

Minnesota DNR AIS Advisory Committee

August 28th, 2025 Final Meeting Minutes

Online via Teams

Members Present: Shelly Binsfeld, Andrew Dickhart, Liz Kaltenhauser, Jared Langer, Carrie Ohly-Cusack, Patrick Selter, Amanda Weberg, Raining White

Members Absent: Nick Bluhm, Beto Garcia, Stephanie Hadler, M. Mahmood Tajbakhsh, Spencer McGrew

Ex-officio Members Present: Maddie Hayden

Ex-officio Members Absent: Nicole Lalum, Amy McGovern

DNR Staff Present: Rafael Contreras-Rangel, Doug Jensen, Kelly Pennington, Katie Smith, Scott Staples

DNR Staff Invited but Absent: Brad Parsons, Brian Nerbonne

Vice Chair **A. Weberg** presided over the meeting beginning at 10:03 due to absence of Chair **S. McGrew**

Motion to approve Agenda: **S. Binsfeld**, motion, **A. Dickhart**, seconded, agenda approved

Motion to approve August Minutes: **S. Binsfeld**, motion, **D. Dickhart**, seconded, minutes approved

Meeting Summary

- Denver Link gave a presentation on the impacts of zebra mussels on fish populations.
- Committee voted against video recording, for allowing AIS Planners to decide length of meeting minutes and explore Teams capability to use Ai to record meetings.
- Committee discussed trade-offs of in-person versus online meetings, meeting length and start times.
- Members suggested topics for fall-winter 2025 meetings.
- Members discussed the need to revise the committee's charter; **S. Binsfeld** volunteered to help the leadership team

Action Items

- **Action Item:** Explore Microsoft Teams' capabilities for AI notetaking.
- **Action Item:** Committee requests **K. Pennington** to share her update notes.
- **Action Item:** **K. Pennington** will check on the cost for Swedish dish cloths for **C. Ohly-Cusack**.
- **Action Item:** **S. Binsfeld** with support from **D. Jensen** will share exiting charter to edit, share with leadership team, then share with the committee to vote on segments during the September meeting.

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.

Zebra Mussel Impacts on Fish Populations

Denver Link, MAISRC Scholar, University of Minnesota (presentation attached)

Key Discussion Points:

- **Mercury Methylation & Ecological Impact:** Zebra mussels may contribute to increased mercury levels in fish due to changes in light penetration and vegetation. Areas with dense or absent vegetation may act as methylation hotspots. Macrophytes could help mitigate this effect.
- **Public Health Role Clarification:** MAISRC is not issuing health advisories but aims to support fish consumption guidance through ecological data.
- **Species Research Priorities:** Tribal Nations emphasized the importance of studying native species, not just invasive ones, in future MAISRC research.
- **Data Collection Approach:** Research relies on rigorous targeted sampling, limiting the feasibility of citizen science involvement. Collaboration with the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe is underway.

Committee Feedback & Outreach Suggestions:

- Develop fact sheets and QR codes for public education.
- Utilize platforms like Minnesota Lakes & Rivers Advocates (MLRA) for outreach.
- Engage the public at events such as the State Fair, local fairs, and fishing tournaments.

Discussion Time for Committee AM

Meeting Notes & Recording Policy:

- Motion passed to not record meetings and shorten meeting notes at Rafa and Doug's discretion.
- AI notetaking and Teams capabilities will be explored, pending privacy considerations.
- Emphasis placed on balancing note detail with discussion time.

Action Item: Explore Microsoft Teams' capabilities for AI notetaking.

Discussion Time for Committee PM

Discuss of in-person meetings

Consideration given to moving meeting location. It was determined that Sauk Rapids DNR Office is preferred location. Meetings will remain as the fourth Thursday of each month. Since there will not be a quorum, September's meeting will be virtual. Other fall meetings are October 23rd (in-person) and December 4th (online) due to Thanksgiving. All meetings will have a Teams invite regardless of a meeting is in-person or not so that members who cannot attend and speakers can present. Reminder that new terms began in January. Currently, there are 14 voting members and 2 non-voting ex-officio.

Retreat

Idea for a fall retreat is withdrawn. October meeting will be considered the retreat.

Discuss having an in-person meeting for September (Sauk Rapids)

September meeting will be online and October meeting will be in-person at DNR office in Sauk Rapids.

SAISAC Expense Form

Members attending October in-person meeting will work with AIS Prevention Planners to submit their mileage expenses.

Plan and process to determine member interest in meeting topics

Ideas shared via chat. Reminder that April minutes identified April Rust and Eric Kenney as speakers for the August meeting but instead this was deferred to AIS and fisheries for this meeting. Members expressed support of topics that are more collaborative and relate to AIS so as to understand more about other entities in the State.

Topics copied from chat:

- State watercraft inspection data summary and interpretation
- Summaries of MAISRC research
- Discuss MAISRC's Research Needs Assessment
- Update on invasive carp moving up in Mississippi River
- Public outreach efforts conducted by the DNR for AIS, clean drain dry, etc. including plans, budget and priorities
- Update on IAPM grants program (**K. Pennington** suggested during her update)

DNR Update

S. Staples, DNR Law Enforcement, K. Pennington, DNR Invasive Species Program Supervisor, D. Jensen and R. Contreras-Rangel, AIS Prevention Planners

S. Staples says that Enforcement is finishing summer work and getting ready for fall. Potentially adding more K-9s next spring. Four new K-9s were added over the summer (Detroit Lakes, Marshall, Rochester, Two Harbors). Plus, new CO out of Silver Bay. Both COs and K-9 Jet attended the Grand Marais Fishermen's Picnic. DNR held first ever inspection check point in Cook County and first ever non-DNR staff who assisted the effort held at the Taconite Harbor water access area. Four out of 10 watercraft inspected were from out-of-state, drain plugs in, therefore were in non-compliance. K-9s are performing daily at the State Fair. Via chat: State Fair K-9 demos are daily at 11 am and 1 pm at the DNR Volunteer Outdoor Stage. K-9s have also been involved in homicides, crimes, ammunition searches and finding lost people. Gauging interest from tribes to determine if they would like K-9s. Several media articles shared below via chat about K-9s. **M. Hayden** says that there are plans for MAISRC researchers to work with Enforcement regarding detection of veligers. She describes the challenges of raising zebra mussels in the lab. **D. Jensen** adds via chat: Zebra mussels begin to form their D-shaped shells after about two weeks. **S. Staples** responds that it will be interesting at what early stage the K-9s will be able to detect them.

<https://www.inforum.com/news/minnesota/dnr-dog-helps-sniff-out-zebra-mussels-in-minnesota-lakes>
<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/news/2025/06/09/four-new-dog/handler-teams-join-dnrs-k9-unit>
<https://www.kaaltv.com/news/meet-trapper-a-minnesota-dnr-zebra-mussel-sniffing-canine-helping-keep-lakes-and-rivers-safe/>

K. Pennington adds that the K-9s are terrific additions to Enforcement, but they are also ambassadors at the State Fair, other events, and at check stations as an entry point for discussion about AIS prevention. Staff are busy at State Fair, hosting the booth, and distributing free materials. Steady streams of visitors with many questions on AIS or other topics which allows staff to defer to other partners at the Fair. DNR is again hosting an interactive game to help players learn clean-drain-dry and play-clean-go. An avatar of K-9 Jet guides gamers in learning.

Watercraft inspection program is transitioning into fall with many Level 1 inspectors headed back to school, but is still hiring Level 2 inspectors. Many of those usually return for the next season to hit the ground running.

During the legislative special session, the watercraft surcharge was raised. Funding for that account comes from watercraft registrations and out-of-state fishing licenses, which has been a key source of inspection efforts. Last surcharge increase was in 2019. Starting next January, the new increase is intended to provide additional funding for priority areas and address a funding structural deficit caused because it had not been increased recently. Purpose is to keep that account healthy.

The Legislature determines how that account is spent. Via this increase, DNR will increase funding available for IAPM grants to tribes and LGUs, which Angelique Dahlberg spoke about at our meeting last fall. Past amounts were \$400,000, increase will likely allow over \$1M available for grants. (Update provided via chat: "From 2020-2025, the grant program funded 730 invasive aquatic plant management projects through grants totaling \$3,418,550." For the original budget proposal, see pp.60-62 for the DNR agency summary for the "Governor's budget" ([Department of Natural Resources 2026-27 Governor's Biennial Budget Recommendations](#)) which includes the increase to DNR IAPM grants and capacity.)

Funds will allow for staffing to local groups conducting AIS management, address new pathways, and support work statewide. DNR is interested in supporting efforts at large lakes working with Parks and Trails who have received funding to update/improve high priority DNR owned water accesses to help ensure that space is considered for current and future AIS prevention efforts. (Citation for AIS surcharge increase via chat: Session Laws 2025, 1st Special Session Chapter 1, Article 4, Sec. 5.). This committee recognized and supported these funding needs. Committee members would like to see more clearly how their support is linked to the funding increases. **Action Item: Committee requests K. Pennington share her update notes so that they can better digest her update.**

D. Jensen says that with support of local partners AIS outreach has ramped up across Arrowhead such as: Ely Blueberry Festival (1,173 visitors), Itasca County Fair (200 youth and adult educated) and Grand Marias Fisherman's Picnic. Nationally, he presented to the Aquatic Nuisance Species Task Force's AIS Community of Practice about the myths and fallacies of AIS spread. MISAC's recent Field Trip focused on jumping worms, hybrid buckthorn, roundleaf bittersweet, climate ready woodlands, novel buckthorn removal and restoration, AIS signs, and park operations to prevent spread of jumping worms. Reminder that field trips are open to SAISAC members. He will also staff booths at the State Fair and Ely Harvest Moon Festival along with a presentation at Cook County COLA's September in-person meeting regarding "A Compelling Story of Successes in AIS Prevention."

R. Contrares-Rangel says that his previous position as AIS in Commerce specialist has been filled by Eric Kenney, who was a communications intern via Conservation Corps. In collaboration with MAISRC, two summer workshops were held for local AIS watercraft inspectors. Focus was on identification and ways to improve AIS outreach and better improve our summer connections with our partners.

Member and Ex-Officio Updates

M. Hayden 1) congratulates AIS Prevention Planners for their efforts on the summer workshops. 2) She also appreciates AIS Prevention Planners for sharing the MAIRC Research Needs Assessment (https://umn.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_3ftTkfHwKKBp9tk) with this committee and primary county contacts. So far, there are >150 responses, all responses are being grouped into categories, further refined as needed. Process is very thorough to make sure the RNA process really dictates the direction of the research then work with the technical committee on specific topics and organisms. Everyone has a voice. She encourages members and anyone else to complete the assessment. 3) MAISRC Showcase is October 7 on St. Paul Campus (<https://maisrc.umn.edu/showcase>). 4) Starry Trek and AIS Detectors

programs are on-going, which leverage community science and volunteers to help county professionals to dictate what lakes should be assessed for early detection. Efforts discovered four new starry stonewort infestations (<https://maisrc.umn.edu/starrytrek>). MAISRC is assisting DNR in hosting Wet and Water Day at the State Fair, which educated >650 yesterday. Spurred many conversations around research, what to do with unwanted bait, etc. Visitors overwhelmingly expressed their appreciation. Based on its 10-year anniversary, **D. Jensen** suggests featuring AIS Sentry program (presentation/session) at UMISC 2026.

C. Ohly-Cusack says a new mobile CD3 station is available for use in Wright and St. Louis Counties. Demonstrations will be held at the new Ely Visitors Center next year. Station ownership will be transferred to the City of Ely and White Iron Chain of Lakes Association will assume costs.

S. Binsfeld 1) supported a MAISRC project by gathering samples of EWM for e-DNA analysis. Unfortunately, EWM was found in a lake that had been previously treated and hoped to be eradicated. 2) She volunteered at State Fair and found it to be a really good experience. Zebra mussel encrusted ice auger and Muck Hunt game were popular attractants. Visitors expressed willingness to get more information, get help, help out, etc. Jumping worms and buckthorn were popular topics. Tattoos, boot brushes and Swedish dish cloths were popular giveaways. Preserved specimens were good conversation starters. Kudos to DNR for high quality display and giveaways! 3) MISAC Field Trip was excellent! Display items at the State Fair or area offices may have items to loan. **K. Pennington** responds that efforts at the State Fair are made possible from federal funding based on our approved invasive species state plan. Printed brochures, ID cards, etc. are easy to get by ordering online (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/ais/outreach.html>). **Action Item: K. Pennington will check on costs for Swedish dish cloths for C. Ohly-Cusack.**

Update on Changes to Walleye Limit

Brad Parsons and Brian Nerbonne, DNR Fisheries - Presenters were unexpectedly unavailable.

Unfinished Business and Wrap Up

SAISAC Meeting Number and Time Discussion

Members discuss possibly shortening meetings because attendance drops in afternoons. Usual 10 am start time was to allow members to drive to in-person meetings. Could meeting time be 9:00 am - Noon to help avoid their participation and updates? Could updates be moved earlier in the agenda to help facilitate this? Via chat: Current charter says min 4 hours and max 6 hours (<https://files.dnr.state.mn.us/aboutdnr/aisadvisory/charter.pdf>). Revising our charter would be a heavy lift for DNR and this committee. Is there an interim step? Members did not favor less meetings. Members felt meeting a quorum is important and that 8 am or 9 am to Noon meetings would work. A separate memo will address attendance expectations including guidelines like excused absences. **Action Item: S. Binsfeld with support from D. Jensen will share exiting charter to edit, share with leadership team, then share with the committee to vote on segments during the September meeting.**

September Meeting Topics

Based on suggested topics received via chat during today's meeting, the leadership team will meet to plan September's agenda, time, and topics.

Adjourned 2:34 pm

Next meeting is September 23rd online via Teams (check your calendar for invite)