

# Minnesota DNR AIS Advisory Committee

*April 24<sup>th</sup>, 2025 Final Meeting Minutes*

***Online via Teams (pivoted from hybrid meeting in Brainerd)***

***Members Present:*** Carrie Ohly-Cusack, Andrew Dickhart, Beto Garcia, Jared Langer, M. Mahmood Tajbakhsh, Amanda Weberg, Raining White

***Members Absent:*** Shelly Binsfeld, Nick Bluhm, Stephanie Hadler, Liz Kaltenhauser, Spencer McGrew, Patrick Selter

***Member Resignation:*** Christine Maxwell

***Ex-officio Members Present:*** Maddie Hayden

***Ex-officio Members Absent:*** Nicole Lalum, Amy McGovern

***DNR Staff Present:*** Rafael Contreras-Rangel, Tina Fitzgerald, Doug Jensen, Jeannine Howland, Kelly Pennington, Scott Staples

Vice Chair **A. Weberg** presided over the meeting beginning at 10:05 due to absence of Chair **S. McGrew**

**Motion to approve Agenda:** **B. Garcia** motion, **A. Dickhart**, seconded, agenda approved

**Motion to approve February Minutes:** **C. Ohly-Cusack**, motion, **B. Garcia**, seconded, minutes approved

**Motion to approve March Minutes:** **B. Garcia**, motion, **R. White**, seconded, minutes approved

## Meeting Summary

- Committee discussed meeting recording privacy issues, meeting topics for 2025, preferences for in-person and hybrid meetings, the possibility to shorten meetings, the AIS Prevention Aid status, the possibility to update the charter, a potential Fall retreat, and the SAISAC mileage expense form.
- **T. Fitzgerald** gave an update on the DNR's Watercraft Inspection Program
- Committee received an update and better understanding regarding DNR AIS budgets.
- Committee reviewed, discussed, and included a suggestion to DNR regarding program financing.

## Action Items

- **Action Item:** Vote in August on whether to have meetings recorded.
- **Action Item:** Invite April Rust and Erik Kenney to speak at August meeting (done/confirmed).
- **Action Item:** Poll members concerning whether first two fall meetings can be recorded.

## Today's Meeting Expectations

- Everyone has the responsibility to contribute.
- Be an active listener and speak honestly.
- Share information in ways that can help others be successful.
- Be respectful and open to new ideas and new ways of doing things.

- Everyone participates, no one dominates.
- Members prepare for each meeting.

## Discussion Time for Committee

### Privacy Issue

The group reviewed slides that are required to be shown and read out loud at the beginning of each session whenever a meeting is to be recorded.

**B. Garcia** asks whether we will have to stop the meeting when a person joins later to let them know they are being recorded. **R. Contreras-Rangel** mentions the message would also be posted on the chat so people that join later can see. **B. Garcia** suggests the committee votes via email to start recordings in August. **C. Ohly-Cusack** suggests people need to be present for the August meeting to vote on recording meetings for minutes purposes to which **B. Garcia** agrees. **A. Dickhart** asks if the committee has bylaws, and if they say this is something we need to vote on. It could just be up to Doug and Rafa to make those changes. If the committee has bylaws, they should be investigated. **D. Jensen** says the committee has a charter, but it does not mention this. The charter would have to be revised. **Action Item: Vote in August on whether to have meetings recorded.**

### Plan and Process to Determine Member Interest in Meeting Topics for 2025

April Rust and Eric Kenney from DNR have been identified as presenters in the future.

### Preferences for In-person vs Hybrid Meeting Options

**A. Weberg** likes in person meetings but mentions there is a need for hybrid options for the people who can't attend in person. **J. Langer** mentions he is a big fan of meeting in person, but meeting in Sauk Rapids and Brainerd would be a big barrier. He suggests doing a regional meeting for that live close to each other where they can meet in a conference room. **A. Dickhart** worries that if there is an option for hybrid, not many people show up in person. **C. Ohly-Cusack** mentioned having meetings periodically in person is valuable and suggests it can be rotated between Minneapolis and Duluth. The most important part is having those scheduled in advanced then rotating them. **M. Hayden** mentions that the next MISAC meeting is the day before October 8<sup>th</sup>, then MAISRC showcase is the 9<sup>th</sup>, and suggests a meeting could be held that week if we know far enough in advance. **B. Garcia** mentions meetings were held in person before Covid and asks how they worked then. **D. Jensen** shares that the meetings were held in Sauk Rapids and we had one meeting in St. Paul with the Commissioner. **B. Garcia** says he has no problem traveling as long as people are going to commit to be there. **A. Dickhart** asks what the geographical split for members is. **D. Jensen** responds that most members are from the Metro and the next is the Northeast. **A. Weberg** mentions the committee is not meeting in person in August and to shoot for an in-person meeting for September in Sauk Rapids (no hybrid).

### Possibility for Shortening Meetings

**A. Weberg** mentions that when there are many presentations the meetings can seem like a lot, but she does not mind having 5-hour meetings if they are full of discussion and productive. **B. Garcia** and **J. Langer** share they are okay with having five-hour meetings. **J. Langer** points out that it can be an accessibility barrier having a 5-hour meeting in the middle of a work week for some people. **B. Garcia** mentions that online meetings have made meetings more accessible since members had to travel, but emphasizes members only met a few times a year back then. He also points out that public service

sometimes comes with a sacrifice. **J. Langer** shares that when he was working for Ramsey County, he had limited PTO, so it would be helpful for some members to have a shorter meeting time. He also adds that it would be helpful to do more work outside the meeting. That could lead to more active discussion during meetings. **B. Garcia** adds that it would also be more valuable to have interactions with the people that are presenting rather than just sitting and listening. **D. Jensen** mentions that right now the committee is using more time on member engagement and discussion. If we limit our agendas to not more than 2 speakers, then we could limit the presenter fatigue. **A. Weberg** links back to Jared's earlier point on accessibility and shares that it can be hard to make the meetings accessible for everyone. If the meetings are held later for younger people to join, other people might not want to join because it's already dark and late. **B. Garcia** thanks everyone for bringing these points up and agrees that the committee should be thinking about accessibility.

#### AIS Prevention Aid Status

**A. Weberg** mentions there are no changes from previous meetings, but the discussion is being watched closely.

#### Charter Status and Update

**A. Weberg** mentions the committee's charter is outdated and it would require a lot of work to make changes and get approvals. **K. Pennington** responds that if there are things that really need to be changed, that'd be something to consider. She also adds that revising the charter takes a very significant effort. But if there are much needed changes, we could spend time doing it. **A. Weberg** asks if the committee can do something to record that the committee has looked at the charter and approved that no changes are recommended. **B. Garcia** agrees with Amanda that the committee could just accept the charter as written. **R. White** asks if the committee could add an attendance requirement like MISAC's for members to make discussions better. **B. Garcia** adds that it is very common for three or four people to show up to three meetings then never show up again. **D. Jensen** mentions the DNR has taken a soft approach where we reach out to members to see if they are still interested in being part of the committee and see if they'd choose to resign.

#### Potential Fall Retreat

Tabling it until the committee gets the meeting calendar figured out.

#### SAISAC Mileage Expense Form

**D. Jensen** mentions the DNR has budgeted for and gotten approval for covering any travel expenses when having in person meetings.

### Update on Watercraft Inspection Program

Tina Fitzgerald, DNR Watercraft Inspection Program Supervisor

She has been in this position for nearly one year and before that, ten years as AIS Prevention Planner. She notes that the focus of the presentation will be on the wide complexities of the program with more on its history, where it is today, and future directions.

- **Overview**
  - Program history, statute authorities, program structure, partnerships, data and future directions
- **Origin Story**
  - Statute – 20,000 hours of inspections at infested waters started in 1993

- Goals – Increase awareness at high use accesses and times
  - Funding - \$5 watercraft registration surcharge
  - Regulations – Transportation, introduction, or launching with milfoils or zebra mussels prohibited
  - **Inspections 1993-2011** (graph):
    - Started doing more inspections and hours in 2007
    - When inspected, boaters would receive a color-coded sticker by year, which would indicate to watercraft inspectors whether they had been inspected and received prevention messages previously, which helped speed up inspections
    - In 2012, inspections became mandator. Over time, inspection hours have increased
    - **D. Jensen** adds via chat: Boaters loved the stickers! They attached them to their winch post with pride. The more stickers, the more commitment they showed.
  - **Inspectors on Front Line for AIS Prevention** (Venn diagram: Right Messenger, Time, Place, Messages)
    - Anglers concerned and want to do the right thing
    - Boaters want help from inspectors and decontamination units
    - Boaters willing to spend time for decontamination
    - Most boaters arrive in compliance with AIS laws
    - Most lakes are not infested – boaters asked to do their part to prevent spread
  - Statute Definitions (statute change in authority that DNR has today)
    - Transportation prohibited species including all aquatic plants
    - Drain plug requirements
    - Inspect (defined)
    - Water related equipment (defined)
  - **Statute Authorities (84D.105)**
    - Compliance with inspections
    - Inspector authorities (visual/tactically)
    - Require decontamination if watercraft meets certain criteria
    - Delegation Authorities
  - **Statute:**
    - DNR may issue delegation agreements with tribal and local governments
    - Gives local partners same inspection authority
    - Partner inspectors receive DNR training to follow same inspection protocols
    - Partners required to submit plan and end of season report
  - **Today's Funding**
    - She knows that the committee has been discussing finances, GLRI funds all watercraft inspection in R2 (Lake Superior)
    - State: \$5,385,869 for inspections and enforcement in FY24
    - State Invasive Species Account: \$10.60 surcharge and \$5 fee on non-resident fishing licenses
    - Local:
      - AIS Prevention Aid \$10 M annually
      - Local and tribal governments
      - Lake Associations
- D. Dickhart** asks what \$5 M means for enforcement? **T. Fitzgerald** says it is lumped together – all inspection and enforcement including salaries and K-9 units. **S. Staples** mentions that enforcement also receives federal funding through the Boat Water Safety Grants Program.
- **Authorized Inspections and Inspectors** (shows graph of inspections 2013-2024)
    - Numbers of inspections completed increased in 2020 to nearly 600,000 inspections and in 2024 there were 450,000 inspections

- Numbers of inspectors really increased after Prevention Aid funding was made available in 2014-15, then leveled off after COVID
  - **DNR Watercraft Inspection Program Goals** (has not changed much since 1992)
- To prevent the spread of invasive species within Minnesota through boater education, watercraft inspections, and watercraft decontamination at public water accesses by:
- Conducting inspection at strategic locations
  - Providing training, authorization and technical support to local and tribal governments through delegation agreements
  - Supporting DNR Enforcement including check stations (aiming for 12 this season that include conservation officers and watercraft inspectors)
  - Attending public events (emphasizing education)
  - **Training** (based in Statute)
    - DNR trains all watercraft inspectors
    - Level 1 are authorized to inspect
    - Level 2 are authorized to inspect and trained to decontaminate
    - Since 2022, a hybrid learning system consisting of online training, testing, in-person training and proposal manuals
    - Total of 842 Level 1 and 197 Level 2 inspectors were trained in 2024
    - Two trainers conducted 50 Level 1 and 24 Level 2 in-person trainings April – July 2024
  - **Decontamination**
    - Hot water (120°F for at least two minutes or 140°F for at least 10 seconds) to kill AIS and, if necessary, high-pressure water to remove attached AIS (based on Uniform Standards developed by the Western Regional Panel on ANS; Statute is more vaguely defined to include hand removal)
    - Live map of free decontamination services ([mndnr.gov/decon](http://mndnr.gov/decon))
    - DNR operated 26 portable units to perform 1,743 decons in 2024
    - Local programs operated 49 units and decontaminated an add'l 2,367 watercraft in 2024
  - **Today's DNR Inspection Program Staff**
    - Program Supervisors = Statewide: T. Fitzgerald, Regional: R1 = Mike Belinski, Assistant Anna Ness, R2 = Jessamyn Foley, Assistant Chad Burbach, R4 = Travis Kinsell, Assistant Darrin Rain, Region 3 = Christine Hokkala-Kuhns, Assistant Traci Eicholz
    - Trainers = Statewide Jeannine Howland, North (R1/R2) = Tyler Lindholm, South (R3/R4) = Cal Stenso-Velo
    - Each region aims to hire 12 Level 2 inspectors with 12 Level 1 interns in each region (total 98) but typically around 70
  - **2024 DNR Inspections** (compares entering and exiting)
    - Majority of inspections conducted June-August continuing with some into October
    - Priority locations based on: Infestation status, lake use, access use, and partner coverage
    - 56,291 inspections conducted, 19,017 hours by 75 inspectors
  - **Local and Tribal Government Partners** (60 who conduct a majority of inspections statewide)
    - All counties highlighted in blue graph have inspection programs
    - Counties highlighted in light blue are smaller programs including park districts, SWCDs, watershed districts plus three federal partners
    - These include: Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Mpls Park and Rec Board, Three Rivers PD, No. St. Louis SWCD, No. Fork Crow River WD, Comfort Lake Forest Lake WD, Ruth Lake Improvement District, Grand Lake ID, Fanny Lake ID, Canosia Township, City of Fifty Lakes, Eden Prairie, and Shorewood

- **2024 Partner Inspection Program Numbers** (data shown in pie charts)
  - Nationally, Minnesota has the largest watercraft inspection program
  - Usually, Minnesota “outcompetes” with CO but in 2024, we were 2<sup>nd</sup> @ 450,000 vs 460,000
  - 59 partner programs reported 763 staff who worked 190,442 hours at 754 accesses
  - Staff size (varies from under 10 (5%) to over 100)
  - Hours Inspected (varies from under 500 (50%) to 20,000, some unknown)
  - Accesses Inspected (varies from 1-5 (50%) to 100+)
  - Really small programs really add up, it is really unique and valuable partnership to get the work done through shared responsibilities
- **Total Inspections Per Month by Local & Tribal Government Staff** (data graph, entering/exiting)
  - 395,259 inspections were completed by 763 inspectors
  - Most inspections conducted June-August, some in May and through October
- **DNR and Local Coordination**
  - DNR provides technical support to local programs based on delegated authority
  - Local programs submit plan and report to DNR
  - Coordinate on location
  - Share schedules
  - DNR hosts off-season workshops to improve our program
- **Mobile Device Data Collection**
  - Location, license plate type of watercraft, drain plug (in/out), time (in/out) of water, next launch time, last lakes/next lake items found (plants, species, mud, water), type of decontamination (full, partial or other)
- **Data Used to Improve Efficiency and Risk Reduction**
  - Target when accesses are busiest, target un-infested water receiving risky boats, with lower compliance, with high-risk watercraft decontamination trends, gather new data for new lakes
- **2024 Findings from Inspections**
  - During 6,291 of 266,371 inspections recorded finding “something”
  - 5,000 watercraft arrived with aquatic plants attached
  - 97% drain plug compliance rate
  - 98% of entering watercraft users follow all MN AIS laws
  - Zebra mussels were found on 163 incoming watercrafts
  - Five were at waterbodies not known to be infested with zebra mussels
  - Data findings justify program and inspections and celebrate the work because the compliance rates are amazing compared to other regulatory programs
- **Statewide Decontaminations**
  - Nearly 1,000 courtesy decontaminations compared to entering (169/294) and exiting (842/1,756)
  - Evidence that boaters and anglers are volunteering and going out of their way for decons before going to another waterbody
  - Decontaminations by steps completed
  - Comparing partial vs. courtesy decontaminations: external (31,858/878), internal (448/348), engine 669/519), equipment (250/175), ballast tanks (32/25)
- **Decontamination Unit Present** (protocol table with data shown)
  - A unit was present during 20% of all inspections
  - 4,110 decons were completed – number of risk boats as much higher
  - Only 69 refusals documented

- **Opportunities to Increase Decontaminations**
  - Room for improvements such as “selling decons” by breaking down barriers, what how, why, etc.
  - Promote “what’s in it for me”
  - Make it easy (location x3)
  - Set reasonable expectations
  - Use social norms
  - Set goals and track progress
  - Try asking for commitments
- **Future Directions**
  - Prioritize limited resources – hired many staff across the state, how to manage as costs rise
  - Coordinate strategically between DNR and local partners – DNR focused on high use infested waters and local programs can fill in the gaps, uninfested waters with high use or days when DNR is not there
  - Continuously improve training – mandatory, making more accessible, developing new ways of teaching adult learners
  - Improve data consistency and use for next season (vs no collection by some counties)
  - Increase decontaminations
  - Install on-demand decontamination stations (1 DNR @ Big Bog on Red Lake)
  - Design public water accesses for AIS prevention
- **Closing Thoughts**
  - Statewide consistency – same level of inspections across counties regardless of size or location
  - Robust statute authorities – unique for Midwest, strongest regulations of all
  - Local partners – biggest and best in the nation
  - Reliable funding – prioritize resources
  - Data for decision making
  - Personal responsibility – primary goal is education, inspectors can be everywhere, all the time

## Discussion

**A. Dickhart** asks two questions: 1) What do check stations look like? **T. Fitzgerald** says it varies mostly at rest areas where space is available for boaters to move away from traffic for safety reasons. They can only be for only one direction of traffic, signs for trailered watercraft must pull over, conservation officers, watercraft inspectors, a decon unit, cones to help direct traffic, and often a zebra mussel sniffing K-9s. One day event scheduled for three in each of four regions. **A. Dickhart** has heard that citations do not hold up in court. 2) Do inspection stations need to indicate that they are mandatory? He was encouraged to look into this.

**A. Weberg** asks how many citations are given per year? How many are processed and go through the courts? **T. Fitzgerald** responds that DNR data is the annual reports, data for local enforcement is unknown because that is not collected. **A. Weberg** emphasizes that there must be an agreement with the county attorney to validate AIS citations. Otherwise, the citations will not be reviewed in court. She is hopeful that an agreement for Cook County is moving forward. **S. Staples** says that the new supervisor met with the county attorney but there is one stipulation that is being worked on. Cautiously optimistic that it will be granted.

**C. Ohly-Cusack** asks why hesitation? **S. Staples** says it has to do with the Fourth Amendment to the Constitution and if they are not onboard there is no reason to have an agreement. DWI check points are different because it constitutes criminal activity driving a vehicle. The difference is walking the fine line

of the Fourth Amendment which regulates search and seizure. DNR does not want to violate rights. Conservation Officers are not looking for any other violation, strictly for AIS. Some county attorneys do not buy into it. In a case that was brought to court, the judge ruled in DNR's favor. Some county attorneys allow it but are very leery about it. When check stations are randomly set up across the state, safety and mission are top priorities. There is a lot of planning that goes into conducting check stations. They are beginning to document saturation, more than one officer working in potential violation areas on high traffic highways. A new RMS data system will allow more accurate tracking. Old system is being phased out.

**B. Garcia** asks if a boat just going down a highway is not probable cause? **S. Staples** responds that yes, officers must have a reason. He compares it to DWI enforcement – not all vehicles can be pulled over for violation checks, there must be some reasonable suspicion and develop probable cause from there. Check stations are conducted near infested lakes. DNR must show that they are protecting natural resources through these efforts. Other states are using similar approaches, but it is unknown if any cases are going to court. It is a really good tool to show that DNR prioritizes enforcement – they get educated and remember that – to achieve compliance without just issuing tickets. **T. Fitzgerald** emphasizes that check stations reach different audiences than those at public water accesses. **B. Garcia** asks if these check stations are mandatory? Yes, but if they avoid stopping, DNR does not pursue. **D. Jensen** adds that in the Western states many are mandatory, operate with cameras, and they will pursue, if a boater bypasses a check station. Western states work from the Uniform Protocol as previously mentioned so if they are checked in one state, they should pass inspection in the next state. Check stations reach a much, much smaller audience than water access inspections. That audience may have never encountered a watercraft inspector because they do not stop at public accesses in MN. They are not expecting to be inspected since they are not familiar.

**C. Ohly-Cusack** says the violation rate validates why check stations are needed. **B. Garcia** asks if Law Enforcement has the authority to pull over a violator who has aquatic plants clinging to the trailer or their boat plug is in while traveling on a public road? **T. Fitzgerald** confirms that any licensed peace officer has the authority to issue warnings and citations.

**A. Weberg** asks since we have the most robust laws in the country, are there any laws that are on a wish list? **T. Fitzgerald** says DNR has been pretty satisfied with the authority they've been given. **D. Jensen** adds on a related topic that there have been past discussions about establishing an AIS boater education program, but it has never received sufficient traction in the legislature.

**B. Garcia** asks if federal watercraft of commercial ships fall into DNR's authority? **T. Fitzgerald** responds that yes with regard to commercial transportation and operation of watercraft and water-related equipment focused on public roadways. **D. Jensen** says that ballast water falls under federal ballast water regulations, first established in 1993 which today are based on EPA standards and enforced by the U.S. Coast Guard. **B. Garcia** asks about commercial work along shorelines? **K. Pennington** responds that DNR has conditions on other permits including working in public waters and dredging.

**A. Weberg** is aware of Canadian check stations reporting 20% violation rate which has been happening for years. There are two audiences, those who do and do not care no matter what, only if they get a ticket. **T. Fitzgerald** jokes or if they get denied entry into Canada. **A. Weberg** emphasizes that they will find another route. Violation fees depend upon species and situation:

<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/laws.html#:~:text=place%20or%20attempt%20to%20place,500%2>

ocivil%20penalty%20or%20misdemeanor). If found in violation, they need to partake in an AIS education program to get their watercraft license reinstated.

**T. Fitzgerald** thanks the committee for inviting her, she is excited to get a full season of experience in this new position, and is available anytime to answer any follow-up questions.

Email: tina.fitzgerald@state.mn.us

## DNR Update

S. Staples, DNR Law Enforcement, Kelly Pennington, DNR Invasive Species Program Supervisor  
Doug Jensen and Rafael Contreras-Rangel, AIS Prevention Planners

**S. Staples** reports that enforcement is gearing up for summer, planning check stations, three new K-9s are being trained and should be available this summer. A success story is recently one of their K-9s rescued a missing autistic mute child near Onamia (<https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/dnr-k-9-officer-boy-autism-comes-home/>). Looking forward to getting them working across the state. Otherwise, just working on priorities and the challenging budget coming up. **A. Weberg** asks if enforcement is fully staffed? **S. Staples** responds that they nearly fully staffed, another academy will be starting next month. Another 13 officers will be ready next winter. With retirements and promotions, all positions will be close to filled. No hiring will occur next year.

**B. Garcia** asks what species can K-9s detect? **S. Staples** says zebra mussels and wild game. Those that don't do zebra mussels, are trained for game and fish. Zebra mussels and fish are kept separately to limit any false detections. Both types of dogs are trained differently. Others are trained to find "articles" with human scent.

**K. Pennington** discussed staffing updates. Mike Verhoven has started as AIS Management Consultant overlapping with Wendy Crowell, who will retire in May. Organisms in Trade and Invasive Carp Coordinator positions for the L&D5 project are in process. Trainers are holding workshops for local and tribal partners to watercraft inspectors who are authorized under their delegation agreements. **A. Weberg** asks about the L&D5 project? **K. Pennington** says that it is a project recommended by the Outdoor Heritage Lessard Sams fund that the legislator provide \$5 M over 5 years for the DMR to install an invasive carp deterrent at L&D5 on the MS River upriver from Winona. Project involves the WI DNR, USGS, USFWS, US Army Corps of Engineers, and tribal natural resource agencies to scope design work. Two other deterrents have been installed elsewhere in the US on an experimental basis so it will be exciting to see if those approaches can work here in MN. Starting on design work.

**K. Pennington** reports on finances as a follow up to the March meeting action item. She marked up the chapter to answer questions. There is a tremendous amount of data that goes into preparation of the financial section of the annual reports. DNR has tried to keep annual reports consistent so that outcomes and accomplishments can be tracked over time, show consistency when reporting things, while trying to keep as concise as possible. Numbers that are reported can be confusing. Some numbers are referred to as appropriations, which is the amount that the legislature gives DNR authority to spend in a state fiscal year vs. expenditures. Information presented on appropriations is shown along with the appropriations law. These two numbers don't add up (total General Fund:Total Expenditures) to the invasive species account, which is true, and this is why. This \$4.2 M is what was appropriated to us from the Invasive Species Account. That account is funded by several things, including LSP permits and certain penalties. Majority of the receipts, however, are watercraft registration and non-resident fishing license fees. Those are the two main pieces which she highlighted.

Second page of annual report chapter is about expenses. Appropriation says that we can spend up to this amount, expenditures are what was actually spent in a fiscal year. In 2024, DNR spent \$6.2 M which is less than what was appropriated. So, this does not add up to those figures on the previous page. Reason those numbers are often lower in the first year is because the legislature works on a biennial basis. While it is specified what was received in 2024, it actually funds two fiscal years at a time. In the first year of a biennium, it is common that expenditures are a bit lower than appropriations because leftover funds can be spent in the second year of the biennium. This provides a little flexibility for budgeting among fiscal years. \$6.2 M reflects the EWR Invasive Species Program. Total in the table also includes funding that is appropriated for DNR Enforcement for their invasive species work. So, that is the reason why those two numbers are different. Those numbers increased compared to EWR numbers alone are included in the two columns with inspection and enforcement.

Based on feedback received from our last meeting, DNR discovered that there is a math error. The General Fund column is not correct. It should be \$3.7 M. DNR will follow up to see how to get that corrected and in the Legislative Library and DNR's webpage. She is pleased that the error was found, and it can be corrected.

What we did not do is prepare a pie chart to show proportions this year. Instead, data was reported in columns – exacting the same as presented in previous reports. She thinks that providing actual numbers is a better way of presenting the data and easier to interpret.

Finally, last page of expenditure report categories which are listed in statute. Definitions for what are included in each expenditure category are listed in the report. Some numbers are based on appropriations that the legislator provides DNR and the authority to spend in a given fiscal year vs. expenditures. General fund budgeted by program. In the section on State Funds, starting with appropriations, two numbers presented do not add up to what is in the Invasive Species Account. One number is what was appropriated to the account. That account revenue is funded in several ways including LSP permits and fines. However, a majority of receipts are from watercraft registration and non-resident fishing licenses. This helps define operationally coded to which categories.

## Discussion

**B. Garcia** sums things up, there was one math error and a mix up in interpretation between appropriation and expenditures actually spent. Those figures are never going to match up perfectly by spending some in the first half of the biennium with anticipation that costs may go up in the second half so that way the budget is covered. **K. Pennington** agrees that differences between appropriation and expenditure are a challenge to show, but DNR does their best to be accurate and to be careful about the language that is used. This exercise has revealed that there may be better ways to be more clear and improve understanding of our budget. **B. Garcia** suggests an entry paragraph that explains the differences, why expenditures and appropriations may not add up to the same number because that is not the way budgets work. **K. Pennington** agrees that it is difficult to interpret, not intuitive differences between the totals, so that might be helpful. **B. Garcia** suggests listing figures via a table. **A. Weberg** uses a table that shows available vs actually spent. **A. Dickhart** suggests inserting a variance column.

For his update, **D. Jensen** posts via chat: 1) Arrowhead AIS Outreach Coordination Coalition – Leading resurrection to promote space to identify opportunities and gaps mostly around AIS outreach events (e.g., booths at fairs/festivals), training and other issues, open to NE counties, watercraft inspectors, interns, any partners including lake associations, Master Naturalists, AIS Detector volunteers. 2) Wrapping up UMISC 2024 and beginning planning UMISC 2026. 3) 2023 County Metrics One-Pager – accessible via DNR webpage at <https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/ais/prevention/index.html>. 4) Common Names – Influenced USGS NAS Database to change their use of *Corbicula* common name from Asian clams to freshwater golden clams as suggested by the U of M Extension’s Invasive Species Community of Practice, which he was a part of. 5) DNR-County Bait Project – Reinitiated for 2025 by DNR’s Erik Kenney.

### Member and Ex-Officio Updates

**M. Hayden** says that 1) MAISRC’s RFP has closed. They received more proposals than historically received and requests for more funding (\$5 M) than available (\$3.5 M). Previously they used a preproposal process to gather more information with an assumption that those proposals would receive funding. This year’s RFP is much more competitive, so they asked more pre-proposal submitters to prepare full proposals. 2) Concerning funding, the General Fund and other appropriations have moved through the legislative process. Initially, MAISRC was going to receive a portion of the watercraft surcharge, but in the latest House budget, MAISRC was removed so now all surcharge funding will go to DNR. They will receive full ENTR funding appropriation in July.

### Discussion

**A. Dickhart** asks if there were any projects that tended to dominate the RFP pool? **M. Hayden** responds that they did receive several continuation proposals. Several new related to mystery snails and freshwater golden clam, which were the first-time advertised in the RFP as priority species. Announcement will be available in a couple of weeks. **B. Garcia** asks if all the information is available on MAISRC’s website. **M. Hayden** responds that at this point only after the funded proposals are announced. Decisions are made based on reviews of the Technical Committee and MAISRC staff, that is when it becomes public.

**A. Weberg** asks if the approach is to fully fund more projects or partially fund some projects? **M. Hayden** says that it is complicated because many continuation proposals asked for greater funding than previously. They received the most funding ever from ENRTF, but inflation has dramatically increased. **N. Phelps** is in a better position and would know more.

**C. Ohly-Cusack** recommends that **M. Hayden** could provide a presentation at a future meeting on the new research/continuation projects funded (e.g., eDNA). **A. Weberg** reminds that MAISRC webinars are recorded and available online (<https://www.youtube.com/@maisrc/search?query=eDNA>). **D. Jensen** adds via chat: One of our Off- Season Workshop last winter included a panel on eDNA.

### 2024 Invasive Species Program Annual Report: Review and Discussion Focused on Prevention Activities (unfinished from March meeting)

- **D. Jensen** reminded members that the purpose of this exercise is to provide feedback on the report based on three sections related to prevention. Are there any gaps, not clear, any general feedback? (See p18 public awareness, public engagement, p26 prevention aid.) He scrolls

through those sections. **A. Weberg** reminds members of the DEI work and language access work that the DNR has presented to the committee in the past.

(<https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/reports/legislative/2025/2024-invasive-species-annual-report.pdf>)

- **B. Garcia** asks about the Off-Season Workshops? **A. Weberg** responds that DNR hosts workshops for local counties that receive Prevention Aid. **D. Jensen** says that in 2025, planners hosted 3 online workshops plus two in-person workshops (Chanhassen south/ Brainerd north) for a total of five, and in 2024, we hosted six total. Online workshops were very well attended, 70-90 participants. Roughly 25 attended in-person workshops, good networking opportunities. **A. Weberg** chimes in that she and **A. Dickhart** are in this role and appreciates the opportunities to share successes and challenges, not invent the wheel. **A. Dickhart** says workshops are great, he has “never left one without something new.” **D. Jensen** says that it is one of most enjoyable things that he and **R. Contreras-Rangel** provide each winter.
- **B. Garcia** comments about the map previously shown today that apparently shows the participating AIS program counties. There seems to be a big hole around Mille Lacs. Where those counties not represented, do they have other programs, do they not find it important? **A. Weberg** responds that there are counties like St. Louis that provide grants across their jurisdiction to lake associations, townships and other organizations to conduct AIS efforts. **D. Jensen** responds that he helped develop the St. Louis County AIS Program, which is county-wide, operated through the County Land and Development Department. Funding received is allotted for an RFP while holding \$50k as a contingency fund. About \$711,000 is usually distributed to fund between 8-12 projects each year.
- **K. Pennington** responds that the map was just those who have county-wide watercraft inspection programs. **D. Jensen** confirms that the northern half of St. Louis County has a watercraft inspection program run by North St. Louis SWCD based on a grant from SLC. There are 31 counties that provide grants. Those counties that do not have watercraft inspection programs may not have the capacity or funding to host one. They will conduct more AIS public outreach in lieu of watercraft inspections. **A. Weberg** agrees that those under \$50k probably cannot afford them. Many of the AIS coordinators have responsibilities in several other areas (e.g., zoning, septic system, inspections). A list of funding by county is available on the DNR’s website.
- **A. Weberg** invites DNR staff to help here with AIS public events. **D. Jensen** says he’s working on the event list to coordinate. **B. Garcia** asks if the limitation is based on funding? **A. Weberg** acknowledges that funding is needed to help with capacity. **A. Dickhart** says that funding is always the limiting factor. In Carver County, they were not able to fund all the inspection hours that were budgeted. In their case, it was more about the lack of watercraft inspection applicants. Being able to hire inspectors depends upon where those positions are located. DNR Level 1 positions start at \$19/hr whereas Level 2 are between \$22-26/hr.
- **B. Garcia** asks if DNR received federal grants? **K. Pennington** affirms that DNR receives federal grants in three ways: 1) GLRI – successful in getting \$800k which funds most of the watercraft inspection in the NE, statewide phragmites control, and AIS in Commerce work. 2) AIS state implementation grant from USFWS at \$80-90k each year, and 3) a rapid response (signal crayfish) grant from USFW through the ANSTF. It’s about 10% of total AIS budget.
- **A. Dickhart** asks if counties can apply for GLRI funding? **A. Weberg** says SWCDs can. **D. Jensen** adds that some of the Great Lakes Commission grants go out to local authorities for various projects, like the Great Lakes AIS Landing Blitz proposal opportunity for NE counties.

## Discussion Time for Committee

**Action Item:** Invite April Rust and Erik Kenney to speak at August meeting (done/confirmed).

**Action Item:** Poll members concerning whether meetings can be recorded.

**B. Garcia** asks if the K-9s can detect zebra mussels in lakes? **K. Pennington** says yes.

**A. Weberg**, motion to adjourn, **B. Garcia**, seconded, motion carried

**Adjourned 3:01 pm**

Next meeting is August 28<sup>th</sup> online via Teams (check your calendar for invite)