

Minnesota Statewide AIS Advisory Committee

February 22, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Teams Online

Members Present: Will Bement, Shelly Binsfeld, Nick Bluhm*, Beto Garcia, Christine Maxwell*, Spencer McGrew*, Carrie Ohly-Cusack*, Patrick Selter*, Mike Sorensen, M. Mahmood Tajbakhsh*, Amanda Weberg*, Ryan Wersal

Members Absent: Charlie Brandt, Chris Magnotto

“” indicates new members starting in 2024*

Ex-officio Members Present:

Ex-officio Members Absent: Nicholas Phelps, Maddie Hayden, Amy McGovern

DNR Staff Present: Tina Fitzgerald, Kelly Pennington, April Rust

S. Binsfeld called the meeting to order at 10:03AM.

Motion to approve agenda: First by A. Weberg, second by R. Wersal.

Motion to approve Meeting Minutes from January 25, 2024: First by R. Wersal, second by S. McGrew.

Meeting Summary:

- The Committee focused on teambuilding with new members and prioritizing topics for remaining meetings.

Teambuilding with New Members

- **S. Binsfeld** welcomed new members.
- All members introduced themselves and shared what brought them to this Committee.

An Introduction to the Committee and DNR’s Invasive Species Program

Tina Fitzgerald, DNR AIS Prevention Planner

See PowerPoint slides for more details.

DNR’s AIS Advisory Committee

- Committee background: Established in 2012, meets 8 times per year, 3-year appointments, work directly with invasive species program staff. Committee membership represents a diversity of knowledge, interests, and experiences from across the state.
- Committee purposes (Charter): 1) Excellent recommendations for improving DNR’s AIS program, including but not limited to review of current field operations, programs, research, policies and outreach materials; 2) Effective suggestions and advice to other organizations on their AIS-related activities; 3) Shared understanding among committee members of AIS issues and their impacts on citizens, lakeshore property owners, and recreationalists, as well as public, private, business, and non-profit organizations.

- At the meetings: Review and provide recommendations for improvement to DNR AIS programs, learn from experts on priority topics of interest and concern, write letters of support to elected officials on funding and policy, and network with members with a diversity of perspectives and backgrounds.
- Beyond the meetings: Share knowledge gained with your own organizations and stakeholders, are ambassadors for AIS programming, coordinate and collaborate with other members, engage with DNR staff, and coordinate summer field trips.
- Annual outcomes: Submit letters of support for funding and policy changes; influence continuous improvements to DNR AIS programming; support and identify research needs; integrate knowledge into your organization's work or activities with your communities; and be ambassadors for AIS programming.

DNR Invasive Species Program Overview

- The mission of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is to work with Minnesotans to conserve and manage the state's natural resources, to provide outdoor recreation opportunities, and to provide for commercial uses of natural resources in a way that creates a sustainable quality of life.
- Invasive Species Program Purpose: Curb the spread and minimize harmful effects of nonnative species that can: cause displacement of, or otherwise threaten, native species in their natural communities; or threaten natural resources or their use in the state. Goals: Prevent introductions of new invasive species into Minnesota. Prevent the spread of invasive species within Minnesota. Reduce the impacts caused by invasive species to Minnesota's ecology, society, and economy.
- The Program is based on state laws (Minnesota Statutes 84D, 86B, 97C, 103G) and rules (Minnesota Rule 6216) governing the behavior of people and agencies. Reviewed legal AIS definitions and example DNR statutory authorities.
- Reviewed history and timeline of program highlights.
- Reviewed DNR and Invasive Species Program organizational structure and funding.
- Reviewed primary responsibilities and staff of the program: Permits and infested waters; lake service provider permit and training; watercraft inspection and decontamination; enforcement; invasive aquatic plant management; invasive species specialists; technical support to counties; AIS in commerce; and communications.
- Reviewed local, state, and interjurisdictional collaboration and coordination.

Discussion

- **N. Bluhm:** Comments about affirmation and trailer training. **A. Rust** added details about the trailer training program being repealed.
- **N. Bluhm:** Encouraged DNR to take care of volunteers. Topic: AIS Detector Training vs Watercraft Inspector Training. He's surprised that there is a cost to volunteers taking AIS Detector Training but no cost to employed county contractors for Watercraft Inspector Training, who will be paid for that work. In Cass County our Association of Cass County Lakes (ACCL) has held AIS Detector Training in each of the past 3-4 years. ACCL split the cost with Cass County SWCD for this training. If DNR would pay for the funding, you might get more volunteers taking the training. The goal is to get more volunteers in the field identifying AIS occurrences. **M. Sorensen:** local organizations can help cover costs.
- **S. Binsfeld:** Asks for clarification on who is in charge. Is it the Division that thinks statewide and then collaborates regionally to implement the work? Yes. **S. McGrew:** Clarifies that aquatic plant management

(APM) folks are in the Fish and Wildlife Division. **T. Fitzgerald:** APM are not in regular invasives staff meetings, but APM and invasive aquatic plant management (IAPM) staff are in regular programmatic meetings each year and constant communication together at the regional level.

- **B. Garcia:** AIS mainly involved in 3 Divisions: FAW, EWR, ENF? Is that at director or manager levels? **T. Fitzgerald** explained we work with all divisions at all levels.
- Asks about funding priorities – given fact that there is local leverage funding with cities and counties, is there a feeling that there should be more research at the state level? **T. Fitzgerald:** The Invasive Species Program is not a research organization, but the Minnesota AIS Research Center (MASIRC) is a research institution and the university gets funding to lead the research for the state. **N. Bluhm:** Did they start with initial funding and then get new funding? **Action Item: Ask Nick Phelps for review of MAISRC funding.**
- **M. M. Tajbakhsh:** Is there a feeling at DNR that funding is inadequate for AIS work? **T. Fitzgerald:** We did pursue a funding increase last year but it was not funded.
- **N. Bluhm:** In Cass County, annually receives AIS \$500,000 – but sets some aside as contingency fund. Does Otter Tail also set aside a fund to cover for future uses? **S. McGrew:** Yes, they keep a reserve account. **T. Fitzgerald:** About a quarter of county programs have contingency funds for larger purchases, emergency funds, etc. **S. Binsfeld:** A couple meetings ago we talked about DNR grants and conversation about how much money is needed. There’s always more need for more funds. If DNR isn’t filling that need, then it’s coming from county funds or lake associations. **S. McGrew:** 1W1P funding isn’t being spent on AIS work but might vary across the state and be a resource. **S. Binsfeld:** In 1W1P process and AIS varies per plan on if its relevant. **Action Item: DNR speaker on 1W1P and integration of AIS.**
- **N. Bluhm:** Question from Pine River Watershed meeting – every year watersheds are adjusted and boundaries change. Who is responsible in state to define those boundaries? **M. Sorensen:** Board of Water and Soil Resources (BWSR) oversees that.
- **N. Bluhm:** Question about DNR Decontamination units – does that include CD3 stations? **T. Fitzgerald:** No. DNR decontamination stations are hot water, high pressure units staffed by professionals.
- **N. Bluhm:** Asked if we can use benthic barriers as an invasive plant management tool in lieu of chemical control. **T. Fitzgerald:** To her knowledge, benthic barriers not currently allowed in Minnesota. Contact would be Wendy Crowell, AIS Management Consultant.
- **N. Bluhm:** Any changes to formula for legislative AIS funding. Hubbard doesn’t have enough funding, they have to get extra funding from lake associations. Any way DNR can supplement funds? **T. Fitzgerald:** Always discussed but no current legislative changes proposed. Counties receive more AIS funding than DNR Invasive Species Program does. We discuss the funding challenges each year. Hubbard is the county that leverages the most matching funds to do more work each year, almost \$100,000, so that is actually a positive thing. **S. McGrew:** Hubbard also engages townships for funding. **M. Sorensen:** Notes the changes in increased minimum wage will impact how many watercraft inspectors can be hired this season.
- **S. Binsfeld:** Thanks to **T. Fitzgerald** for prep and dedication.

DNR Updates

Kelly Pennington, DNR Invasive Species Unit Supervisor

- She can't spend full day together because she is attending a Great Lakes Interjurisdictional meeting.
- Breaking news this week – DNR added species to list of prohibited invasive species. Full details in [Rulemaking news release](#). **M. Sorensen:** Asks is DNR list different than the noxious weed list? **K. Pennington:** That is a different list administered by the Department of Agriculture. There is a little overlap.
- Time for intern hiring at DNR. Our Program hires a lot of interns – inspectors and specialist interns.
- Looking forward to federal grant applications. Working on application for Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) funds. Past year funding has supported northeast watercraft inspection program, successful non-native phragmites control work in partnership with the University of Minnesota, and organisms in trade work. US Fish and Wildlife grants are available for states that have Aquatic Nuisance Species (ANS) Management Plans that are approved at the federal level. DNR usually is awarded close to \$100,000, which in past years has funded K-9 Zebra Mussel sniffing dogs, AIS promotional materials, and outreach projects.
- Ongoing: Invasive Aquatic Plant Management grants are being assessed and will be awarded this spring.
- Started working with partners to implement the brand new [Invasive Carp Action Plan](#).
- **S. McGrew:** Asks who Heidi Wolf reports to. It is EWR Director Katie Smith who then reports to Assistant Commissioner Jess Richards.

Identifying Topics of Interest for 2024

Members were split into pairs – one senior member and one new member – to discuss the following questions: 1) What is one thing you would like to learn more about in 2024? And 2) What is one thing you would like the Committee to address in 2024? Each group reported out to develop the list below. To prioritize topics for upcoming meetings, the list was entered into Microsoft Forms and each member voted for their top 3 topics. Number of votes are noted as (#) after the topic listed. Top four ranked topics are bolded.

- **LSP Training & Oversight** – getting people/providers to become LSPs that aren't already (e.g. contractors, construction) + compliance/enforcement (4)
- Hydraulic Lifts (e.g. Sea Legs) – risks and mitigating risks (1)
- **Movement of mechanical plant harvesters** – risks and mitigating risks (3)
 - Note: Commercial mechanical control companies are not lake service providers, it is a different process and permit.
 - **W. Bement:** Asks if they are seeing improper disposal of material; they don't get notified when it is being done; and they hear about people piggybacking on other's permits illegally.
- Enforcing dock and lift law – make it more realistic (1)
- Prohibiting felt soled waders (0)
- Enforcement giving more citations and increase fines (1)
- **How all the Divisions and Regions communicate and work together** – who are the people you call in your region? (3)

- **P. Selter:** Shares an experience trying to look up someone to contact when he saw a violation, but it took a long time to figure out who it was. The public isn't going to put that much work into finding it, how do we make it easier? Suggests a graphic or online resource that shows contacts based on your location.
- More forward thinking – pathways that aren't addressed as much right now (2)
- What can the DNR do to reach lake associations more and improve recognition of volunteer work? (1)
- Wake boats and future boat and trailer designs (0)
- Balancing protection and access to public waters (0)
- What goals are we not meeting? Not meeting the challenge? (2)
 - **T. Fitzgerald:** The State Plan (Minnesota Management Plan for Invasive Species) identifies gaps.
- Advocate for something (e.g. letter of support) (2)
- Connecting AIS work and water quality work – many of the people doing the work are doing both, but don't necessarily make that connection. Watershed districts could have interesting perspectives. (1)
 - Discusses 1W1P as a potential. **A. Weberg** could touch on this topic.
- Committee meeting operations post-covid – assess and revamp – look at pre-covid as reference to how thing operated in the past (0)
 - **T. Fitzgerald:** Could look at annual reports from the Committee. Could also invite past members to a meeting.
- Carp – mitigation, impact, migration (2)
- Waterfowl outreach (0)
- Water laws in Minnesota vs. other states (0)
- **Communications strategies** – different demographics, who are we not talking to? How to identify gaps? (4)
- Invasive Aquatic Plant Management (IAPM) grant awards – benefits and long-term resolutions (0)
 - **T. Fitzgerald:** Angelique Dahlberg, DNR Grants and Research Consultant, plans to review this season and ideas for 2025 in the fall with this Committee.

Closing Discussion

- **S. Binsfeld:** asked senior members, what topic or guest speaker from past years that answered questions or you really connected with? **M. Sorensen:** Tribal representative presentations from last year. **W. Bement:** Discussions on how to reach youth. **S. Binsfeld:** hard to pick – MAISRC, county AIS staff, K-9 zebra mussel demonstration. **B. Garcia:** Jeff Forester, MN Lakes and Rivers Advocates around shared coalitions.
- **Action Item: T. Fitzgerald will send past meeting summaries/minutes for any topics that came up today that were covered in recent meetings.**
- **T. Fitzgerald** and **D. Jensen** are working to set up a new file sharing site (SharePoint) where all meeting materials will be stored. This is a transition from an old site (Basecamp) that is no longer supported.
- **Action Item: T. Fitzgerald will send information about mileage reimbursement for travel to meetings.**
- **S. Binsfeld:** reminder that as we have presenters attend meetings, we should be asking about what we as a committee can do for them. Share ice breaker ideas/questions with Tina and Doug.

Adjourned at 2:55 PM. Next Meeting to be held March 28, 2024 online.