13,208 watercraft inspection hours on 43 public access landings across the County. Crow Wing County has partnered with the University of Minnesota – Aquatic Invasive Species Research Center (MAISRC) to develop an optimized model for locating DNR trained watercraft inspectors on Crow Wing County’s public watercraft access landings. The model was developed to specifically maximize the number of inspected watercraft that move from infested (AIS) to uninfested water bodies. Objective data from multiple sources was utilized to build the model, including:
 - Location of infested and uninfested lakes
 - Average boats per-hour inspected (2019-25) at 43 lake accesses in Crow Wing County.
 - Number of watercraft moving from infested lakes to uninfested lakes (derived from MAISRC research and MN-DNR watercraft inspection field-collected data). This includes estimates of watercraft moving from:
 - Within the county
 - Within the county to outside the county
 - Outside the county to within the county

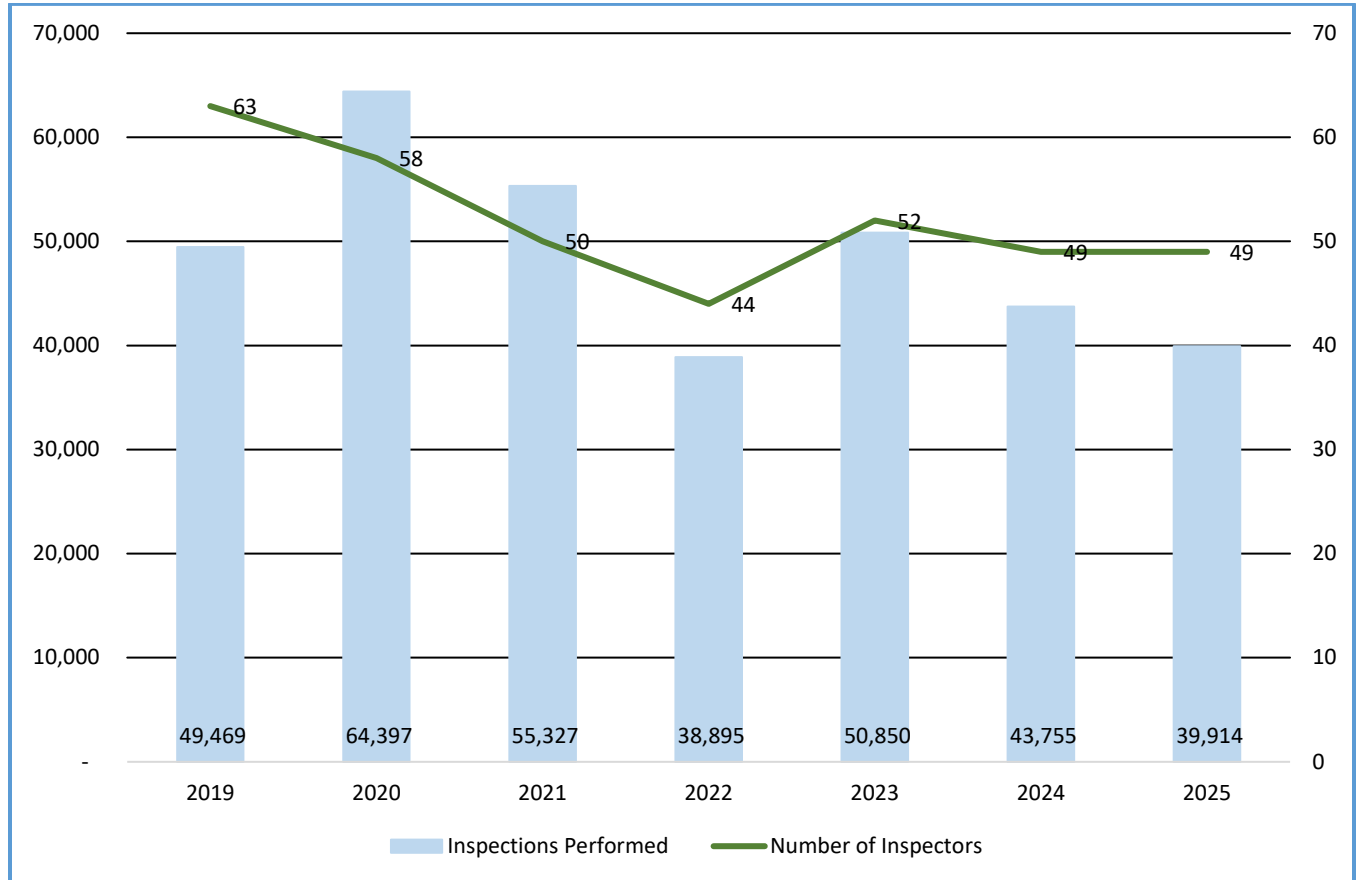
MAISRC developed an online dashboard of this model called AIS Explorer for local government AIS managers and staff. This online dashboard uses existing infestation information, water connectivity risk modeling, and over 1.6 million boater movement survey results to forecast the introduction risk of four priority AIS (zebra mussels, Eurasian watermilfoil, starry stonewort, and spiny waterflea) at individual lakes throughout Crow Wing County. The County will rely on this model for prioritization for watercraft inspectors as seen in **Appendix 1** “2026 Crow Wing County Watercraft Inspection Locations”. In total, the 13,208 watercraft inspection hours on 43 landings will be allocated in the following manner:

- High risk landings that received at least 2.5 average inspections per-hour (from 2019-25 County inspection data) and also appeared in the model’s results (22 landings).
 - These landings will be staffed 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Friday to Sunday, beginning Memorial Weekend and ending Labor Day Weekend.
- Medium risk landings that received at least 2 average inspections per-hour (from 2019-25 County inspection data) and also appeared in the model’s results (16 landings).
 - These landings will be staffed 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., Saturday and Sunday, beginning Memorial Weekend and ending Labor Day Weekend.
- Low risk landings that received at least 1 average inspection per-hour (from 2019-25 County inspection data) and also appeared in the model’s results (5 landings).
 - These landings will be staffed 10 a.m. to 6 p.m., on the three holiday weekends, Memorial, July 4th, and Labor Day.

The County plans to continue to provide monies to local government units (LGUs) who have a signed active delegation agreement with the Minnesota DNR to facilitate watercraft inspections on County allocated landings in 2026. Funding includes Ruth Lake and Fifty Lakes to provide hours for their watercraft inspection and decontamination program approved by the MN DNR.

Landings that have not been identified for watercraft inspections are still part of the 2026 AIS Prevention Plan, but in a different way. The County will rely on trained volunteers and education / awareness campaigns generally prioritized by data compiled using MAISRC's online dashboard for Introduction Risk for Surveillance that forecasts the potential risk of spread of zebra mussels and starry stonewort across the County. The model takes into account introduction probability, establishment probability, and levels of management interventions. This model will be used as a decision-making tool to generate effective intervention strategies and design cost-effective surveillance programs to prevent the spread of AIS.

Crow Wing County plans to hire a seasonal part-time lead inspector to assist the Operations Specialists with the County's AIS watercraft inspection program including spot checks, training, addressing inspectors' needs, assisting with fishing tournaments, checking data, and operating the mobile decontamination unit.



- **\$29,151 = Decontaminations.** The decontamination stations will be fully staffed by DNR trained Level II inspectors to remove AIS. An AIS decontamination hotline will be available for the public to call, 24 hours a day. A texting service will be offered for additional information on AIS decontamination for the public. The hotline and texting service will assist with providing customers the locations of the closest open decontamination stations nearest them. This funding also includes DNR training, County training, and general supplies/maintenance.

Two mobile decontamination units will be located at multiple landings in the County including Edward, Lower Hay, North Long – Merrifield, Pelican – Halverson Bay, Upper South Long, and Lower Cullen. They will be staffed approximately 784 hours (+/-), starting Fishing Opener weekend through Labor Day weekend, open Friday through Sunday, 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. and closed Monday through Thursday. Advantages of mobile decontamination units include providing more decontamination locations to the public, additional protection to lakes in the County, and to further control of the spread of AIS.

- **\$5,008 = Education & Awareness.** Funds will be spent on education and outreach materials for public schools, youth groups, and civic organizations in Crow Wing County. Education and outreach activities may include presentations, contributions to publications, campaigns and partnerships.
- **\$68,470 = Grant Funding:** AIS monies will be administered as available grant funding for the prevention, treatment, and early detection of aquatic invasive species to lakes across the county.

Funding may be available to lakes for the following activities:

- Eurasian watermilfoil treatments
- Starry stonewort treatments
- Starry stonewort sampling
- Zebra mussel veliger sampling
- Spiny water flea sampling
- Other opportunities to be vetted based on policy standards

The County highly encourages local lake associations to apply for grant opportunities and staff are available to assist lake associations with their applications. Aquatic invasive species grants available through the DNR also cover treatment projects for Eurasian watermilfoil, curly-leaf pondweed, flowering rush, and starry stonewort. Please refer to the MN DNR website for more information:

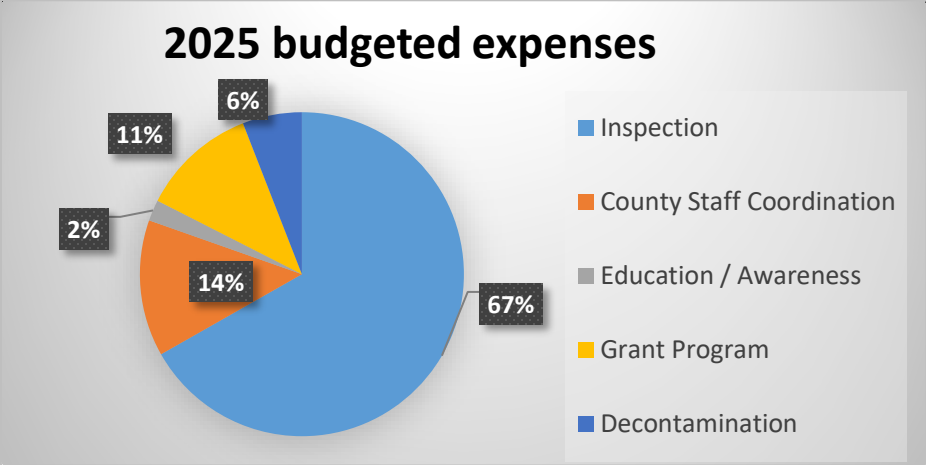
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/grants/aquatic_invasive/index.html.

Proposed 2026 CWC AIS Budget

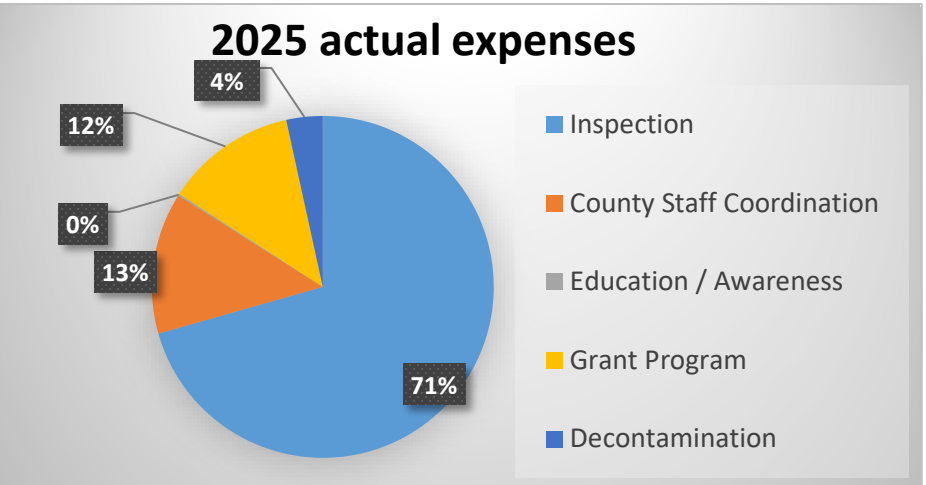
Inspection		
Hiring coordination and facilitation	\$2,000	HR related expenses related to the advertising, facilitating, coordination, and hiring of watercraft inspectors
Level I Inspection Hours	\$290,458	Inspector wages and fringe for 12,680 total hours on 43 landings / Payment to Ruth Lake LGU and Fifty Lakes LGU for inspection hours/Unemployment charges
Training for Level I Inspectors & Operations Specialists	\$24,453	DNR and County trainings including landing double-up / AIS Trainings for Operations Specialists
Supplies & Equipment	\$10,200	Inspector supplies, manuals, and timecard system.
Lead Inspector	\$11,933	May - September - 3 days per week Lead Inspector duties
County Staff Coordination	\$30,258	Operations Specialists positions (salary + benefits). Salary details: 15% AIS aid funds, and 85% County funds
Total Inspection	\$369,302	
Decontamination		
Level II inspection hours/Mobile Decon Hours + Program Reimbursement	\$22,151	784 mobile decon hours + Payment to Ruth Lake for decontamination station operation
Training for Level II Inspectors	\$2,660	DNR & County trainings
Decon outreach and education	\$500	Decon signs, hotline cards, and handouts
General Operating Supplies	\$4,200	General maintenance, fuel, and supplies for the decontamination units.
Total Decontamination	\$29,511	
Education & Awareness		
Public Outreach	\$5,008	Education materials for public schools, youth groups, resorts, and civic organizations in the County. Starry Campaign materials.
Total Education & Awareness	\$5,008	
Grant Funding		
DNR-approved treatment & related surveys by licensed experts	\$68,470	Up to \$3,500 for each eligible lake (15) for EWM treatment/surveys and \$1,750 for one lake. Up to \$2,500k for each eligible lake (2) for Starry Stonewort treatment. \$100 per lake on up to 20 lakes for veliger & spiny waterflea testing. \$200 per lake on up to 20 lakes for monitoring and identifying. Rapid response funds of \$5k for 2026 (\$5k remaining from 2025 funds)
Total Grant Funding	\$68,470	
AIS income & existing available funds	\$472,291	\$471,391 from the MN Dept. of Revenue for local County aid money; \$900 from carry-over funds from 2025
2026 Total AIS Projected Expenses	\$472,291	Total projected expenses from each expense category (above)

2025 Budget vs Actuals

Inspection	\$ 356,212
County Staff Coordination	\$ 72,663
Education / Awareness	\$ 11,165
Grant Program	\$ 61,800
Decontamination	\$ 31,610

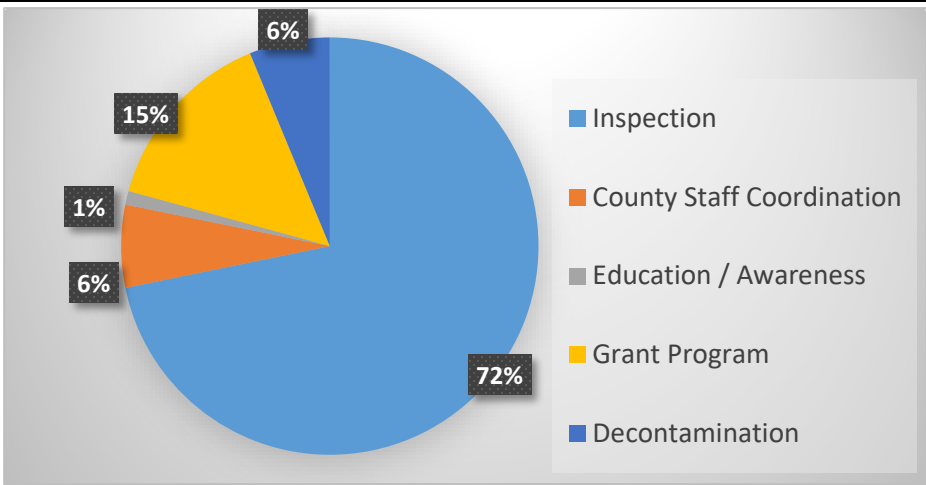


Inspection	\$ 391,560
County Staff Coordination	\$ 74,251
Education / Awareness	\$ 850
Grant Program	\$ 68,940
Decontamination	\$ 19,067

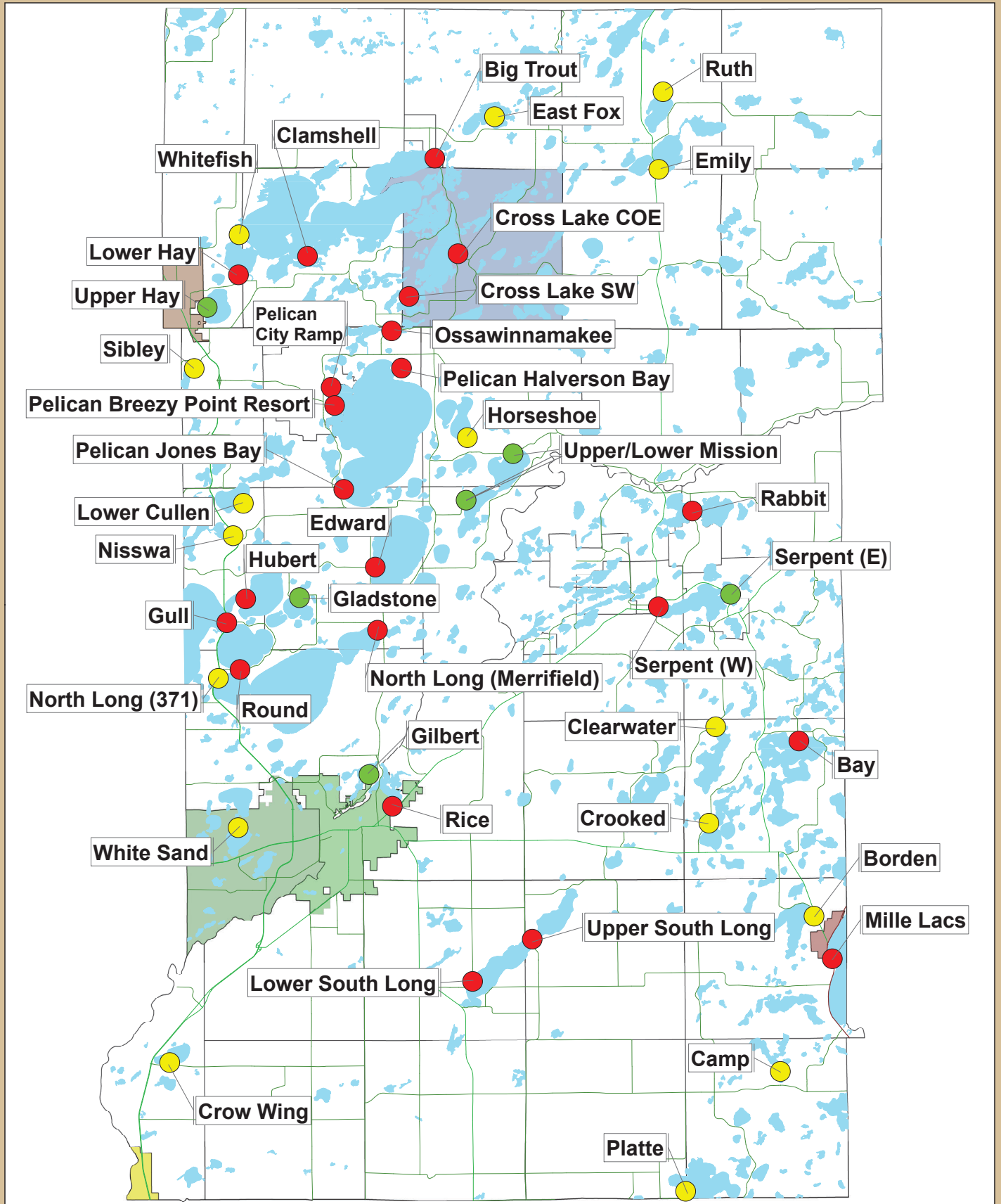


2026 Proposed Budget

Inspection	\$ 339,044
County Staff Coordination	\$ 30,258
Education / Awareness	\$ 5,008
Grant Program	\$ 68,470
Decontamination	\$ 29,511
2026 State of MN Revenue:	\$ 471,391
Balance forward from 2025 (estimated)	\$ 900
2025 proposed expenses:	\$ 472,291
Carryover to 2027:	\$ 0



2026 Crow Wing County Watercraft Inspection Locations



0 2.5 5 10 Miles

- High Risk (Fri - Sun)
 - Medium Risk (Sat - Sun)
 - Low Risk (Holiday Weekends Only)
- Staffed 10 AM - 6 PM**



Crow Wing County
Land Services Department
322 Laurel Street, Suite #15
For non-legal, reference use only
218-824-1010

Cities

- Baxter
- Brainerd
- Crosslake
- Fort Ripley
- Garrison
- Jenkins



TITLE: CWC AIS Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination Program Policy
DATE: 11/10/2025
TO: Non-county entities that partner with Crow Wing County on the watercraft inspection program
FROM: Crow Wing County – Land Services Department

In order to implement an Aquatic Invasive Species (AIS) watercraft inspection program that is consistent, transparent, and effective, the following policy is effective immediately.

- A. Crow Wing County will be the delegated local government unit (LGU) and responsible for assigning inspectors to landings and decontamination stations. Crow Wing County will also provide all required equipment such as, but not limited to, tablets, vests, flags, etc.
- B. Alternatively, Crow Wing County will provide, to any LGU that agrees to sign a delegation agreement with the MN DNR and has at least a portion of jurisdiction adjacent to the lake, funding equal to the number of inspection and decontamination hour's per-lake plus the cost of DNR training. The funding will be for watercraft inspections, decontamination, and DNR training only. The payment on a per-hour basis for inspections and training for LGUs with a signed delegation agreement will be \$25 in 2026. Specific inspector wages can be set by the LGU. The County reserves the right to discontinue funding if funds are spent for other purposes. Non-county entities (such as lake associations) will be responsible for securing the LGU funding. The entity will be responsible for working with the LGU to hire and schedule inspectors and provide all other MN DNR required equipment. For more information about watercraft inspection delegation agreements, see the MN DNR's ["Watercraft Inspection Delegation Agreement Q & A"](#).

Non-county entities that partner with Crow Wing County on the watercraft inspection program ("partners") agree to the following:

1. Crow Wing County's "master schedule" and inspector availability are the sole basis for scheduling inspectors at landings.
 - a. The master schedule is based on "peak" usage at landings and reflects the overall best times for performing watercraft inspections.
 - b. The master schedule will be shared with partners (e.g., lake associations).
 - c. The master schedule will be implemented with the following benchmarks:
 - i. Early March: Master schedule is created by County staff using only the County allocated hours from the County Board approved AIS Plan. The draft schedule will then be sent to partners for feedback on additional / expanded inspection hours beyond the County's allocation.
 1. Partners provide feedback and expanded coverage requests. Expanded coverage requests must follow Crow Wing County shift schedule of 10 am to 6 pm. Inspectors will not be scheduled at landings prior to 10 am or later than 6 pm.
 - ii. Early April: Master schedule is revised to reflect partner feedback.
 - iii. Late April: Final master schedule is published.
 - d. Requests for changes to the "master schedule" after it is published will only be considered if communicated to the Operations Specialist at least two weeks prior to the proposed change.

- e. Regardless of the source of funds paying for inspectors, Crow Wing County will abide by the master schedule and inspector availability for the entire duration of the AIS watercraft inspection season.
 - f. The master schedule is to be interpreted as a guide which is ultimately subject to inspector availability (inspectors may become sick, have an excused absence, etc.)
 - 2. Crow Wing County will not provide partners with access to weekly or bi-weekly schedules except that:
 - a. Crow Wing County will inform partners with an active DNR trained certified volunteer program when an inspector is unable to make a scheduled shift or when major changes to the scheduling patterns occur upon request so that volunteers can be arranged.
 - b. The Operations Specialist may be contacted directly for verification of hours scheduled on an as-needed basis.
 - 3. Crow Wing County will not schedule inspectors prior to walleye open-water fishing opener weekend for any reason, typically the second weekend in May. Staff will only be scheduled after Labor Day weekend, typically first weekend in September, if adequate staffing is available for expanded coverage requests.
 - 4. Scheduling at the landing will occur in the following priority order: (1) MN DNR inspector schedule, (2) Crow Wing County / LGU inspectors, and (3) volunteers.
 - a. Crow Wing County will not schedule inspectors around volunteer schedules.
 - 5. Crow Wing County will use the following priority of landing coverage when inspector availability is limited:
 - a. Coverage on high risk lakes in the County's approved AIS Plan.¹
 - b. Coverage on medium risk lakes in the County's approved AIS Plan.¹
 - c. Coverage on low risk lakes in the County's approved AIS Plan.¹
 - d. Expanded coverage on high risk lakes in the County's approved AIS Plan.
 - e. Expanded coverage on medium risk lakes in the County's approved AIS Plan.
 - f. Expanded coverage on low risk lakes in the County's approved AIS Plan.
 - g. Expanded coverage on non-County AIS Plan inspection hours. *NOTE: *Will only receive hours if the County has available staff beyond the County's core inspection program.*
 - 6. Crow Wing County will not staff non-County AIS Plan public accesses unless /until staffing needs on the County's allocated landings have been met.
 - 7. Inspectors are to adhere to the CWC Watercraft Inspection Policy Manual and MN DNR Watercraft Inspection and Decontamination Manuals. Together, these policies address issues such as leaving the landing, appropriate appearance, lunch / breaks, weather events, inspection and decontamination protocol, etc.
 - 8. Partners who wish to financially provide additional hours of inspections on County AIS Prevention Plan lake accesses or new hours on non-County AIS Plan lake accesses shall be invoiced directly from Crow Wing County. Partners will be invoiced monthly for all expanded inspection hours fulfilled. Partners must provide Crow Wing County payment within the timeframe identified on the invoice. Failure to provide timely payment will result in the County not scheduling expanded coverage requests and/or not considering future expanded coverage requests by the partner indefinitely in the future. Unfilled scheduled hours in the Crow Wing County AIS plan have no bearing on the reimbursement. The rate partners will be invoiced on a per-hour basis will be the inspector wage plus applicable payroll taxes (i.e., Medicare, social security, etc.). For returning inspectors with 2 or more years' experience, this will be \$25/hour, a new inspector, will be \$22/hour.
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