

SWCD workload increase leads to watercraft inspection duties request

By [Jean Ruzicka](#) on Jan 9, 2016 at 8:45 a.m.

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Hubbard County Soil and Water Conservation District's increased workload – specifically AIS watercraft inspection and decontamination (WID) program and the new state mandated buffer initiative –has led to district manager Julie Kingsley's request to transfer WID duties. In a letter to AIS Task Force chair Ken Grob in late December, Kingsley explained the request is based both on office space availability – the new facility will accommodate just three people – and the WID workload. Forty-two watercraft inspectors were on 39 lakes this summer. And additional programs were added this fall, the state having enacted a new buffer initiative for counties, which will be the SWCD's responsibility to implement. Jamin Carlson, as the AIS WID program coordinator, spent three-quarters time as AIS WID coordinator, and a quarter time as Water Quality Specialist (WQS).

“With the additional programs given to the SWCD this fall, the WQS will require a full-time commitment,” Kingsley wrote. “Jamin has voiced that his educational background and interest lie with the SWCD WQS position. This will

leave the AIS WID program coordinator vacant and require an additional person be hired. "For these reasons, the Hubbard County SWCD is beyond its working capacity and needs to transition the AIS WID programs to the AIS Task Force or county," she wrote. This week, commissioners reviewed a response to the request, drafted by Grob and board chair Matt Dotta. "We are sorry that SWCD's future work load has led to this decision," the memo to Kingsley and SWCD board chair Bob Iles states. "It is felt that the activities of AIS prevention are very synergistic with the SWCD mission. The results of the working relationship with the county task force and Program Performance Inspection committee over the past several years have been the envy of other counties in Minnesota.

"The inspection/ decontamination results have been outstanding, thanks to SWCD's dedicated efforts and management," the response states. "This was dumped on us fast," Commissioner Cal Johannsen said. "We have to be careful about taking this on." By discussion's end, the board agreed to assume the role of fiscal agent, the state currently allocating \$248,000 annually to address AIS in the county. But additional "directions" from commissioners in a formal response await SWCD agreement. Environmental Services officer Eric Buitenwerf cautioned that AIS funding is appropriated on a biennial basis. "We don't know if they will re-up the funds. You may have to eliminate the position." "Suggested direction" from commissioners requested that the SWCD maintain records until April 30, or sooner if a new hire is on board. The county will audit 2015 records. The county

is also asking SWCD to continue its full WID role until April. "Hubbard County prefers to take the transition action beyond just transferring WID responsibility to the county," the memo states.

"They want to look at the long-term organization needs and the desire to also transition the AIS coordinator position to the county. This will take additional time to adequately assess the organization roles, space, roles of AIS Task Force, COLA, etc.," the memo states of the request. "Rapid transition after April 30 is expected. "Hubbard County will assume responsibility for hiring an employee to replace Jamin Carlson and to fulfill some of the duties previously handled by Julie Kingsley and Melissa Koebernick," the draft memo states. "SWCD will help train the new employee, with payment for time on an hourly basis. The new employee will report to a county supervisor (to be determined). The position will be structured to transition to county AIS coordinator by the end of 2016. The county will want to have SWCD participate in the interviewing process. Hubbard County will provide office space for the new employee and any seasonal employees that are hired." "The next level is to get SWCD to agree," Dotta told commissioners. Dotta and Commissioner Ed Smith will serve as an AIS sub-committee through the transition of the AIS program from SWCD to Hubbard County, with recommendations to be reviewed by the board. The new location of the SWCD offices has not been formally announced.