Minnesota DNR AIS Advisory Committee

January 22nd, 2026 Final Meeting Minutes

Online via Teams

Members Present: Shelly Binsfeld, Andrew Dickhart, Beto Garcia, Liz Kaltenhauser, Jared Langer, Spencer McGrew, Carrie Ohly-Cusack, Amanda Weberg, Raining White

Members Absent: Nick Bluhm, Patrick Selter, M. Mahmood Tajbakhsh

Ex-officio Members Present: Maddie Hayden

Ex-officio Members Absent: Nicole Lalum, Amy McGovern

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

Past Chair **S. McGrew** called meeting to order at 10:02am

Motion to approve Agenda: S. Binsfeld, motion, **L. Kaltenhauser**, seconded, agenda approved

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

Meeting Summary

Committee discussed the following:

- Elected new officers: **A. Weberg**, Chair, **J. Langer**, Vice Chair
- Debriefed regarding December meeting presentations
- Confirmed that revised Committee Charter has been submitted to Commissioner's office for approval
- Discussed potential revisions to policy letter and voted to approve and submit to Commissioner's office
- Discussed new Community Grants Program and watercraft surcharge
- Discussed county survey status, quick review by members, and next steps
- Discussed priority topics for 2026 meetings…stay tuned
- Discussed role in Local AIS Prevention Aid advocacy and strategy
- Discussed DNR and member updates

Action Items

- **DNR** and **MAISRC (M. Hayden)** will review the county response to the AIS Prevention Aid reductions survey
- **D. Jensen** and **A. Dickhart** will meet to discuss past meeting topics before February meeting
- **Action Item: A. Dickhart** will share this version of the draft survey with SAISAC for red-flag review with a deadline of COB Monday January 26th
- **Action Item:** Survey Committee will revise as needed
- **Action Item: D. Jensen** will share survey with DNR (**K. Pennington**) and MAISRC (**M. Hayden**) for a two-week red-flag review (TBD)
- **Action Item:** Survey Committee will revise as needed
- **Action Item:** Survey Committee will conduct a pilot with six counties (timing TBD)

Potential Action Items:

- **R. White** suggested creating a subcommittee focused on recruiting tribal nation members to the committee. **B. Garcia** supports the importance of tribal representation, especially in leadership roles.
- **J. Langer** proposed writing a letter supporting Marr and Reisgraf's study findings in regards on how those could impact AIS. **S. McGrew** proposed creating a subcommittee to write the letter. **A. Weberg** recommended to hold off for now while current subcommittees finish their current work.

Election of Officers

Spencer McGrew, Outgoing Chair

Chair Election

Outgoing Chair: Spencer McGrew
Nomination: S. Binsfeld nominated **A. Weberg** for Chair; **R. White** seconded.
Discussion: A. Weberg expressed interest in continuing work on key documents, including letters and charter updates completed in the previous year.
Outcome: Motion passed. **A. Weberg** elected Chair.

Vice-Chair Election

Call for Nominations: Initiated by **A. Weberg**

Nomination 1:
B. Garcia nominated **R. White.**
Discussion: R. White was open to the nomination but noted existing leadership commitments and a demanding summer field schedule. He welcomed additional nominations.

Nomination 2:
A. Dickhart nominated **J. Langer.**
Discussion: J. Langer accepted the nomination, stating he aims to support **A. Weberg's** priorities, continue learning in his second year on the committee, and contribute his passion and perspective.

Additional Notes:

- **R. White** withdrew his nomination due to other obligations.
- **B. Garcia** highlighted the importance of tribal representation in leadership roles. **R. White** supported this point and requested the creation of a subcommittee focused on increasing tribal member recruitment.

Final Action:
S. Binfeld seconded **J. Langer's** nomination. Motion passed. **J. Langer** elected Vice-Chair.
A. Weberg presided over morning session and **J. Langer** presided over afternoon session.

Revisit Action Items from December Meeting

Phase Two Wake Study – Marr and Reisgraf

Key Study Impacts

- **A. Weberg** notes that the transition of wake boats from plowing through the water to riding on top creates the greatest disturbance to lake bottoms.
- **S. McGrew** references a study by Olivia Nyffeler indicating that up to 80% of boats entering some lakes are wake boats.
- **A. Dickhart** and **S. McGrew** raises concerns that wake boat activity may interfere with chemical treatment applications.
- **A. Weberg** adds that wake boats may contribute to algal blooms by stirring nutrients from the lake bottom.

Committee Discussion: How to Use This Information

Legislative Monitoring:

- **A. Dickhart** suggests tracking the legislative session and responding to any relevant laws or recommendations, though he notes the Committee's advocacy workload is already substantial.
- **B. Garcia** agrees, calling the issue complex and noting the trend toward larger, more powerful boats and shifting public attitudes.

DNR and Community Awareness:

- **S. McGrew** shares that DNR leadership, during roundtables, expressed surprise at the study's findings. He suggests raising awareness within local communities and emphasized that the committee is not opposed to wake boats but supports using them in appropriate areas to reduce ecological harm.

Mapping and Guidance:

- **C. Ohly-Cusack** mentions existing lake maps showing designated wakeboarding areas and questioned whether additional guidance is needed.
- **S. McGrew** notes the study recommends increasing the minimum distance required for wake boat operation.

Potential Committee Actions:

- **J. Langer** proposes writing a letter supporting the study's findings; **D. Jensen** adds that the committee could also sign onto related letters or recommendations.
- **C. Ohly-Cusack** notes that Jeff Forester and Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates (MLR) appear to support the study.
- **J. Langer** also mentions researchers seeking grants to study plant ecology impacts related to wake activity.

Broader Context and Challenges:

- **A. Dickhart** observes that pro-wakeboarding groups are organizing, including proposals to increase elevation requirements for wakeboarding.
- **B. Garcia** highlights that few lakes exceed 30 feet in depth and predicted significant pushback due to the financial investment many have in wake boats.
- **S. McGrew** notes growing divisions within lake associations over potential wake boat regulations.
- **C. Ohly-Cusack** suggests this moment might prompt the boating industry to reconsider producing increasingly large and powerful models.

Next Steps:

- **J. Langer** reiterates that sending a recommendation of support for the study to the DNR could help advance change.
- **S. McGrew** asks whether a new subcommittee should be formed; **A. Weberg** recommends holding off and continuing work through existing subcommittees for now.

Preventing the Spread of AIS – Nick Phelps

- **A. Weberg** mentions the committee supports increased funding rather than decreased funding.
- **S. McGrew** wants it to be captured that SAISAC had input for the start of the MAISRC studies that show a slow in the spread of AIS after AIS Prevention Aid Program implementation.

Use of Decontamination Units vs CD3s by DNR and LGUs – Selter and Forester

Background

- **A. Weberg** reminds the Committee of prior discussion (October meeting) regarding potential Prevention Aid funding decreases.
- She notes that CD3 stations have been suggested as a possible tool for supporting boat decontamination efforts under reduced budgets.

Comparison of Tools

- **C. Ohly-Cusack** emphasizes that CD3 units and traditional decontamination stations should not be framed as competing options.
    - Each has strengths and weaknesses.
    - On-site inspectors remain irreplaceable.
    - The Committee needs a strategic plan for resource allocation once funding declines.
- **R. White** shares that CD3 stations serve as useful outreach tools due to their visibility and messaging.
    - However, they are frequently vandalized and costly to maintain, especially regarding data management.
    - They lack hot water and therefore should not be considered true decontamination units.
    - He states a preference for funding inspectors over purchasing CD3 units.
- **A. Dickhart** agrees with previous comments.
    - CD3 stations have a role, but their cost-benefit ratio is low.
    - Counties should conduct their own cost-benefit analyses to determine the most effective tools.
    - For example, a roving inspector team may provide more value than a single CD3 station.
    - **S. McGrew** supported this perspective.

AIS Prevention Aid Funding and County Participation in the Program

- **A. Dickhart** questions whether some counties, facing a 50% funding cut, might attempt to return unused funds.
    - **D. Jensen** and **R. Contreras-Rangel** clarify that although some counties have expressed interest in doing so, there is no mechanism to return funds.
    - A few counties have chosen not to spend any of their allocated Prevention Aid since the program began.
- **B. Garcia** finds it concerning that some counties receive allocations they do not use.

    - He suggests the legislature might need to be asked why this is occurring.
    - **D. Jensen** cautions that raising the issue could lead to unintended complications.
- **A. Dickhart** recommends revisiting the topic after receiving survey responses from counties.
- **D. Jensen** notes that counties not using their funds may also be unlikely to complete the survey.

Charter Status

- The proposed charter update is currently being reviewed by the DNR Commissioner's Office.

Policy Advisory Letter to DNR Commissioner

- Due to time restraints, this topic is tabled until after lunch.

County Survey Status

- **R. Contreras-Rangel, D. Jensen, A. Dickhart, A. Weberg, S. McGrew** and **M. Hayden** have been working on the survey.
- The survey will be reviewed by DNR and MAISRC before being sent out.
- MAISRC will be able to use their tools to create and administer the survey so they can do an analysis then share with DNR and SAISAC.

Local AIS Prevention Aid Advocacy and Strategy Discussion

Prevention Aid Advocacy would have to go through the Tax Committee, various groups were contacted, but it seems this would not be one of their priorities going forward for now.

DNR Updates

K. Pennington

- Two new zebra mussel detection dogs may be added to the program pending successful completion of their current training.
- Two new AIS Specialist positions, along with one backfill position, have been posted. These roles are funded through the AIS surcharge.
- The DNR is also seeking to hire a Communications Specialist, another position made possible by the AIS surcharge and supported by SAISAC's recommendation.
- The **2025 Invasive Species Annual Report** has been published and is available on the DNR website.
- Recent DNR roundtable discussions included several AIS-related topics, such as the wake boat study presented at the committee's December meeting.

The following links were shared on the chat:

2025 MN DNR Invasive Species Report
https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/invasives/ais/programs.html
2026 MN DNR IAPM Grant Program
2026 Invasive Aquatic Plant Management Grant Program | Minnesota DNR
2026 DNR Round Table Links:
DNR Commissioner Strommen Welcome (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efk_ICR0DQs)
Legislative Panel (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X8LjGWiznsY)

D. Jensen and R. Contreras-Rangel
National/Regional Coordination:

- DNR (Jensen) joined the National Golden Mussel Work Group to plan responses to the new and rapidly spreading infestation in CA. Next online meeting is January 23, 11am. Contact Jensen for more info.
- In early January, DNR (Jensen) participated in an online meeting of the Mississippi River Basin Panel's Education and Outreach Committee meeting.
- Invasive Species Centre's Forum online is February 17-19, and the St. Louis River Estuary Summit is March 3-5 at UW-Superior, where Jensen will speak about the successes of AIS prevention in MN.

DNR Statewide AIS Advisory Committee Support:

- AIS Prevention Planners (Jensen and Contreras-Rangel) are facilitating planning for winter-spring monthly Committee meetings for January-April.
- Planners are supporting development of an online survey for counties to evaluate the impacts of the reduction of Local AIS Prevention Aid funding.

Local AIS Prevention Program Support:

- AIS Prevention Planners (Jensen and Contreras-Rangel) supported counties that must submit to DNR a resolution, guide, plan and/or metric according to state statute by December 31 each year. All 83 counties complied.
- Planners are developing three on-line workshops on the themes of Partnerships, Prevention, Partnerships and Local AIS Prevention Aid for February and March and two in-person networking meetings, one in the southern half of the state and the other in the north likely in late March or early April. SAISAC members will be invited.

Outreach:

- Reminder: DNR has produced a new set of AIS trading cards. To order, go here: Aquatic Invasive Species Publication Order Form June 2018

Community Service:

- Jensen completed his last term as a member of the Great Lakes Aquarium's Board of Directors after nearly 20 years!

Member and Ex-Officio Updates

M. Hayden

- MAISRC's Annual Report and story board will be ready before next meeting.
- MAISRC's RFP for next year is open (https://maisrc.umn.edu/research/rfp) with preproposals due March 2, 2026 at 11:59 PM CST.
- New Externship Program is being piloted to broaden the span of research and connect with counties and the state. A listening session will be held this afternoon. A couple more will be held in the future. Externship deadline: February 2, 2026. Preproposal deadline: March 2, 2026 (https://maisrc.umn.edu/research/externship).
- Lab to Lakes funding efforts is shifting carp research to eDNA sampling, more about that in upcoming months, potentially starting in April or May.
- MAISRC has been working with Riley Purgatory Bluff Watershed District on zebra mussel control (here).
- Several new research projects started (https://maisrc.umn.edu/research-projects) focused on mystery snails, expanding AIS Explorer, crack willow and others. Lab tours are available for groups or individuals by appointment.

- Other non-invasive species research mentioned:
    - Lake Superior cisco (aka herring, here)

Return to Priority Topics Discussion

Future Meeting Topics:

- **A. Dickhart** has compiled topics from past monthly meetings and will share that with the Committee before the next meeting. Plans to meet with **D. Jensen** to make sure that we're on track before February meeting.

Policy Advisory Letter to DNR Commissioner

- **J. Langer** reviewed letter previously with **S. McGrew**, **A. Dickhart**, and **A. Weberg.** Draft letter is available with the last December meeting materials. Committee members review letter during meeting online. While at the DNR Round Table, **S. McGrew** condensed the question from our letter for Commissioner Strommen: How will the DNR prepare for the loss of Local AIS Prevention Aid funding? Sort of got a non-answer and would like a response letter in writing. Assistant Commissioner **B. Meier** responded that the Community Grants and increase in surcharge are potential solutions for loss of AIS Prevention Aid.
    - **A. Weberg** points out that the Community Grants and surcharge funds are administered through DNR, they do not help with loss of Local AIS Prevention Aid finding. **K. Pennington** also clarifies that the IAPM grants are separate but are funded through the new AIS watercraft surcharge (Environment and Natural Resources Trust Fund Community Grant Program Implementation | Minnesota DNR). Community Grants is a new program with AIS management mentioned as an eligible area to apply for funding. The Invasive Species Program is coordinating with DNR's Grants Program who leads it, invasive species grants will not be run through the Invasive Species Program. A new legislative report is available that provides some clarity about the Community Grants program. She suggests signing up for the newsletter.
    - **D. Jensen** says the Community Grants program has $28M available, but it is unclear on the duration of the grants. He adds that he investigated with several legislators, if the intent of the Community Grants was to partially backfill the loss of Local AIS Prevention Aid. Their response was they did not know.
    - Discussion ensues to tweak the content and tone of the letter. **B. Garcia** expresses his concern but at the same time indicates that it reflects the sentiment of a majority of the Committee. **M. Hayden** points out that we could integrate results of the county survey into the letter? Data may change the tone of the letter.
    - Survey timeline is at the bottom of the survey instrument shared with the Survey Committee yesterday – there is the intent to have results ready for presentation at an Off-Season Local Partner Workshop in mid to late March. Plans are to share this draft with DNR and MAISRC for a two-week red flag review. Survey will be revised then piloted among six county coordinators, revise again before full survey administration. Actual timeline for full survey administration has not been established but the process has been determined.
    - **J. Langer** points out that the survey gets at the question that the letter asks. A second letter could be sent after survey analysis and interpretation is completed.

- **S. Binsfeld** motions, **S. McGrew** seconds, motion passes by Committee majority with one objection (based on informed consent). Committee discusses option of sending a second letter based on the survey results.

Discussion Time for Committee Action Items

County Survey:

- Final survey draft was shared with Survey Committee yesterday. Survey Committee needs to vote to approve this version. Structure of the background information (how we approached development), introduction, draft survey and timeline process elements were reviewed. Survey was developed based on the Dillman survey design method with a blend of multiple choice, ranked choice, and open-ended questions (total of 26) which will coded a priori based on the answers that are provided.
- **A. Dickhart** will share with SAISAC for red-flag review with a deadline of COB Monday January 27th then revised by Survey Committee as needed. **D. Jensen** will share survey with DNR (**K. Pennington**) and MAISRC (**M. Hayden**) for a two-week red-flag review. Survey will be revised by Survey Committee if needed. Plans include a pilot with six counties. Members greatly appreciate MAISRC for offering to set up the survey in Qualtrics and conducting data analysis and help with interpretation.

Next Meeting

- Policy letter status
- County survey status
- SAISAC website status
- Topics for meetings in 2026 - discuss past meeting topics and ranking with implementation in February

Adjourned 1:58 pm
Next meeting is Thursday, February 26th, 10 am – 3 pm via Teams