

Minnesota Statewide AIS Advisory Committee (SAISAC)

December 3, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Virtual Meeting via WebEx from 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m.

Members Present: Norman Baer, Justine Dauphinais, James Johnson, Jim Boettcher, Kate Hagsten, Pat Brown, Holly Kalbus, Ryan Wersal, Isiah Tolo, Michaela Kofoed, Mary Alverson, Roger Imdieke, Kelsey Taylor, Chris DuBose

Members Absent: Eric Johnson, Brian Gross

Ex-officio Members Present: Nick Phelps, Doug Jensen, Nicole Lalum

Ex-officio Members Absent: Amy McGovern

DNR Staff Present: Heidi Wolf, Phil Hunsicker, Tina Fitzgerald, Shane Kirlin, Jake Walsh, Steve Colvin, Jan Shaw Wolff

Guests: Consultants Kat Donnelly (Azentive), Kirstin Pinit (Azentive), Ken Donnelly (Beyond Attitude), Marielle Mateo (Azentive)

Meeting began at 10:05 a.m.

Motion to approve agenda. Addition of EWR Director, Steve Colvin, to the beginning of the agenda. Motion made by J. Dauphinais and second by M. Alverson. Motion approved unanimously.

Motion to approve Meeting Minutes of October 1, 2020 with small addition made by J. Johnson concerning creation of a voluntary monetary contribution system to benefit AIS management when boats are registered in MN. Motion made by J. Boettcher and second by M. Alverson. Motion approved unanimously.

Meeting Summary:

- EWR Director, **Steve Colvin**, who is retiring on January 4, 2021, thanked the Committee for their assistance and service.
- The Committee learned about proposed changes to the invasive aquatic plant control grants to be offered by the DNR in 2021.
- The Committee elected a new Chair and Vice-Chair for 2021. The new Chair is **Justine Dauphinais**. The new Vice-Chair is **Holly Kalbus**.
- The Committee worked with the Community-Based Social Marketing consultants and a new online tool called Mural to capture the names of important community organizations and individuals necessary to engage to promote AIS behavior change.

- The Committee thanked members **Jim Boettcher, Norman Baer, and Mary Alverson** for their contributions to the Committee. Their terms of service end in 2020. The DNR will soon begin a recruitment process to fill their seats.

A few Minutes with EWR Director, Steve Colvin

- **S. Colvin** is retiring on January 4, 2021. He thanked the Committee for their assistance and service. He warned that there may be a state budget deficit, which will affect the state's general fund and monies allocated to support AIS work within the DNR. The governor's budget will be released around January 25, 2021. After that date, the DNR can be more forthcoming about communicating its budget requests for the next biennium.

Committee Member Updates

- **R. Wersal:** The end of the semester is next week. Finished the DNR-supported starry stonewort research project. Final report was submitted to the DNR. Collected some good data.
- **P. Brown:** Red Lake is frozen. Now planning for AIS work for next year.
- **N. Baer:** North Brown's Lake is not yet frozen. Planning for curly-leaf pondweed treatments next year. Will be retiring from his position with DEED on March 2, 2021.
- **M. Kofoed:** Busy marketing the Aqua Weed Stick for Christmas.
- **M. Alverson:** Recovering from being down with COVID and pneumonia. Feeling better.
- **K. Hagsten:** Looking forward to hiring and getting funding for next year to support AIS work.
- **J. Dauphinais:** Waiting for ice to thicken so they can harvest carp on Rice Lake. Still waiting for them to school up.
- **J. Boettcher:** In Carver County, did seining in the Grace Chain of lakes. 100,000 goldfish were removed. Estimate that there are between 500,000 and 1 million carp in the chain. Lots of recognition for their efforts. Having an issue with loss of funding from Minnehaha Creek Watershed District. A \$20,000 gap to fill, so looking at strategies to save money. Might stop doing early morning inspections. Also, spent \$13,000 on decontamination work in 2020, but the county only did seven decontaminations. Looking at eliminating decontamination services due to high costs. **T. Fitzgerald** added that she recently had a virtual conversation with Drew Dickhart, the County AIS Coordinator, along with Adam Doll (DNR), Christine Hokkala-Kuhns (DNR) and **P. Hunsicker** about how to increase decontamination numbers, based on experiences in other counties, and how to use the unit so it doesn't break down as often. Might be an alternative to eliminating the program.
- **J. Johnson:** Seeing a lot of proposals to do lake work next year. Recently had a conversation with a client on Big Oak Lake, which is part of the Briggs Chain in Stearns County. Lake has Eurasian watermilfoil, but it isn't yet listed on EDDMapS or on the DNR's infested waters list. Client is frustrated. **H. Wolf** says she will check. Signage usually happens quickly. Listing sometimes takes more time.
- **I. Tolo:** Working in the lab with samples taken over the summer. Nearly done looking at ecology of Koi Herpes Virus. Entire population of the lake being investigated has been exposed.
- **H. Kalbus:** Busy with reporting and preparing for 2021. Le Sueur County AIS Advisory meeting next week to discuss future plans for 2021. Doing year-end reporting and discovered that between 2017 and 2020, the county continually increased inspection hours each year. Plan to use the AIS Explorer tool next year to evaluate risk and where inspectors should be placed throughout the county. Have used the CLIMB Theater since 2012 to educate students about AIS. They have successfully transitioned to online presentations with

schools. Most of their work is with younger students. Want to work with them to help create AIS lessons for high school-aged students.

- **C. DuBose:** Finalizing One Watershed, One Plan. Includes five counties in the Lower St. Croix. Did a lot more inspections in 2020. Sprayed nonnative Phragmites. Saw reductions, but no eradication.
- **R. Imdieke:** Students are active in Let's Go Fishing Program in Kandiyohi County. Attracts 400-500 sixth-graders. Students can go out on pontoons to fish, and learn about water safety and AIS. County AIS Prevention Program has in the past used an outside contractor. Now using a county staff person who is also the feedlot supervisor, Russ Hilbert. Good fit to do both. Staff person has an advisory group, but the staff person is the one doing most of the hands-on work. Use I-Lids in the county. They need upgrades. Talking with the lake associations to see if they can help cover upgrade costs. County received grant requests from lake associations for curly-leaf pondweed treatments. Cost vary from \$1,650 to \$25,000 per lake. Looking at a fair policy based on size of the lake and acres of treatment.
- **D. Jensen:** Busy. Finished virtual UMISC. Successful. Over 1000 registrants. 223 presentations. Provided social networking opportunities despite a virtual conference. 29 exhibitors and 21 sponsors. Covered 152 taxa. Ended up profitable. Next UMISC conference will be in Green Bay, WI in 2022. Interns did two inventories. First was an inventory of unreported sightings of AIS in northeast MN. Chinese Mystery Snails and Banded Mystery Snails. Also did a signage inventory in Cook, Lake, Carlton, Itasca, and St. Louis counties. Some signs are out of date. Some are missing. Good model for other counties/regions to do their own sign inventories. National AIS task force meeting to discuss early detection and response, ballast water discharge, and an RFP to evaluate the Stop Aquatic Hitchhiker! Campaign. Great Lakes Panel has an interest in the AIS Explorer tool. Looking at risk associated with other groups besides boaters. Don't Pack a Pest Project to educate international travelers.
- **N. Phelps:** Videos of presentations from the Showcase are now available. AIS Explorer tool is now available. Looks at risk for zebra mussels and starry stonewort. Has the ability to prioritize where watercraft inspections should happen. **J. Johnson** asks how a state budget deficit will affect MAISRC. Most of MAISRC's research money comes from the Environmental and Natural Resources Trust Fund.

DNR Updates

- **H. Wolf:** DNR is doing an internal data dive on invasive carp so that all parties in Ecological Water Resources (EWR) and Fisheries Divisions are on the same page. Preparing information for a Lake Area Management Plan for an EPA grant. Kelly Pennington (DNR) met with EPA. Proposal is to eradicate nonnative Phragmites in Region 2 (Northeast MN). Met with the MPCA, MDA and wastewater treatment plants to discuss moving away from the use of nonnative Phragmites. Noxious Weed Advisory Committee will vote on the status of nonnative Phragmites, and moving it to the prohibited status. Busy completing the DNR's Invasive Species Annual Report for 2020. **D. Jensen** says the 1854 Treaty Authority's Phragmites control project has been successful. Still monitoring. **J. Johnson** asks why wastewater treatment plants are reluctant to stop using nonnative Phragmites. Is it a question of cost? **H. Wolf** responds that we're still trying to figure out what plant might be a good option to replace nonnative Phragmites. If it's native Phragmites, it needs to be a hearty strain. Still researching that. In Wisconsin, they transitioned to remove everything – all layers of the plant and soil, including all seeds, etc. Costs were over \$1 million. Can we just remove the top layers? That is far less expensive. No new systems can use nonnative Phragmites.
- **J. Johnson** would like to follow up in 2021 on his suggestion of a voluntary contribution that could be made when Minnesotans register their boats. The voluntary contribution would support AIS management and not "general lake stuff." Minnesotans can be generous when they support a worthy cause like AIS, and when they

know how the money will be used. **H. Wolf** says there exists a voluntary Non-Game contribution collected through state taxes. We could look at other options.

Invasive Aquatic Plant Control Grants in 2021

Presentation by Jake Walsh (DNR Invasive Species Research and Grants Coordinator)

- **J. Walsh** provided a 2021 Control Grant planning update. As a reminder, the grants fund local invasive aquatic plant management (IAPM) projects by local groups that receive reimbursement for control work tied to IAPM permits.
- DNR conducted an online survey of potential grantees – especially for those that didn't apply in 2020. The discussion at the last Committee meeting really helped formulate this survey. Specific goals were: Understanding organization history with the program; Evaluating delineation survey requirement and funding support; Exploring alternatives to first-come, first-served grant selection. Results:
 - 83 of 155 total respondents applied for a Control Grant in 2020.
 - 57 awarded, 26 not awarded grants.
 - 69 respondents did not apply in 2020.
 - Evaluating barriers to application, communication/outreach strategies, etc.
 - 137 responses to open answer question about why groups did or did not apply in 2020.
 - Respondents valued delineation survey and support.
 - 74% viewed delineation survey as valuable or valuable and integral to their project.
 - 75% viewed support for delineation as valuable or valuable and integral to their project.
 - He also heard this from conversations with consultants about data-driven management.
 - Alternatives to First-Come, First-Served
 - Viewed FCFS unfavorably
 - Prompt: First-Come, First-Served was a fair system for awarding grants in 2020
 - 23% agree or strongly agree; 51% disagree or strongly disagree
 - Viewed a lottery system more favorably than First-Come, First-Served
 - Prompt: A lottery after a two-week submission period would be fairer than First-Come, First-Served
 - 49% agree or strongly agree; 25% disagree or strongly disagree
 - Open comments
 - Those that support First-Come, First-Served say it is good for people that are prepared.
 - Nobody is entirely enthusiastic about either lottery or First-Come, First-Served – interested in more merit-based
- Decisions based on this feedback
 - Continue funding support for pretreatment delineation survey
 - Considering adding flexibility in delineation requirement, particularly for early spring treatments
 - Will always require oversight from Regional Specialist managing permit
 - Replace first-come, first-served selection with lottery
 - Provide a longer submission period (2-3 weeks)
 - New grant process that allows for more time to plan in spring
 - Grants need to be fully executed (all parties sign agreements) to begin work
 - In 2020, grant agreements were sent out for signatures after award notice

- New process moves up signature steps to application (grantee) and award notice (DNR) stages
 - Work can then begin when grantees receive award notice
- Targeting similar timeline as in 2020:
 - RFP communication and outreach in early- to mid-January
 - 2-3 week submission period
 - Grant lottery ranking, review, and selection in February
 - Grant award notice in March
- Early goals for continuous improvement
 - Contractor Survey for feedback from surveyors and applicators
 - “Meeting” County AIS Coordinators
 - Define and measure equity and accessibility
 - Continue conversation regarding strategic review and selection
 - Survey echoed same degree of support for strategic evaluation as discussed on 10/22
 - Responses revealed diverse and sometimes opposing values regarding need, merit, and ecological targets in potential grant applicants → needs to be an ongoing discussion
 - Reviewing “neutral” criteria to be strategic without introducing bias, affecting accessibility, or dramatically increasing processing time for 250+ applications (e.g., public access sites, species prioritization, etc.)

Discussion

- **N. Baer** says Stearns County Environmental services – none of that funding can go to IAPM. No other source of funding besides from the state for his association. Could you consider that in the award process? **J. Walsh** has been talking with county coordinators and discussing how best to get meaningful support to many organizations. Changing county by county would be challenging and potentially introduce bias. **P. Hunsicker** adds that Stearns County is not unique – some counties don’t fund any IAPM or only do for certain species. **J. Johnson** adds he received a call from a Stearns AIS board member. They asked about the interplay of county money and DNR money and if lakes are getting grants from both of them. Does that leave lakes like **N. Bear**’s out in the cold? Could funds be earmarked for smaller groups? **H. Wolf** says the county aid was not given to the DNR, doesn’t go through the DNR, and we don’t have oversight. The counties get to do what they want to do. They are aware of the DNR grant program, but the DNR can’t require anything of them/their funds. **J. Johnson** clarifies that it may help to just understand the interplay. Stearns County drafted on their own where money goes. They may want to understand where money isn’t going or if organizations are double-dipping. Where can the programs dovetail – DNR can have recommendations. **H. Wolf** is concerned people would get upset or not follow what we tell them. **T. Fitzgerald** says she has discussed with **J. Walsh** about how to better communicate the DNR Control Grant program with counties.
- **D. Jensen** mentions headwaters and that AIS float downstream – any thought by DNR to target those? **J. Walsh** says no, not at that level for the control grants. It needs to be neutral, even, and random. Good to think about though.
- **P. Hunsicker** says the lottery is trying something different and we hope to fine tune it as we go along.
- **N. Bear** says there are two lakes upstream in Meeker County – to try to coordinate between two counties would be even more challenging.
- **J. Dauphinais** recommends strategic-based, scoring criteria. It will come down to values. This Committee spans and represents different values – this Committee could review that and rank things such as public access, littoral area, boatable connections, upstream, etc. for beyond 2021. **J. Walsh** says yes a lot of back and forth between the DNR and this committee and stakeholders is needed. Also talked with other states about this type of scoring. Once you move beyond map-based data, it biases towards grant writing.

- **N. Phelps** asks are there lessons to be learned from other programs? E.g. prairie restoration, land acquisition? For equity, need, etc. it might be worth checking with those programs for lessons learned. **J. Walsh** says yes that would be very helpful.
- **K. Hagsten** asks about starry stonewort. **J. Walsh** says there is a different pot of money, so it's not in grant program this year. **H. Wolf** adds the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funds direct management of starry stonewort by DNR.

Election of Chair and Vice-Chair for 2021

- The new Chair for 2021 is **J. Dauphinais**. The new Vice-Chair is **H. Kalbus**.

Community Asset Mapping Strategy Session with CBSM Consultants

Facilitated by consultant Kat Donnelly with AZENTIVE

- The information collected during this activity will be organized by the consultant.
- Used an interactive online tool called Mural, which allows the kinds of activities typically done when participants are gathered in the same room. Includes the use of sticky notes, brainstorming lists, consolidating common ideas, etc. Task was to brainstorm lists of organizations, water programs, individuals, and underrepresented individuals that are vital to improving community engagement and changing AIS behaviors on a grand scale.
- Goal is to find influencers to carry the AIS message.
- Participants were asked to think about those outside of the usual groups – religious leaders, elected leaders, tourism businesses, and those representing other sports like wakeboarding, SCUBA diving, sailing, aquarium enthusiasts, waterfowl hunters, water gardeners, etc.

Wrap-Up

- Committee recognized contributions of Norman Baer, Jim Boettcher, and Mary Alverson, whose terms end in 2020.
- Next meeting is scheduled for **Thursday January 28, 2021**. AIS Planners will work with new Chair and Vice-Chair to develop an agenda.

Adjournment at 2:05 p.m.

