

# Minnesota DNR AIS Advisory Committee

*March 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025 Final Meeting Minutes*

## *Online via Teams*

**Members Present:** Shelly Binsfeld, Nick Bluhm, Andrew Dickhart, Beto Garcia, Jared Langer, Spencer McGrew, M. Mahmood Tajbakhsh, Raining White

**Members Absent:** Stephanie Hadler, Liz Kaltenhauser, Christine Maxwell, Carrie Ohly-Cusack, Patrick Selter, Amanda Weberg

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

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

**DNR Staff Present:** Rafael Contreras-Rangel, Mimi Daniel, Adam Doll, Doug Jensen, Eric Kenney, Kelly Pennington, Scott Staples

**Motion to approve Agenda:** **S. McGrew** motion, **B. Garcia**, seconded, agenda approved

**S. McGrew** asks to add the following the agenda:

- Talk about charter and lode stones
- Talk about a possible board retreat

**Motion to add to agenda:** **N. Bluhm** motion, **A. Dickhart**, seconded, agenda with amendments approved.

**Motion to approve January Minutes:** Tabled for April meeting

**Motion to approve February Minutes:** Tabled for April meeting

## Meeting Summary

- Committee received an update and better understanding regarding DNR AIS budgets.
- Committee received an update on DNR's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Program.
- Committee reviewed, discussed, and included a suggestion to DNR regarding program financing.

## Action Items

- **D. Jensen** will inquire for meeting room availability at the Great Lakes Aquarium on April 24.
- **K. Pennington** will inquire about updating the list of Lake Service Providers on the website.
- **M. Hayden** will report about the status of the White Bear Lake and zebra mussel study at the April meeting.
- **K. Pennington** will inquire into the apparent discrepancy in financials per conversation with **N. Bluhm**.
- As per motion, **DNR staff** are asked to address fiscal issue above within a month.

## 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.

## Legislative Update

Adam Doll, AIS Prevention Consultant

Currently, he is in a mobility position as Legislative Coordinator and working through this legislative session.

### Overview of 2025 Legislative Proposals

- Policy
  - They must clear through various committee (e.g. environmental committee) to continue, and the deadline is in two weeks.
  - Lake Superior
    - Correction that allows for commercial harvester to keep bycatch, specifically burbot
  - Exempting Dead and Eviscerated Carp
    - Right now, structured way prohibited transport invasive species.
    - This means cannot be sold and possessed invasive carp
    - Bill would allow for the transport of all carp except black carp and includes a definition for eviscerated.
    - **B. Garcia** asks if this is for invasive carp and not common carp. **A. Doll** confirms that common carp is regulated, so this would be for the prohibited species. The definition for eviscerated would be eviscerating the gills so that there would be no way for the fish to be alive. **B. Garcia** asked for clarification whether this means a person can fish an invasive carp and, if they eviscerate the gills, then they would be able to keep it. **A. Doll** confirms that is correct.
- Budget
  - Fee Proposals – Aquatic Invasive Species
    - Increase AIS surcharge on a sliding scale to support DNR AIS programs, grants and provides additional funding for AIS research at UMN.
    - Surcharge increases by watercraft type (e.g. crafts less than 17 feet increase to \$25 from \$10.60 for a 3-year license period.
    - Recommendation includes a general fund reduction for DNR's AIS programs of \$660,000 to be offset by additional surcharge revenue.
    - **B. Garcia** mentions that the way he is reading this is that there is going to be an increase of \$5.7 million in AIS funding but that there will be \$660,000 reduction in the general fund. Not everyone that uses lakes/rivers is a boat owner, seems like one step forward two steps backs. There should be education that everyone

benefits from AIS management, not just boat owners. **A. Doll** agrees and highlights that the reduction in the general fund is shown to be offset by the increase in the invasive species account. **N. Bluhm** asks where this increase would be going to. **K. Pennington** responds that it is detailed in our change page which she shared in the chat with the committee last month. She adds that in the portion that they are requesting for their account, they proposed this would go into increasing the grants that go to local groups to build their capacity.

- **M. Hayden** says that the way that the surcharge is currently written into the bill, MAISRC would receive \$1,200,000 a year, or about \$5 from each registration. **N. Bluhm** asks what the dollar amount that would increase? **K. Pennington** responds \$1.7 million. **N. Bluhm** asks for clarification if this would go to grants for organizations and for other management. **K. Pennington** responds that a portion of it is and she also added the following link to the Governor's budget (Kelly added this on the chat: <https://mn.gov/mmb-stat/documents/budget/2026-27-biennial-budget-books/governors-recommendations-january/natural-resources.pdf>). **S. McGrew** notes it seems the prioritization is long-term management. **K. Pennington** adds that this would increase grants, watercraft inspections, which would increase a big piece of the pie. It also helps maintain the health of the program so that there is continuous money being entered into the invasive species account to appropriate.

**B. Garcia** inquires if there is an update on the County AIS Prevention Aid Program. **A. Doll** responds that he can't really comment on that because it is not a DNR proposal, but so far during the comment period it has all been opposition. **S. McGrew** says the summary right now is we don't know until the last day of the legislative session. **B. Garcia** asks if this influences how the DNR is budgeting. If this happens, is it not going to be made up on the DNR side? **A. Doll** responds the DNR does not have a healthy enough fund to absorb a \$5 million hit to the program. He also emphasizes how the DNR knows how helpful and important those funds are, and they've been relaying that information. **B. Garcia** mentions that this committee's role is to advise the DNR and their advice was to revisit or recommend to the governor to revisit those budget cuts. We are not sure if that got through. It seems it's early days until things happen. **S. McGrew** reminds the committee that they did send out a letter to the Commissioner and she did respond and said they see the importance of the work the counties are doing and encourages to have them be involved in the process.

## Update on DNR Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Mimi Daniel, DNR Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Last time Mimi Daniel presented it was about the agencywide DEI assessment.

- The assessment has been completed and the results will be shared soon. It's currently under review.
- The goal is to see the results and create action plans regarding DEI and to help employees understand how it impacts their role.

## Language Access Plan

- This will help nonnative English speakers better access programs and services.
- Currently working on a pilot with the Enterprise Translation Office to make sure the information is relevant and ensure that the intended audience can use it.
- The DEI team is also working in policy and procedures for divisions to track what areas they should focus for tracking of language services, as different division will have different focus.
- Community engagement will have members of the community provide feedback to make sure these programs are working properly.

## DEI Action Team

- Working on a DEI Toolkit, one for staff, one for managers, etc.
- Good faith efforts tracking
  - What the DNR is doing to engage recruit and retain a diverse workforce
- DEI newsletter
- Pipeline programs
  - There are pipeline programs, community partnerships. Right now, there is not a central place where all agencies know what is going on. The DEI team is trying to centralize it so that all internships, pipelines programs, partnerships can be shared. This will foster communication between agencies so they can share successful programs with each other.

## Recruitment Resources

- Same as pipeline program.

## DEI Employee resource groups

- This is to foster DEI for employees and to give them a place for them to have conversations about DEI and come up with proposal to keep pushing DEI forward.

## Discussion

**M. Tajbakhsh** asks if the DEI team has run into a situation to change the name of programs due to the federal changes? **M. Daniel** says there have been no issues with federal policies, but they have partners that receive federal funding that have been affected. For example, Conservation Corps MN & IA (CCMI) receives a lot of federal funding, and they had to have conversations with their attorney because they are partners with us. They have a program where people with disabilities and minorities can apply. To comply they can change the name of their programs while keeping the essence of the program. If we need to change the name of our programs we would do so. At the DNR we are highlighting the why of why we do things. Here we have a culture of respect that naturally ties to DEI. We also must help staff understand the difference between state and federal law. Just because something is outlawed in the federal, it does not mean is outlawed in the state. Another example is affirmative action, it is not a difference between being white or black, our role is to help people understand what it really goes into such as protected classes. Everyone can be a certain type of protected class.

**N. Bluhm** asks for clarification whether the DEI efforts are for the DNR staff rather than the general population of MN? **M. Daniel** mentions that most of their work is internal but emphasizes that their internal work impacts external work. If we don't work on internal DEI efforts, that really impacts our external efforts. Our staff needs to know how DEI is relevant in our work, that will impact how they interact and work with the community. But yes, we are also trying to do external work as well. **N. Bluhm** asks if she has any examples of reaching out to the Asian community to have them come out and fish. **M. Daniel** mentions the Fisheries Division hired a Hmong liaison and Korean liaison last year to work with the community. We also need to build capacity, like hunting and fishing. Right now, we don't have anyone in that role. **N. Bluhm** to reach out to minorities and refugees that are looking for employment right now. **M. Daniel** appreciates the recommendation and will investigate that possibility.

**R. White** asks if there are any highlights on what has been done specific to natural resources and DEI? **M. Daniel** says she can put together some of the programs and share them with the group. Their office is new and have been siloed within the DNR Action item.

**B. Garcia** asks if they contract people to do specific tasks with specific languages for community groups? **M. Daniel** responds not right now since this office was formed in August and before that we had an office that had just formed for two years. We are currently making strategic plans, which is why are open to hearing from you all. This planning will include contracting, planning, and community engagement regarding DEI efforts.

**M. Daniel** shared her contact information in the chat: [mimi.daniel@state.mn.us](mailto:mimi.daniel@state.mn.us)

## Discussion Time for Committee

Charter

P. 204 milestones

The advisory committee will work to accomplish the following outcomes each year:

- The Advisory Committee will review and make recommendations for improvements to the DNR's AIS prevention and management program, especially review of the previous year;
- The Advisory Committee will propose, review, discuss and comment on AIS legislation;
- The Advisory Committee will review and make recommendations on research regarding AIS management, AIS prevention, management and outreach; and
- The Advisory Committee will assist in preparations for AIS focused events such as AIS stakeholder events or the DNR Roundtable events.

**S. McGrew** opens discussion to talk about what they think are doing well, what do they need to work on.

**B. Garcia** mentions an improvement to be made is to have members show up for the meetings and participation when members do show up. **N. Bluhm** agrees. He reached out to former members of the committee with impressive backgrounds, and they felt they weren't getting any tractions. Many of the discussions were anecdotal and not really try to make many changes. He also took the time to look at minutes which started in 2021, but the most recent ones are from two years ago. When reading the

minutes many of the discussions were not touching on these milestones. Overall, he saw a lack of focus and a lack of following the charter.

**B. Garcia** says he agrees to an extent however, he mentions covid might have affected what happened in the committee, including a lack of in person meetings. He adds that this will be hist 4<sup>th</sup> year in the committee and it's more like being talked to than advising. The only meaningful difference is the letter they sent to the Governor and DNR this January. He suggests the committee creates a task list of recommendations and advise as described on the charter as an action item. From his perspective, it has not been a lack of trying and caring, it might just be more difficult to get things done online than in person.

**A. Dickhart** mentions that as a brand-new member he is still trying to understand the goals and objectives of the group and how it's disseminated. He doesn't want people to think he is not trying to participate. He also reminds members that are part of lake associations that AIS managers have these conversations every day and it can sometimes feel redundant.

**N. Bluhm** reminds the group this groups exists because the Commissioner of the DNR wanted an outside group to give recommendations on how to move forward. He also wonders if they are meeting the expectations of the people who provided the funding.

**J. Langer** mentions that he is also new and is learning as we go. He also agrees the presentation style is more informative type of presentation rather than inquiry types. It doesn't leave a lot of room for feedback or asking for it. Also curious to hear what their goals are when presenting. Are they just informational or are the just looking for feedback?

**D. Jensen** mentions the committee was created in 2012 as a response to have stakeholder input. He also highlights that the commissioner is impressed at the level of activity this committee has shown. As for the committee's main role, it is to provide suggestions on how to improve AIS management in Minnesota. Previously the committee has provided recommendations for research to MAISRC and those have been made into prioritizations. We have also provided many speakers and have asked the committee to provide feedback to presenters and programs. We can improve and align how these things are done. Another role of this committee is to educate you all on what is going on so you can educate other people outside of the committee.

**B. Garcia** mentions the style of these presentations is appropriate because the public are not professionals. We are citizens engaged in the topic. We try to be ambassadors of what we learn here. We learn a lot from MAISRC and other presenters. I have learned a lot about the challenges. A lot of people come in trying to reinvent the wheel, but the wheel is already there. It's good for us to learn. Overall, I believe it is a good format and it's heartening to hear the DNR commissioner sees the good we are doing. I do think we can do better, especially in committee member participation.

**J. Langer** agrees that these meetings are ran well. He mentioned how other committees he has been a part of are not as active. What he likes about this committee is having things to review before the committee. If the committee can spend more time reviewing things outside the meetings, then they can spend more time discussing things to change.

#### Retreat

**S. McGrew** asks the committee for their views on having a retreat in the next in person meeting.

**B. Garcia** asks what he means retreat? **S. McGrew** mentions the AIS task force meeting Ottertail County did in 2023 and how it was one of the most productive meetings he has been to. This revitalized their efforts. **A. Dickhart** mentions he is a fan of in-person meetings because people zone out due to so many online meetings. Keep in mind where people are located for travel. In terms of tool stations and such, it has been a hot topic in our area. We should put that in the agenda, he is particularly interested in the CD3 stations. Is it worth it? Now that money is potentially going away, we need to start having these discussions, including consistent conversations with the DNR. **B. Garcia** says he is interested in participating in a retreat, but those of us that have other day jobs might find it difficult because we'd have to take a day off. We don't have to do it formally, but we could also do it informally. He suggests Duluth. **R. White** also supports an in-person meeting. **A. Dickhart** mentions he'd be fine going north for the April meeting.

**S. Binsfeld** mentions she loves in-person meetings and crowdsourcing ideas. This committee has gone the furthest when meeting in person. She recommends it but suggest doing it when coming back from the summer. Last time, we did it in April the momentum had fallen. We did give the DNR an action item which worked out, but everything else lost momentum. She recommends it be in August or September. Also having the one that matches with the MAISRC showcase was great. **M. Hayden** mentions October 9<sup>th</sup> is the MAISRC Showcase. **R. White** mentions meeting at an already planned event would be excellent, especially if a lot of us plan to attend anyways. we are also doing something in June with MLR that's AIS focused in Walker, MN, that's planned for a Friday/Saturday. **D. Jensen** reminds new members the DNR can reimburse mileage and provide lunch.

**S. McGrew** mentions he'd rather do it as soon as possible, but we could also wait until after we come back. What do you all think? **A. Dickhart** mentions he can do it when everyone thinks it's best because it'll be part of his job anyway. **R. White** says his schedule is flexible but suggests a mandatory poll for those members that are not present. **B. Garcia** seconds what Raining says of having an additional informal meeting (e.g. Duluth). The goal is to get participation and have people become involved. Have more of a carrot than a stick. He wouldn't say this committee has lost propulsion, he thinks some of these things take time, especially when you have a lot of people coming in and leaving. **S. Binsfeld** reminds the committee that there are random meetings when participation is just low. Over time, participation has gone up. For full disclosure, for April she already has a full schedule so she would not be able to make it. **B. Garcia** suggests the committee tables this for now to get it out to the absent members and have a discussion via email. **D. Jensen** reminds the committee that depending on location and timing, there was a discussion about having a facilitator. Is this something that you still want? **S. McGrew** confirms and mentions he has a good facilitator in mind.

**S. Binsfeld** included the following for in-person meetings in the chat *Team Meeting Agenda: Decide, Learn, Bond, Do*. She believes the in person meeting really helps with the bond aspect and she offers a place for the group to meet.

Discussed meeting teams only vs in-person options. Cass Lake Casino and Duluth's Great Lakes Aquarium were discussed. **D. Jensen** explained what the GLA location has to offer: easy to find, ample complementary parking, a complementary day pass, beautiful meeting space overlooking the Arial Lift Bridge and the Duluth Harbor, a new Oceans Alive Display, plus a self-guided tour of the Invasive Species Exhibit. **Action Item: Committee asks D. Jensen to inquire**

about availability and costs of the Discovery Center meeting room at the Great Lakes Aquarium along with lunch catering options.

April meeting topics and in-person meeting options

Tabled for April meeting

Shortening meetings

Tabled for April meeting

Meeting notes preferences

Tabled for April meeting

## DNR Updates

Kelly Pennington, DNR Invasive Species Program Supervisor

Doug Jensen and Rafael Contreras-Rangel, AIS Prevention Planners

- Planning for inspections, training inspectors, ramping up seasonal training staff, regional program assistants, seasonal staff for regional program supervisors, working to hire interns including level 2 inspectors who are trained to use decontamination units
- Adam Doll did a great job characterizing the legislative session, just watching and following the things that he discussed.
- Completing our expenditures for the current biennium, end is July 2025.
- Start planning for the next biennium for FY 2026-2027, but that budget is still in discussion within legislature.
- Wendy Crowell will retire in May after three decades; Mike Verhoven has started so they have overlap.
- **R. Contreras-Rangel** continues in AIS in Commerce Prevention Planner position until the position is filled and working on grants which includes a regional staff that can coordinate across the Great Lakes. He and **D. Jensen** co-hosted three workshops online and two in-person including one in Brainerd next Monday, members of this committee, counties, tribes and DNR have been invited to attend.
- **E. Kenney** has update SAISAC webpages, some still in progress, should be done by end of week. He is creating 17 new AIS WATCH Cards that are designed with a training style in mind. Publication order form will be updated to include the new cards, will be accessible via publications website.
- **S. Staples** says they have hired a new position to deal with animal health issues related to game and deer farms and feral swine. DNR is down to one Water Resources Officer (WRO) but will be hiring three more by summer. Three new k-9s are in school now and should be ready for this summer.

### Discussion:

**B. Garcia** states that the list of Lake Service Providers (LSP) needs updating. **Action Item: K. Pennington will inquire.**

## Member and Ex-Officio Updates

- **B. Garcia** interested in the legislative update, completed his LSP training, noticed it's changed a little bit since three years ago - good training. He's also getting ready for seasonal mapping efforts.
- **J. Langer** completing classes for spring semester and going to Washington DC for training on advocating for science and policy.
- **M. Tajbakhsh** has no updates.
- **M. Hayden** says they've been meeting with new members of Legislature committees supporting both the surcharge and AIS Prevention Aid. RFP closed on March 3. Technical review committee begins to review on Friday starting by comparing to their strategic plan. Received to most applications and most amount of funding ever requested – exciting that there is that much interest. She can report more about this during the April meeting about projects that will start next year. **B. Garcia** asks about White Bear Lake zebra mussel study re: sonar backscatter. **M. Hayden** replies that the project funded through MAIRSC in collaboration with St. Anthony Falls lab was completed. **Action Item: M. Hayden will report her findings at the April meeting.**
- **N. Bluhm** has no update.
- **R. White** says they will be hiring a new diver to conduct DASH and are bringing back two other divers – candidates need experience identifying aquatic plants. Also hiring two watercraft inspectors and submitted an LCCMR proposal to conduct an aquatic plant survey of Leech Lake, last conducted 20 years ago, much needed. Council members will be meeting soon with Commissioner.
- **S. Binsfeld** says she attended the third annual “Future of Southern Lakes” Conference – highly recommends, about 100 attendees, mostly lake association members, MN and IA DNR, and SWCDs. Good networking opportunity. Wishes there was one in the Metro and northern regions. Many positive stories and education.
- **S. McGrew** says Otter Tail County is hosting a lake stewardship event on May 31, conducting 12 watercraft inspector interviews for 4 slots for a total of 25, has had excellent staff retention. On behalf of this committee, he's been heavily involved in writing a letter of support for the AIS Prevention Aid funding to the Commissioner. Testified before the Senate Taxes Committee on this committee's perspective supporting full funding and emphasizing that \$1 spent today equals \$100 spent in the future. If \$500k is spent over 30 years, then spend \$4B in the meantime as an example of how prevention works.
- **N. Phelps** and Pat Conzemius, President and CEO of Wildlife Forever, also testified. Recordings are available on the Senate's YouTube website ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtg0Z\\_5MYyg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xtg0Z_5MYyg)). He says they received guidance on how to continue to advocate as long as it does not represent the DNR. He encourages all members to do this. Senator Hauschild (D-NE) generally commented about the importance of lakes in his northern district and the AIS Prevention Aid funding in protecting lakes. Chair Ann Rest introduced a Senate file to the Tax Committee for further discussion and vote at a later hearing. He explained to the committee that 90% of watercraft inspections are conducted by the counties and that DNR in no way has the resources to backfill those efforts. It would be catastrophic if this funding was reduced, a massive reduction in effort.
- **N. Bluhm** asks why not go to LCCMR for the \$5M shortfall? DNR's Annual Report shows that funding was received from LCCMR. Requesting entity needs to contribute 25% of funds and

could front the funding before the DNR would need to find it. Funding would not be needed until July 2026. **S. McGrew** responds he would rather count on the Legislature to continue to fund the AIS Prevention Aid at current levels rather than using LCCMR as the backstop.

- **N. Bluhm** says that if full aid is not reinstated, LCCMR has \$95-105M. **R. White** says the 25% match is only for land acquisition and building projects. LCCMR is closed for this year so would need to wait until next year anyway. He doesn't think using funds for watercraft inspections is a good use of those funds. **D. Jensen** has previous experience with LCCMR and not receiving funding because they felt that the proposal was better fit for MAISRC. But he didn't submit to MAISRC because it did not fit their strategic plan at the time. He agrees that it is unlikely that LCCMR would fund watercraft inspections, they prefer to fund projects that advance management through prevention.
- **S. McGrew** emphasizes that we need to remember what the goals of these committees are for. **B. Garcia** believes that AIS is a statewide issue, funding for prevention should be as broad as possible, and not be supported ad hoc through grant funding, suggests keep moving forward on permanent funding. **N. Bluhm** says there is section in LCCMR RFP that identifies that funding request need not be land acquisition and many grant applications did not ask for capital expenditures, time expenditures and studies, so he believes that hiring people to do the work would be covered. He thinks that LCCMR would be open to this request and probably would be sympathetic in the loss of AIS Prevention Aid support.
- **R. White** asks what Otter Tail County spends on watercraft inspections? **S. McGrew** says the most they have received is \$466k per year and \$300k of that is used for 24 inspectors about the 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the state. **M. Hayden** says that LCCMR does not like to fund projects indefinitely. Based on her previous experience, LCCMR asked that proposing entity be able to float their proposal if full funding was not available. **S. McGrew** adds that some counties may feel AIS prevention is important and add it as a levy. He says it is important to remember that this is a law, which shows a very high-level commitment. If funding is lost, it will be very difficult to get it back. **B. Garcia** believes that we could get it back if say 2,000 more lakes became infested, something catastrophic. Yes, damage would be done, but perhaps more people would understand how important prevention is. **D. Jensen** via chat: For context, top ten counties receiving funding get about half of the \$10M of the AIS Prevention Aid.

## 2024 Invasive Species Program Annual Report: Review and Discussion Focused on Prevention Activities

**S. McGrew** points out that our charter identifies that the community has a role in reviewing the DNR's annual report. He would like to incorporate a process into how the report is prepared and reviewed. He notes that there were some typos and apparent miscalculations in the financial section. In doing so, we will develop a better shared understanding of the DNR's process and how the financials are calculated.

**N. Bluhm** says that documents were sent to members for their review. He looked and crunched some numbers to better understand the program, but numbers did not add up. He prepared and sent questions to K. Pennington then walked through it. He discovered that financials on pages 8-9 are not exclusively appropriation numbers nor are they expenditure numbers, it is a bit of both. So, these numbers really cannot be use in a summary to understand unless you dig in a bit. State fund numbers are correct. They add up to the statute that are appropriated in the biennium in the Years 1 & 2 (\$2,831,000). Total of \$4,222,000 is correct for the biennium numbers but the two numbers that are below do not add up to that total amount. It is unknown if those are expenditures. **Action Item: K. Pennington is looking into this.** Can unused general and invasive species funding from Year 1 be used in Year 2?

**N. Bluhm** points out text and numbers on page 9. General fund does not total \$2M, it's more like \$3.6-3.7M. He reviewed every annual report from 2017-2024 and determined that there is a consistent pattern that 2017-2021 where the numbers were split out for the funding appropriated, expended, and funding that was returned to or as shown in reports in the biennium years, so that was informative to do. A couple of detail points were interesting. The Invasive Species account only refers to aquatic invasive species and wild animals, it does not include terrestrial plants.

He then examined the head count and titles of the individual staff to try to understand the information so that we as a committee could advise and better understand the program. To DNR, how do you manage your programs? He put together a chart reflecting the following programs:

1. AIS Inspection Training, LSP
2. AIS Inspection Training, Local & Tribal, In-Person Events
3. Watercraft Inspection, Joint Inspection with Conservation
4. Watercraft Inspection, DNR with Seasonal Staff
5. Terrestrial Invasive Species Management
6. Invasive Aquatic Plant Management
7. Invasive Aquatic Animals Management, Invertebrates
8. Invasive Aquatic Animals Management, Invasive Carp
9. Outreach & Communications

**N. Bluhm** emphasize that it is not his intent to instruct the DNR on how to manage their program. It is a way monetize expenses for the program. Our charter says that the committee is supposed to advise DNR. So, what are considered programs? How do you conduct business?

Look at program details, if we take DNR's program organization chart from 2024 and communized them into programs, it reveals the following programs:

1. Terrestrial
2. Aquatic Plant Management

3. Invasive Animals
4. Invasive Plants
5. Carp
6. Invertebrates
7. Trainings (LSPs/In-Person)
8. Watercraft Inspection w/o Conservation Officers
9. Watercraft Inspection w/Conservation Officers

Working with these program categories, the committee to work with DNR to look at the qualitative and quantitative measurements then have discussions about costs, efficiencies, and looks differently at this to do something better. We could see where there is progress, success, and failure because there is more information available, then manage and measure accordingly, which is the goal.

State Statute requires that there are five categories of expenditures that must be provided in the annual reports including management planning, and inspection and enforcement. But, in the annual report, there is section on inspection and enforcement. **S. McGrew** provided the costs for Otter Tail County and **N. Bluhm** has for Cass County compared to DNR annual report. From the report, watercraft inspection and enforcement costs were \$5M, seasonal inspection at ~\$56k and with conservation officers at \$151k. That averages \$103/inspection compared to Cass County numbers. He does not believe that the DNR numbers are correct and not that high. But because of how the program is summarized and not broke down by program, the Legislature or the public would have the same results. Therefore, going back to the program breakdown, it would provide a better understanding of DNR's business better so that the committee can defend DNR's programs, show costs for trainings and LSPs, show costs for watercraft inspection and enforcement, and other program details. He believes this would provide value.

**K. Pennington** joins call. **N. Bluhm** asks how DNR breaks down your program and what metrics do you use to measure success and failure? **S. McGrew** chimes in the metrics template provides a way to measure things. **R. White** asks if counties are reporting in the same way? Can we compare directly? Everyone may have different accounting methods. Maybe the committee should recommend synchronization of financials by DNR and among counties? Same yard stick. That would really simplify this. **D. Jensen** via chat: Counties have different challenges, population density, number of waterbodies, launches, etc. Each county has their own county accounting system that are administered by SWCDs, land department, environment departments, etc. with their own fiscal policies so accounting is going to be highly variable and would likely require a revamp of their systems. Given the level of funding that they receive, this would be unlikely, not worthwhile, unless it was mandated by legislation.

**K. Pennington** responds that the budget is very complicated, but making comparisons are important. What assumptions are being made and how the data will be used are important too. Discussion has been good to see how we can improve the annual report, make it clear and accessible. DNR has tried to be consistent to report the statutory required categories of reported expenditures. DNR's cost accounting system has tried to make it simple. Going into deeper analyses would take significant time and effort. Having some common metrics to examine would be helpful. DNR would like to have a clear outcome. **N. Bluhm** asks **K. Pennington** for the metrics that staff use perhaps grouped by programs? This way the committee would know what staff are able to measure, which could be helpful, not asking for what doesn't exist, share what does exist.

**K. Pennington** says DNR would need to examine this from a statutory reporting perspective. For example, DNR has statutory requirements to review aquatic plant permitting. A metric could be how many permits are reviewed or issued? Does that provide meaningful information about the state of management or prevention? This has always been a struggle – how do we quantify a waterbody not being infested? There are many experts who have examined this. Those types of outputs are challenging, when our goal is preventing spread of aquatic and terrestrial invasive species in the State. Ex of other metrics could be: how many coordination meetings, how many partners do we work with, how are grant funds leveraged, metrics from the county templates, etc.

**N. Bluhm** mentions terrestrial program's effort to measure acreage, remediation, etc. Perhaps in future meetings, the committee could examine a program at a time, have staff talk about their program, some metrics regarding success and failure, then the committee can provide some thoughtful feedback, come up with some strategies – looking for more than anecdotal discussions more which there may be no metrics involved. Statute does require that the annual report by 15 January each year to report on the five expense categories. Is there a definition of inspection identified in statute or have a definition that is used rather than having it defined for DNR? **K. Pennington** responds that the categories have been elucidated on those categories identified in Statute so that DNR can operationalize what is reported in annual reports. Reason training includes inspections is because trainers are part of the inspection program for watercraft inspectors across the state. Those are included so that it is understood where those expenditures are. **N. Bluhm** agrees if they are used consistently year after year.

**B. Garcia** comments on the unified metrics concept, it would not be easy to create a unified field of metrics for spending vs effective spending. **D. Jensen** via chat: We consider each of the 83 counties as "working laboratories." **B. Garcia** continues that this should be something that the DNR should be auditing. Each county is going to be different, needs and effective spending. An effective measure is how many new lakes become infested with new AIS. Goal is to bring down the amount of funding spent to be effective. He understands the lack of transparency on what the funding is spent on, how effective in reducing AIS infestations, there could always be improvements to make clearer, making financials clearer, etc. It could benefit the DNR, counties and State. **D. Jensen** notes via chat: Several counties "match" AIS Prevention Aid funding by paying for administration themselves that way they can extend the AIS Prevention Aid funding further. **S. McGrew** points out that every county's needs are different. Some counties do not use AIS Prevention Aid for invasive plant control, that is done by lake associations. Trick that it is difficult to prove a negative. **D. Jensen** via chat: Effectiveness is directly related to expectations, eradication vs effective management. Invasive aquatic plants have not been eradicated anywhere in MN despite some of the best efforts across 30 years. Maybe we should set our expectations accordingly. Following discussion, it was pointed out that DNR inspections cost more than counties (1.3x more). **B. Garcia** says we need to do better at telling our story, that is a problem, people do not know successes, funding has made a difference. **S. McGrew** states that this (metrics, how we tell our story) would be an excellent topic at our retreat.

**S. McGrew** asks about the lower-than-expected county metrics reporting for 2024, which is alarming since 50% of the funding maybe reduced. **D. Jensen** responds that we received a couple more thankfully that will increase our metrics snapshot numbers.

**N. Bluhm** asks since DNR has staff scattered across the state in different regions, does it make sense for them to pressure the counties to submit their metrics? **K. Pennington** does not think that would do much more than what the Prevention Planners are already doing. How would the ask be different? **N. Bluhm** counters that regional AIS specialists may have more of a personal relationship to motivate reporting. **D. Jensen** emphasizes that reporting metric must benefit them based on what data they are collecting, so that they can show their accomplishments. He adds that many of the larger programs are reporting, but for a majority of the smaller programs if metrics are difficult to track, they may stop metrics reporting, worse still they may receive their funding, but do not spend it.

**S. McGrew** summarizes that he is pleased that the committee has shown interest in digging into this deeper, that sometime the need is to get more granular to understand programs.

**N. Bluhm** motions that DNR staff revise the 2024 financials back to the previous formats used in 2017-2021 (harmonize) and share with committee: expenditures, what was committed, rolled back, etc. and share with the committee within two weeks. He says by charter we have set expectations, and this request supports those expectations. **S. McGrew** supports that this is being discussed within the committee rather than in public media. It not only makes consistent, it is to make corrections and omissions, make mathematically correct, it must be fixed. First motion was not seconded. **S. Binsfeld** offers another general suggestion to allow DNR to come back to this committee with concerns or thoughts. She motions that we suggestion to DNR to consider our findings, thoughts, concerns and comments and come back in a month with solutions. **N. Bluhm** seconds. Motion passed unanimously with one abstention.

#### **Adjourned 3:03 pm**

Next meeting is August 28<sup>th</sup> in-person or online (in-person with online option)?