

# Minnesota DNR AIS Advisory Committee

January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2025 Final Meeting Minutes

## Online via Teams

**Members Present:** Shelly Binsfeld, Nick Bluhm, Andrew Dickhart, Beto Garcia, Liz Kaltenhauser, Jared Lager, Spencer McGrew, Carrie Ohly-Cusack, Patrick Selter, M. Mahmood Tajbakhsh, Amanda Weberg, Raining White

**Members Absent:** Stephanie Hadler, Christine Maxwell

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

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

**DNR Staff Present:** Rafael Contreras-Rangel, Robert Haberman, Doug Jensen, Kelly Pennington

**DNR Staff Absent:** Staples Scott

**Guests:** Dan Cibulka

**R. Contreras-Rangel** calls the meeting to order at 10:02am and facilitates member introductions. As interim chair, **S. Binsfeld** presides over motions and election.

**Motion to approve Agenda:** **B. Garcia** motion, **A. Weberg**, seconded.

**Motion to approve December Minutes:** **S. McGrew** motion, **B. Garcia**, seconded.

## Action Items

- **Action Item:** Letter Writing Ad Hoc Committee will write a letter to the DNR Commissioner and Governor in support of not cutting AIS Prevention Aid funds.

## 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.

## Elections for 2025 Chair and Vice Chair

- Committee voted in favor (3 new member obtentions) of holding elections today rather than during February meeting
- **S. McGrew** elected Chair, **A. Weberg** elected Vice Chair, who then presided over rest of meeting

## DNR Updates

Kelly Pennington, DNR Unit Supervisor

- *Overview:* February meeting will provide an Invasive Species Program overview
- *Annual Report 2024* is found [here](#), a highlight is Enforcement added 3 new zebra sniffing canines

- *Personnel updates:* Gina Kemper, AIS Specialist, Region 1, Park Rapids, vacated by Nichole Kovar; Adam Doll, temporary mobility position with Legislative Team; Wendy Crowell, Aquatic Invasive Species Management Consultant, will retire in May, working to fill position before she retires; Carlie Wagner hired as the Invasive Carp Project manager for a Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council funded project to scope an invasive carp deterrent at L&D 5 on the MS River; working to fill the AIS in Commerce position vacated by R. Contreras-Rangel, which is temporary position funded through GLRI
- *Legislative update:* Governor is including a watercraft surcharge increase as proposed by DNR, funding will go into Invasive Species Account. Last surcharge increase was in 2017, from \$5 to \$10.60 based on a 3-yr registration; first increase in 25 yrs, which helps with a long-term structural financial deficit; surcharge fee is based on length of watercraft and baseline registration costs, hopes increase in funding for Invasive Aquatic Plant Management (IAPM) grants, which are delivered to local partners across the state to conduct management; also hoping to expand outreach to reach new audiences; \$5 from each registration would go to MAISRC to help sustain their research program, translate their research for local managers and long-term programs; other than the surcharge proposal, she is unsure of the origin of other proposals

## Discuss Governor's Budget Proposal

- Proposed budget aims to reduce deficit which includes a 50% reduction in Local AIS Prevention Aid for 2026-2027 based on public water accesses and trailered parking spots, funding administered through Department of Revenue; funding would be reduced from \$10M/yr to \$5M/yr; funding is from the General Fund distributed through Department of Revenue based on tax law which is a garnish from property taxes. counties encourage SAISAC to contact Governor with their concerns; for clarity, 2025 funds are secure; June 2026 payment would be the first decrease for FY202, costs for local enforcement comes from these funds
- LCCMR is accepting proposals that support AIS management, some counties may request funding. Funding could go to DNR for distribution to counties; limitation of this approach is that LCCMR funding is not long-term therefore not viable solution for watercraft inspection programs; funding from surcharge would help MAISRC with the balancing act of moving away from reliance of short-term General Fund to long-term security; LCCMR funding will continue to fund research. Outside of LCCMR, all funding comes from the General Fund and private donations.
- Minnesota Invasive Species Advisory Committee (MISAC) is sending a letter to the Governor opposing the proposed cut and look for signatures from other organizations; Minnesota Inter-County Association and Association of Minnesota Counties will visit Capital in February to meet with legislators to discuss impacts of proposed cut, committee supports advocacy by these organizations; Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe does not receive this funding, cuts would impact their local partnerships therefore plans to oppose the cut.
- Discussion ensues about whether leadership of this committee can sign onto such letters. **D. Jensen** says this has been addressed within other similar groups like the Great Lakes Panel on ANS and MISAC. Leaders representing their organization are permitted to sign such letters as long as: 1) letter represents that of the larger organization and 2) their employer does not have policies restricting that activity. SAISAC Leadership will follow up with their supervisors.
- Motion to form a letter writing committee to Governor, DNR Commissioner, and Legislators: **B. Garcia** proposes, **A. Weberg**, second, motion passes

## History and Evolution of Minnesota's Invasive Species Laws and Enforcement

Robert Haberman, DNR Water Resources Enforcement Officer

- Reviews key changes in laws regarding AIS over the years
- In 1996, existing statutes were codified into a single Chapter 84D, which gave enforcement powers, addressed Eurasian watermilfoil, zebra mussels and purple loosestrife, listing of infested waters, and transport and introduction laws; 1996 Law changes allowed Enforcement to issue civil penalties, misdemeanors, and criminal citations and transportation of aquatic macrophytes enforced (civil penalty)
- In 1999, harvesting bait permitted from infested waters
- In 2004, terminology continued to improve - exotic was replaced with invasive; transport and introduction was added as a misdemeanor; illegal (gross misdemeanor) to purchase or sell invasive species; civil penalty for possession increased from \$100 to \$250; failure to drain water from zebra mussel or spiny waterflea waterbodies added at \$50; transport of infested water from riparian property without a permit added at \$200 – all based on new research water transport is a mechanism for spread
- In 2008, attempt to launch with prohibited AIS attached, including any and all aquatic plants
- In 2010, added requirement to drain water for all waters of the State (not just ZM) at \$50 civil penalty, as a result of the increase in spread statewide; Lake Service Provider program authorized, funded and enforcement authorized
- In 2011, huge positive change – added water-related equipment like docks, lifts, rafts; requirement for drain plugs be removed; roadside check stations; watercraft inspection program was greatly expanded
- In 2012, penalty for launching with AIS attached reduced to \$500 for first offense and \$1,000 for subsequent offense; first enforcement action taken, gave enforcement choice of penalty type; training began with local law enforcement; offenders required to complete online training
- In 2014, added attempted placement of infested water related equipment fine at \$500
- In 2016, added failure to comply with decontamination, complete decontamination, or offender training citation
- As for check stations, ranges from 6-12/yr, would like to do more but it takes a lot of time planning and staffing, enforcement officers, decontamination station and Level 2 Inspectors must be available, county attorneys are on board and conducted in safe locations; emphasis on transient traffic; violation rate can be up to 50% (aquatic macrophytes, prohibited species, drain plug not removed); K-9 dogs used to improve zebra mussel detections; estimated cost has not been calculated
- In summary, laws and enforcement responded because existing AIS were spreading and these things needed to be adapted over time, importantly based on the best available science; humans are the main source for spread, not wildlife; more authority and transfer of authority to local inspectors has really improved coverage; ignorance is no longer an excuse

#### Discussion:

- K-9s: Three recently added, one recently retired
- LSP Violation: Fee is based on set pay scale, no increase based on subsequent offenses
- Watercraft inspection program began in 1991 with 12 inspectors and has risen to over 1,000 inspectors making it the largest program nationally
- Greatest challenge is human nature, some only think of themselves and do not think of others, laziness, do not care, most do care, but there are always a few that are rude and bad apples
- Further discussion of letter writing effort: Members asked to review MISAC letter during lunch with further time during Discussion Time for Committee

## Member and Ex-Officio Updates

- Skipped due to time restraints.

## Overview of Wisconsin's AIS Program

Amy Kretlow, AIS Program Coordinator, WI DNR, PowerPoint attached.

### Discussion

**R. White** asks if there are any emerging threats and if there are any novel management methods outside of traditional chemical use. **A. Kretlow** says they are watching for hydrilla, red swamp crayfish, and European frog bit, a newer species that's been around for about four years. As for control, they don't have any novel control methods, but they promote integrative plant management. They have observed that not just relying on chemicals works well when there are native plants around.

**B. Garcia** asks if WI has any lake service provider programs like MN. **A. Kretlow** responds that they are trying to bring one in like the one in MN, but they don't have as much authority as MN in terms of certifications. WIDNR is trying to have people voluntarily do trainings and use the self-cleaning kits. WIDNR is trying to do what MN does, but they don't have the authority. **D. Jensen** highlights that "Clean boats Clean waters" started in 1994 and WI adapted it to the program Amy just described. Many other Great Lakes states have also adapted it.

**A. Weberg** mentions she is located on the Northshore of Lake Superior and has worked on getting purple loosestrife beetles. Her program is glad to have WI partners help.

**C. Ohly-Cusack** asks if WIDNR has seen out of state violations coming from specific states through their inspection program. She also asks if both states could coordinate messaging depending on which outside states, they are coming through. **A. Kretlow** responds that they don't track boat number or plates, they ask where they are coming from and where they are going. She will inquire to see if she can get that information. **C. Ohly-Cusack** mentions that information would be great for cross-referencing with other states to see if there are more violators from certain states.

**A. Kretlow** mentions that Wisconsin and Minnesota's AIS teams have meetings throughout the year to collaborate. They are usually quarterly meetings.

**B. Garcia** asks what existing cooperative programs do MN and WI have. **A. Kretlow** responds that the fishing management team is working closely with MN, especially with the carp program. WI DNR sits on the Lock and Dam 5 advisory committee as well.

**A. Dickhart** asks if Wisconsin has been responding to goldfish infestations. **A. Kretlow** responds that a lot of their city areas are inundated with goldfish. They have gotten past the point where eradication is possible. They are doing more outreach, but there are too many in the metro to try and eradicate.

**A. Weberg:** mentions that on highway 61, along the north shore of Lake Superior, 90% of boats in violation of the boat plug law are from WI and most of those boats have big motors and are going to Canada. **A. Kretlow** responds that in WI they can drain the water and put their plug back in, which is most likely why those violations are seen since that is different than MN.

## Overview of Sherburne County AIS Program

Dan Cibulka, AIS Program Coordinator. Sherburne County PowerPoint attached.

## Discussion

**N. Bluhm** asks if Sherburne has installed any AIS Self-cleaning Signs/Tool stations and if he can he discuss public response. **D. Cibulka** responds that they had conversation with different groups and have not installed self-cleaning tools. With their budget these would be a substantial investment, up to \$30,000, not including continued maintenance after that. For it to be feasible, they would need a partner to take care of maintenance. Sherburne has not installed self-cleaning stations, but they are interested. **N. Bluhm** says it costs about \$70 to install a metal pole and some tools and says they've observed some pretty good use of them. **D. Cibulka** says they've had conversations with partners about those cheaper tools. Vandalism is a concern, so they are hesitant to install something like that. At another location the group was not convinced it would be used, so they decided on funding inspection hours instead. **N. Bluhm** mentions the DNR did a field study watching how people use tools and found that boaters spend two minutes longer cleaning their boat when using tools. **D. Cibulka** says that now that we have that grant subcategory on their plan, they are hoping a partner would want to support the installation and maintenance of AIS self-cleaning tool stations. **D. Jensen** says they have not seen many vandalisms on these tools, and when there is vandalism, they are easy to replace. Most of the vandalism has happened in the twin cities area.

## Continued Discussion on Governor's Budget

**B. Garcia** suggest the committee uses this MISAC's letter as a base but change the language into their own. He continues to say the results of this funding cut would be irreversible. **S. McGrew** says he sees two paths, writing this letter or tacking on their signature to the MISAC letter. The committee could also write their own letter in addition to signing on to MISAC's letter.

**B. Garcia** moves to have the committee be a signature to MISAC letter and **C. Ohly-Cusack** seconds.

**C. Ohly-Cusack** says they can sign on to any of these letters but also have their own. **M. Hayden** suggest when writing the letter to the Governor, they could also urge the DNR that this is important. **B. Garcia** says they are an advisory committee to DNR and should be advising the DNR to push back on this funding cut.

**S. McGrew** motions to cosign MISAC's letter as AIS advisory committee to the DNR. Motion passes.

**S. McGrew** says the AIS prevention aid is its own law. The governor can recommend cutting it, but unless a legislator introduces a law, then nothing can really happen. He asks D. Jensen if that is correct. **D. Jensen** says that is correct and adds that pushback can also be successful.

**C. Ohly-Cusack** asks if anyone has any idea what specifically the Governor is unsure of this program. What is he questioning? Is it solely financial? The committee needs to keep this in mind before writing a letter. **S. McGrew** says the Department of Revenue summarized why they are doing it. The number of infested lakes back in 2014 is larger now than before. He thinks it was that simple of a decision but does not know for sure. **B. Garcia** says that if people haven't subscribed to different committee newsletters like the House Environment and Natural Resources Committee or the Committee to Environment Climate and Legacy, he recommends they all sign up for them. **A. Dickhart** believes this was low-hanging fruit for the Governor's office. It could be as simple as that.

**D. Jensen** mentions the allocations of the Department of Parks and Trails counts the number of trailered parks alongside to water accesses. Based on those numbers, that's how the allocations are divided up, and that is a 50/50 split between water accesses and number of trailer parking spots **B. Garcia** asks if there are metrics available on how many watercraft inspections happen every year. **K. Pennington** responds yes. **B. Garcia** says that would give good information on how effective the funding is. **S. McGrew** says the bulk of the lift of

inspections is done by counties compared to the DNR. **B. Garcia** asks if it is okay for them to say they are part of the advisory committee and that they have first-hand account of how this cut would affect AIS spread. **S. McGrew** says he thinks it'd be fine to say that we are part of the committee. **D. Jensen** does not think that'd invoke any conflict of interests.

**S. McGrew** entertains motion to write a letter. **B. Garcia** moves to write a letter to the DNR and **A. Dickhart** seconds.

**A. Dickhart** mentions that as an AIS manager, he observes there is a lack of seeing AIS as part of water quality. Water quality gets lots of attention an AIS is an afterthought. If the committee writes their own letter, they should include something about degrading water quality by cutting this budget. **S. McGrew** agrees and offers that it can be contextualized in as a water quality problem.

**S. McGrew** motions to write a letter to the DNR Commissioner and to the Governor. The motion is carried.

**S. McGrew** says **B. Garcia** will help the letter writing committee and suggests this ad hoc committee meets on Friday. **M. Hayden** suggest sending out an email to the rest of the committee saying they will meet tomorrow to work on the letter. **C. Ohly-Cusack** urges the group to add the economic impact to the letter, maybe that would ring a bell at the governor's office. **A. Dickhart** asks what he needs to do to send suggestions for the letter. **D. Jensen** says to send it to the group but not to **R. Contreras-Rangel** or and himself, because they cannot be advocates. They can only provide information.

**Action Item:** Letter Writing Ad Hoc Committee will write a letter to the DNR Commissioner and Governor in support of not cutting AIS Prevention Aid funds.

**S. McGrew** entertains motion to adjourn. **B. Garcia** motions to adjourn and **A. Dickhart** seconds.

Adjourned 3:01 pm