Minnesota DNR AIS Advisory Committee

February 26th, 2026,* Final *Meeting Minutes

Online via Teams

Members Present: Shelly Binsfeld, Andrew Dickhart, Beto Garcia, Liz Kaltenhauser, Spencer McGrew, Patrick Selter, Amanda Weberg, Raining White

Members Absent: Nick Bluhm, Jared Langer, Carrie Ohly-Cusack, M. Mahmood Tajbakhsh

Ex-officio Members Present: Maddie Hayden

Ex-officio Members Absent: Nicole Lalum, Amy McGovern

DNR Staff Present: Rafael Contreras-Rangel, Adam Doll, Kelly Pennington, April Rust

Chair **A. Weberg** called meeting to order at 10:02am

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

Motion to approve January Minutes: A. Dickhart, motion**, L. Kaltenhauser**, seconded, minutes approved

Meeting Summary

Committee discussed the following:

- Action items from January meeting
- Local AIS Prevention Aid Advocacy and Strategy
- DNR Updates, including Legislative updates
- New action items

Action Items

- **A. Weberg** encouraged members to complete meeting topics survey **A. Dickhart** created.
- **S. McGrew** will send out the Prevention Aid Survey, and Rafa will provide the county contact list.
- **R. Contreras-Rangel** will review with **D. Jensen** the process of updating SAISAC's DNR website.
- **R. Contreras-Rangel, D. Jensen** and **A. Dickhart** will check if SAISAC can have a booth at UMISC.

Revisit Action Items from January Meeting

Meeting priority topics for 2026 meetings – next steps?

- **A. Weberg** encouraged members to complete the survey created by **A. Dickhart**.

Review response letter from DNR Commissioner – next steps?

- The Commissioner thanked the group for their work but stated that the DNR is not in a position to produce an impact report at this time.
- **A. Dickhart** shared that the survey has undergone multiple reviews and recommended sending it directly to counties without an additional test phase to ensure results are received sooner.
- **A. Dickhart** also highlighted that the data the Commissioner referenced—data the DNR does not currently have—will be gathered through SAISAC's upcoming survey. This will serve as SAISAC's next major step.

Status of county survey

- **A. Weberg** reported that the survey is nearly complete, with only minor adjustments remaining before distribution.
- **A. Dickhart** says it has gone to multiple reviews and suggests it is just sent to the counties and not do a test to have the results earlier.
- **R. Contreras-Rangel** added that the goal is to present findings at the March AIS workshop; however, if results are not ready, the presentation can shift to an update rather than a full report.

Status of charter

- The charter is currently under DNR review.

Tracking subcommittees

- **A. Weberg** emphasized the importance of ensuring all members are aware of ongoing work and responsibilities so that tasks are distributed evenly and not concentrated among only a few members.

Panel Discussion: Local AIS Prevention Aid Advocacy and Strategy

Jeff Forester and Sami Selter, Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates; Nate Quadhamer, MISAC Chair

MISAC Overview- Nate Quadhamer

- MISAC is a diverse coalition that includes AIS partners, researchers, government officials, and nonprofit organizations.
- The group supports AIS funding efforts; last year they signed a letter supporting Local AIS Prevention Aid.
- MISAC has seen success in several funding initiatives MISAC backed in the past and intends to continue supporting AIS funding, noting strong data demonstrating the effectiveness of AIS prevention strategies.
- Nate emphasized the importance of keeping MISAC informed to avoid red flags or misrepresentation of the agencies they represent.
- With the legislative session approaching, MISAC sees this as a key opportunity to show support.
- While MISAC is not an advocacy organization, they are willing to publicly support AIS initiatives.
- Nate invited feedback from AIS experts on how MISAC can strengthen its role and support.

Legislative Messaging- Sami Selter

- AIS prevention has been a priority for MNLA? for several years.
- Their legislative-session work includes messaging efforts, letter-writing training, and tools to help the public connect with legislators.
- Last year's messaging helped prevent deeper cuts to AIS funding; the next focus is preparing for the upcoming biennium.

Importance of AIS Prevention Aid – Jeff Forester

- AIS work spans many jurisdictions, and Local AIS Prevention Aid helps bridge gaps and prevent stakeholders from becoming siloed.

- Many tools developed by MAISRC and other organizations rely on data funded through Local AIS Prevention Aid.
- Prevention Aid often supports education efforts, including youth programs that help build long-term awareness and interest in AIS issues.
- Jeff noted that while some funding sources (e.g., AIS surcharge, LCCMR community grants) have increased, restoring AIS Prevention Aid remains important.
- A high number of legislative retirements will make education of new members critical.
- Bipartisan support is essential given Minnesota's political landscape.
- Cuts to Prevention Aid will affect regions unevenly across the state.
- Jeff emphasized the importance of personal stories—such as Nick Phelps' path from AIS watercraft inspector to leading a major research lab—and encouraged sharing them widely.
- He noted there is roughly a one-year window to shape public and legislative understanding before funding decisions are made.

Discussion and Questions

- **How can the committee help?**
  Jeff encouraged members to share strong AIS stories, as they spread quickly and resonate with the public. Committee members are well-connected to DNR and other groups and often hear impactful stories firsthand.
- **Legislative champions and timing:**
  Jeff noted that while there is strong support in environmental committees, support in tax committees is limited. Some legislators are focused on other pressing issues, and the current political climate makes it difficult to elevate AIS concerns. Identifying champions is challenging this year because bills that do not pass have no immediate consequences, reducing motivation to add new items.
- **Funding structure and the tax bill:**
  Jeff explained that moving AIS funding out of the tax bill has been discussed, but there is currently no interest. The tax bill provides predictability, which has historically been beneficial. Recent decreases were tied to an unprecedented budget deficit.
- **Building broader support:**
  P. Selter encouraged members to involve groups and individuals—not just associations—and to encourage participation in MLR, noting that broad support is often key to legislative success.
- **AIS Summit:**
  Jeff shared that they will be reaching out to AIS coordinators for support with the upcoming summit, including securing booths. Additional support is needed to keep registration costs manageable.

Wildlife Forever Overview

Zack Burnside and Pat Conzemius, Wildlife Forever; Association of Minnesota Counties

- Zach provided an overview of Wildlife Forever and its role in AIS prevention and outreach.
- The organization offers outreach consulting for the Clean Drain Dry initiative.
- Wildlife Forever works with on-the-ground partners to ensure consistent messaging and to target key audiences using proven tools and resources.

Program Priorities

- Access Management
    - Conducts inventories of access-related information and assigns risk ratings.
    - Recommends a range of interventions based on identified risks.
- Cleaning Stations
- Expect to Inspect
    - A tool that outlines inspection requirements for all states.
    - Includes an interactive map featuring more than 700 cleaning stations.

Outreach Impact

- In 2024, Wildlife Forever generated 65 million outreach impressions and facilitated $880,000 in investments.
- Targeted paid advertising—primarily through Facebook, Instagram, and Google Display Network—accounted for approximately 9 million impressions.

Coalition Building

- Wildlife Forever has assembled a coalition of stakeholders to advocate for continued funding of AIS Prevention Aid.

DNR Updates, Member and Ex-Officio Updates

Program Updates

- **K. Pennington** reported that the IAPM grants window has closed. This year's cycle received significantly more applications, likely due to the increased funding available compared to previous years.
- A communications position will be hired soon, and a new Conservation Corps member will also join in a communications role. She will continue work previously started by Eric Kenney.
- Seasonal hiring for WIP staff is underway. Training staff returned from seasonal layoff last week for DNR operations.
- **R. Contreras-Rangel** shared that AIS Off-Season Workshops are coming in March. These are a series of online workshops, each focused on a specific topic of interest that will include a few presentations, panels and facilitated discussions primarily from local programs. The invitation link to the meetings has already been sent to committee members.

Legislative Updates

- With the legislative session beginning, the team is proposing updates to laws regarding the possession and use of certain carp species. The proposed change would allow processing of these species as long as they are dead and eviscerated. This would enable low-risk activities such as transferring carp captured in rivers for donation to the raptor center.
- Fisheries is proposing to add black carp to the list of species that must be reported. Including this species would support early detection and response efforts

Discussion Time for Committee Action Items

Discussion on Recruiting New SAISAC Members

- **R. White** has been in contact with Doug and Rafa to reach out to tribal groups regarding potential SAISAC participation. Members expressed a strong goal of increasing tribal representation on the committee.
- Members discussed options for expanding awareness of SAISAC to a broader audience, such as publishing an article in *Outdoor News* or contacting individuals directly.
- The group also suggested including a SAISAC reference or materials at the DNR booth during UMISC.

Public Participation in Meetings

- The committee discussed how the public can access meetings. While meetings are open, the link can be difficult to find.
- A suggestion was made to add contact information to the SAISAC website so individuals can request meeting links. After further inspection, contact information was identified as present on the website.
- The group also considered offering a view-only or listen-only option for public attendees.

Website Updates

- Members discussed who can update the SAISAC website. Doug has been the primary contact, and Rafa will begin learning the update process.
- It was noted that none of the 2025 meeting minutes are currently posted on the website.

Wake Boat and Legislative Issues

- The group discussed ongoing wake boat concerns. Michigan has a bill under consideration, and some members suggested drafting a letter supporting continued wake research. Others recommended waiting to see how Michigan's legislative efforts progress this year.
- Wisconsin may pass a regulation requiring wake boats to operate 300 feet from shore and 10 feet of water and may also consider a whooping crane season.
- A bill has been introduced to revert the boater license test to the 2014 version, though it is unlikely to advance.

Prevention Aid Survey

- **S. McGrew** will send out the Prevention Aid Survey, and **R. Contreras-Rangel** will provide the county contact list.
- The group agreed on a two-week response window.

Goldfish Study Proposal

- **A. Dickhart** is considering approaching LCCMR about a goldfish study that would compile existing projects, strategies, and data.
- He invited members to share any past or current goldfish-related projects.

Legislative Discussion

- Members discussed how lake association representatives can support AIS efforts.
- Suggestions included contacting county commissioners and legislators through emails, phone calls, or physical letters.

Adjourned 2:23 pm
Next meeting is March 26th, 10 am – 3 pm via Teams