

Grassroots movement pushes zebra mussel bill across the finish line

On Friday May 27th, 2011, the day before Memorial Day weekend, Governor Dayton signed Senate File 1115, a bill that empowers the DNR to begin a comprehensive statewide plan to control the spread of aquatic invasive species.

Passage came after months of and organized grass roots mobilization by MSRPO, the Tri-County COLA Collaborative, Kandiyohi COLA, and others, Izaak Walton League and individual lake associations. MSRPO retains a professional advocate at the state capital and has an email system capable of putting out personalized emails to MSRPO members that contain an email they can send on to their specific legislators with a click. When so many voices are focused and coordinated it is a winning combination for Legislative change.

Said DNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr, "The reason we were able to get it today, is because of the groups and the individuals who are concerned about aquatic invasive species. Everything that the Department does, is either authorized or funded by the legislature... individuals and groups made it happen this year by directly calling their legislators and by directly calling the governor, and *organizations* made this possible by doing those same things. We need that continuing into the future."

In an end of session thank you note, Commissioner Landwehr wrote, "Without you (MSRPO) and your members, the legislative leadership would not have known the urgency of the issue, and would have likely not acted."

The final Aquatic Invasive Species policy bill that passed, SF 1115:

- Defines decontamination, suggesting the Western Regional Panel on Aquatic Nuisance Species guidelines.
- Defines "Inspector" to include anyone certified by the Commissioner, even if they are not a licenced peace officers. Empowers these inspectors to be able to order inspection anywhere in the state, and if needed order decontamination of water related equipment before it is put into waters of the state.
- Makes "compliance with aquatic invasive species inspection requirements... an express condition of operating or transporting water related equipment" in Minnesota.
- Empowers conservation or peace officers to set up "check stations," to check for AIS.

- Requires water related service providers to complete AIS training to get a permit.
- Disburses AIS penalties to the issuing agency, thereby creating further incentive for local law enforcement to enforce AIS regulations.
- Requires boat owners to display an educational rules decal (supplied at no cost by the DNR) on their boats. This will keep the AIS message constantly in front of all boat operators, even those who are not the owner and may not know the rules.
- Gives the commissioner increased leeway in dealing with fishing tournaments by the addition of, "The commissioner may require mandatory decontamination of boats participating in fishing contests on infested waters."
- The bill was effective the day after Gov. Dayton signed it on Saturday, May 28th, 2011.

The bill did not increase either civil or criminal penalties for violating AIS rules.

Gov. Dayton had requested an increase to the AIS surcharge on three-year boat registrations of about \$5 for the average boat. The AIS surcharge has not been increased since the DNR launched its invasive species program in 1991. The legislature rejected this funding source, instead appropriating money from the LCCMR fund, the proceeds of the state lottery.

Gov. Dayton wrote regarding this provision, "I have concerns about using environment and natural resources trust fund dollars to fund accelerated efforts to prevent future spread of aquatic invasive species; the state needs a long-term and dedicated funding source to build lasting programs. I urge you to include my Aquatic Invasive Species funding proposal to fund these important programs."

A number of legislators also put forth the idea of using money from the Legacy Amendment Fund which voter approved in 2008. The appropriations bill for the Legacy Fund stalled on the House floor on the last day of session.

So far no funding has been appropriated and the DNR AIS work will be curtailed when/if Minnesota shuts down on July 1st. . MSRPO urges you to [contact your legislators](#), and [Gov. Dayton](#), and urge them to make AIS funding part of whatever final budget negotiation Gov. Dayton and the Legislature reach.