

## Minnesota DNR AIS Advisory Committee

*March 28<sup>th</sup>, 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, Charlie Brandt

**Members Absent:** Chris Magnotto, Chris DuBose

**Ex-officio Members Present:** Maddie Hayden, Amy McGovern

**Ex-officio Members Absent:** None

**DNR Staff Present:** Tina Fitzgerald, Doug Jensen, Kelly Pennington, April Rust, Shane McBride

**Motion to approve agenda: First by A. Weberg, second by S. McGrew**

**Motion to approve Meeting Minutes from February 22, 2024: First by S. McGrew, second by C. Brandt**

### Action Items

- Share an example Commercial Mechanical Control permit.
- Invite a speaker from DNR's Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) office to speak more broadly about what the DNR is doing now and planning for in the future.
- Share the link to North America Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA)'s Language Workshop.

### Member Updates

- **M. Sorensen:** Ice on/off – 15 lakes earliest ever ice-off dates, only covered for ½ as long as a typical winter (56 days). How it is going to impact carp, plant growth, etc.
- **S. McGrew:** Floating icehouse machine – evolving technology, might pose some challenge for AIS.
- **W. Bement:** Asks **M. Sorensen**, how far north are you ice free? You are usually 2 weeks ahead of their walleye run. [DNR has map](#) of ice-off dates. **C. Brandt** it is ice free up to Cloquet. **S. Binsfeld** gets wildlife, they came through last week, seems a month ahead.
- **C. Brandt:** Asks, after years of a lot of ice and snowpack – how does that effect the vegetation grow back? E.g., harsh winter and deep snow – low weed growth. Should we be predicting matting/heavier growth due to mild winter and lack of snow? **D. Jensen** says it effects growth of curly-leaf pondweed. **M. Sorensen** adds yes, sunlight is stimulation plant growth earlier in the season. **R. Wersal** says down south they are bracing for a terrible year, especially curly-leaf pondweed.
- **A. McGovern:** Lessard's approved carp deterrent at Lock and Dam 5. Have tested acoustic deterrents. Prussian carp is on our radar – concern is in the Red River and potential to use eDNA. Snakehead – Mississippi River Basin Panel is meeting on that, it made a range jump into Missouri further. **N. Bluhm** asks about a news article on the Lock and Dam deterrent, it seems the DNR was against that? **A. McGovern** says they have been working closely with DNR on what might occur there, a lot of caveats with such a complex project. Lock and high water events allows movement. Might have a trap and sort system. Taking an integrated approach. **N. Bluhm** says it seemed like the DNR would not put forth the money, so the other group did. **K. Pennington** clarifies that the DNR has not been opponents, we are looking for integrated approaches. This is a complex issue and a lot of planning and design work that would need to happen. Lots of considerations on how to reduce the impacts all coupled with a deterrent.

## Lake Service Provider Permit and Training Program

April Rust, DNR AIS Training Coordinator

[Lake Service Provider Website](#)

- Minnesota has a lot of water and water recreation – we like to protect them.
- Lake Service Providers (LSP) are a wide range of businesses and individuals – anyone that is paid to install remove, rent, or lease or decontaminate water related equipment. For example: Marinas, dock installers, lawn irrigation, boat repair shops, etc. It does not include all the businesses working in the water statewide, rather it focuses mostly on recreation related equipment. Find definitions in Statute 84D.
- **Program History:** 2011 legislative report and voluntary LSP program started. 2012 LSP permit and training. 2013 legal definition updated. 2016 training streamlined online. She brings environmental education into mandatory government training.
- **Permits and Employee Certificates:** According to statute, every 3 years LSPs owners must take training and pass a test to get permit. There is a \$50 fee. They get sticker for their vehicles and permit. Employees take free online version of the training for employees and then print out wallet card. Statute requires the have it on them while working.
  - For county partners checking on LSPs, all expiring permits disappear from the website on January 1<sup>st</sup>. January through ice-out is training season for getting permits for that year. There is a lag time. Also, they can pick which counties they work in and some pick all of them. If you have questions, you can always ask DNR.
- **P. Selter** comments that this is his third time, it is an awesome program. It is very in depth, could we promote this through the boater safety program? His son is taking the boater safety one now, and it barely touches on AIS. **A. Rust** says when she first started, she talked with the boater education contractor. Contracts allows DNR a few changes and can only have 2 questions on the test. It may be time to check in again.
- **S. Binsfeld** asks, how many members here are LSPs? There are three.
- Challenge: Permit renewal compliance. Regular process for renewal happens every three years. Not an annual habit, so it's not easy to remember. She sends out reminders directly (postcard and emails), through groups like Minnesota Resorts and Campgrounds, and GovDelivery – our agencies' online communication tool. She whittles down the list every winter, then sends a final letter. Then work closely with DNR Enforcement to fit it into their schedules to visit. Typically, the issue is the person no longer owns the business, there is a lot of turnover. A bit messy.

### Discussion

- **S. Binsfeld:** it is not just you, a lot has changed with COVID and increasing costs.
- **P. Selter:** COVID was two-sided, field work got super nuts because everyone was at home and administrative staff were bombarded with tons of questions.
- **S. McGrew:** Has a task force member that is an LSP, his challenge is retaining employees. **A. Rust** says that has been an ongoing challenge, that is a good thing/reason why employees are not under the permit itself.
- **A. Rust:** Trying to connect with watercraft inspection programs at the off-season meetings – especially for tracking patterns of LSPs that aren't doing what they are supposed to do. She needs to hear about it, so she can track it. This is especially important for any enforcement action. The permit is a long-term tool – we can modify it or revoke it – for those consistently acting badly.
- **D. Jensen** asks **P. Selter**, the calls you were receiving, what were the frequently asked questions? They do mostly herbicide treatments. Many people relied on their lake association to handle everything. Now they are home and see their boats going by – what are you doing, what are you putting in the water. **A. Rust** adds it was extra stressful that year because everyone wanted everything now.

- **A. Weberg:** As a local AIS coordinator, she is here to help the DNR. She will go to the business and help the employees, hold their hands through the program. Be the liaison. **A. Rust:** we do not have enough people, even with Enforcement and watercraft inspectors, to know the changes going on locally. So many moving parts, appreciates people knowing their community. Like Bill Grantges program that offers lunches and promotes the businesses – we can't do that as a state agency. A trusted voice that is not the regulator.
- **C. Ohly-Cusack:** Suggests lake associations put information in annual newsletters – people you are hiring on the lake, are they LSPs? The property owners would know. **A. Rust** says it happens sometimes, but people might still not hear it. Would like to build a stronger, intentional communications plan and streamline training in the future. Used to do a lot of in-person stuff too. Will be reaching out to local coordinators to find rock start LSPs, who can “host” the training better than the current duck and turtle. **C. Ohly-Cusack** says if Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates can help, let her know.
- **S. McGrew:** Had a lot of zebra mussel violations in the spring especially in COVID, people bringing their equipment from storage not clean. Inspectors were stopping them and then telling them to talk to their provider. Last year there were only 8 violations.
- **S. McGrew:** Overlap working in public waters, but they are not LSP; there are AIS procedures.

## Commercial Mechanical Control Program

Shane McBride, DNR Aquatic Plant Management Consultant

[Aquatic Plant Management Website](#) and [List of Commercial Mechanical Control Companies](#)

- The DNR Fish and Wildlife (FAW) Division's Aquatic Plant Management (APM) program conducts Commercial Mechanical Control (CMC) workshops for companies that mechanically harvest aquatic plants for hire. Before COVID there was one in St. Paul. **A. Rust** adds there are way more LSPs than CMC companies. CMC training is way more in-depth.
- **Training Topics:** Covers definitions, regulations (e.g., Minnesota Rule 6280), plant identification, benefits of aquatic plants, riparian rights, public waters, APM, when a permit is required, and 60 question exam. When COVID hit, FAW turned the power point presentation into a PDF and provided that with a few other documents to the companies and then had them take an open book test.
- Permit is always required for emergent vegetation.
- Permit is not required for submerged vegetation around the dock using mechanical or hand removal; cannot exceed 2,500 square-feet. 50ft along shore or half the frontage, whichever is less. Channels: no more than 15ft wide, cutting or pulling, same location, direct route to open water, and can control floating leaf plants.
- Who can apply? Riparian property owners and municipalities or contractors on their behalf.
- The CMC commercial license is good for 1 year. They only have to do the course once.
- AIS related permit conditions: They must clean at the launch, decontaminate before launching at another lake, notify the DNR 48 hours before moving, and DNR may inspect (coordinated through the watercraft inspection program). For zebra mussel infested waters they must scrape and high pressure wash all equipment, rinse with hot water and dry for at least five days. For starry stonewort they must use high pressure wash. For faucet snails they must rinse and scrape. For spiny waterflea they must dry for 24 hours. All disposal of material must be done 300 feet away from any waterbody.
- There is no permit fee. They do need to file an annual report, either via mail or online via MPARS (DNR permitting system). DNR can revoke the permit if they aren't following it.
- There is [a list of CMC companies](#).
- The permit as transport permit, to a dump site.
- Permit and training are for the owner/manager/crew leader. A. Rust notes this is one of the other differences between these two programs – for LSPs all staff need training.
- **Action Item:** Ask S. McBride to send a copy of the permit.

## Discussion

- How many companies are there? Not all want to be listed, there are 30 listed. 50 total.
- **C. Brandt:** For the channels, what about wild rice? Can I use that channel to fish? Are those channels in violation? **S. McBride** says there needs to be an APM permit for emergent vegetation, that includes wild rice. A CMC can't go in and do that without an APM permit. Channel is limited to 15 feet wide. Sometimes for cattails they allow a wider area. Wild rice is tricky, just driving a boat through it will keep a channel, especially early in the year. It is sensitive.
- **C. Brandt:** Jets, are those illegal in Minnesota? **S. McBride:** They are legal if you are not disturbing the lake bottom and are not using them to control aquatic plants. Used on the surface as a fountain to aerate or blow algae, duckweed, or floating vegetation away. For the most part people are using them illegally. DNR has tried to do enforcement activities, but it is difficult. It is not an APM issue, it is a dredging issue (hydrologists). DNR Enforcement may issue a cease and desist vs. a citation.
- **S. McGrew:** Wanted to work with DNR watercraft inspection supervisor to get notification when the harvesters are moving. DNR staff said he doesn't get the notification either. Is there a way to get the notices to local programs? Another question about the 2,500 square feet limit, so you could do 2,000 square feet without any notice? **S. McBride:** No, they still need to notify if they are moving between lakes. They always need a CMC permit. Size only matters if they need an APM permit. There are AIS permits, APM permits, CMC permits, LSP permits, etc. It gets confusing. The notification goes through the DNR watercraft inspection program.

## DNR Updates

### Kelly Pennington, DNR Invasive Species Unit Supervisor

- *Invasive Carp Update:* As a follow up from our February meeting, DNR released the Minnesota Invasive Carp Action Plan in January. A presentation was provided to the Lessard Sams Outdoor Heritage Council, which proposed a deterrent in the Mississippi River coupled with strategies like tagging and tracking, removal, and to reduce passage through dam spillway gates. Each dam has a lock which allows vessels to go up and down the river.
- Over the past 10 years, invasive carp captures increased during high water events, like in 2019 and spring 2023. During those times, the Army Corps of Engineers opens the gates to manage high water levels and flooding. This is when it becomes an "open river." When dam gates are closed, they prevent fish passage through the lock and dam – creating an effective barrier.
- Installation of lock chamber deterrents can help reduce invasive carp passage through the lock. Sound-based systems are ~50% effective, electricity >95% effective in blocking fish passage. Unfortunately, deterrents for spillways do not exist yet. Coupling these with deterrents for locks is an important component.
- *Federal Funding:* DNR is applying for several grants which supports a significant portion of DNR's budget.
  - Pre-proposal to fund implementation of the Minnesota Invasive Species State Plan, this approved plan makes us eligible to receive federal funding. This proposal includes support the K-9 program (aka zebra mussel sniffing dogs), providing outreach materials, etc.
  - Pre-proposal to the USEPA through GLRI (Great Lakes Restoration Initiative) to support the watercraft inspection program in northeastern MN, control of non-native Phragmites in the state, and organisms in trade pathway.
- *Hiring Interns:* For 2024, salary increased from \$15 to \$19/hr, which resulted in a larger applicant pool. Regional watercraft supervisors are conducting lots of interviews to get interns on board.

## Discussion

- **S. Binsfeld** asks if there is anything new in communications that isn't in the annual report? Any ideas percolating? **K. Pennington** responds that there is a Conservation Corp of Minnesota & Iowa individual placement working with our staff, which will provide extra capacity to implement new ideas. With this is an opportunity to try new communication channels that the unit has typically used in the past (e.g., news releases). Other channels like social media, existing email lists, website updates and other ways to communicate. She asks the members what communication opportunities they use or as consumers? **C. Brandt** wonders if new boats could have information in a boat title application, simple, straight forward, can't apply for registration/title without reading and signing. **K. Pennington** replies that is in-line with things DNR has tried including "Take the Pledge," asking people to make public commitments, and commitments to themselves on how they will take action to prevent the spread. Currently in statute, there is a requirement for an [affirmation](#) which appears on watercraft licenses and non—resident fishing licenses. It's a short statement that they read/follow the state regulations to be in compliance. She suggests another way of working with retailers, at points along that chain. She feels that registration is more transactional and checking a box during the process the prevention message might get a little lost. DNR has learned through its community based social marketing work that receiving information through multiple channels is important including getting those from trusted individuals or groups. **C. Brandt** is thinking that most people will read what they're signing first and recognize that not taking action can result in a fine. Having something to sign would help with that commitment.
- **B. Garcia** asks about dam remove and outcomes that allow AIS to move upstream in the Twin Cities area. **K. Pennington** responds that it's always a trade-off to allow native fish natural passage and AIS access. A federal act in 2014 permanently closed the lock at St. Anthony Falls, which is now an effective barrier to prevent access of both invasive species including invasive carp and native fishes to the Upper Mississippi River system. If dam removal is considered, the trade-offs need to be closely examined.

## Communications

- **T. Fitzgerald** reviewed member pre-meeting assignment to read the section of the 2023 DNR's Annual Report Education and Public Awareness Efforts. The purpose is to prepare for our meeting in April, which will be more interactive, an effort to brainstorm ideas around communications. This process will help reveal what you are thinking about our communications, annual report, or what you've experienced elsewhere, priorities or questions so that we can better prepare to dive deeper. Goal here is to stimulate ideas.
- **S. Binsfeld** really likes that the program emphasizes behavior change, conducted pilot studies – good first step. Looks like DNR will continue to do that with future needs and plans. Movement in the pet stores along with how many boaters are using the tools are good. Nice small studies that support future programming at larger scales. Would like to learn more about how DNR is communicating in other languages for different cultures. She noticed fishing regulations are printed in five languages. New cultures are coming to MN so interested on how DNR's prioritizing that effort.
- Building from **S. Binsfeld's** comment, **M. Tajbakhsh** would like to know how diverse communities are being engaged. Some of the efforts around environmental justice may be beyond AIS, but he is interested in knowing how DNR is responding to this need. Beyond AIS, it is important for new audiences to understand from a broader perspective how ecosystems work. Little knowledge on species, rules – how does DNR engage? Could AIS knowledge be paired with ecological knowledge? Another thing is, when people come to MN and start to fish, they are more often shoreland anglers, because they don't have a lot of money. So, what is DNR thinking about long-term engagement? In 20 years, youth will be the new angler demographic, so how can we reach them? **S. McGrew** agrees.
- **S. McGrew** likes the report because it defines where DNR's been and where DNR's are going. An issue he would like improvement is on the focus of proper unwanted bait disposal. He likes that DNR is emphasizing

community based social marketing, lakeshore owner study, how they use LSPs – good foundations for future work. He thinks it's going well.

- **Action Item: T. Fitzgerald** suggests that we invite a speaker from DNR's Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) office to speak more broadly about what the DNR is doing now and planning for in the future.
- **A. Weberg** would like DNR to host more public facing events so that the public can interact more with DNR staff for the purpose that they can convey all of the important work that DNR is accomplishing. **S. Binsfeld** agrees and that DNR is often thought about as regulatory, but they are experts who love the same land and water. Any time to get those experts with the public helps build bridges.
- **M. Sorensen** notes that DNR provides training and educational resources. What else should those groups be informed about? He bets that the public responds positively to AIS success stories and hopes the DNR would use its channels to get the word out, especially on social media where someone who doesn't appreciate the DNR, will see those stories. He knows that there are successes from across the state and hopes that DNR will do a better job to promote them.
- **S. Binsfeld** wonders how much is the DNR shifting using video vs. print? People get a lot of info from short YouTube videos. Could be a great way to promote those success stories in short format.
- **C. Brandt** says that negativity sells, scare tactics work. Has scare tactics been considered? **Action Item: T. Fitzgerald** will share the link to North America Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA)'s Language Workshop with members. As part of the annual National Invasive Species Awareness Week, the two-day workshop emphasized how important language is in our invasive species work. Spoiler alert: positive messages work better. **D. Jensen** added that the workshop is an extension of the work of the University of Minnesota Extension's Invasive Species Community of Practice. He is co-author on a paper on this topic, which should be published in May. He also added that there is significant evidence in the literature that fear works well in politics, health care, and other areas, but does not work as well in natural resource protection, supported by recent AIS studies.
- **W. Bement** would like to see more emphasis on partnerships, getting diverse opinions and thoughts; DNR is getting input from a variety of sources. He really likes the community-based approach too.
- **B. Garcia** asks if an ambassador program could be started made up of leaders, maybe using social media to emphasize their connections within communities. It could be a great way to get more outreach in the community.
- **P. Selter** reflects that he grew up in Michigan. When he reviewed the report, he commends DNR and stakeholders for their prevention efforts over decades. In MI, they watched Eurasian watermilfoil spread across the state in 5-6 years. Zebra mussels did the same thing. MI has not had programs and communications until recently, but that is changing now – still not remotely close to what we have here in MN. There is a reason for the relative lack of spread of starry stonewort. We're seeing the effectiveness through adaptive management programs, prevention programs – it goes to show that the level of communication is really critical to management of AIS. Among younger colleagues, there is an obsession with QR codes – how can we use that popularity? Direct information would be helpful. Lots of opportunities to reach younger audiences through social media quickly. Of all the states he's been to, MN ranks #1!
- **N. Bluhm** offers several recommendations. 1) Be more effective by partnering with MAISRC, MLRA, and MNCOLA because many of these organizations have AIS people directly involved. 2) At MAISRC's Showcase, DNR could demonstrate proper watercraft inspection and decontamination. Also, at the State Fair. 3) Emphasize give aways like the Swedish dish clothes at State Fair and other events. 4) Does DNR have a presence at fishing tournaments, county fair, and festivals where there are opportunities for public engagement? Needs more DNR presence.
- **S. Binsfeld** emphasizes that there are two audiences, those that know you and those who do not. Those are very different in approaches; both are very important.
- **N. Bluhm** says that lake association are desperate for newsletter articles – get them some!



- **M. Hayden** says social media is wonderful because younger generation attention span is shorter. MAISRC is digging into the use of QR codes because popularity came back after COVID. Websites are too dense or dead end. Often hard to trace the information back to its source. Delivery of outreach through public events can be wildly successful. **T. Fitzgerald** offered **M. Hayden** the opportunity to meet to discuss what DNR is doing with lake associations. **M. Hayden** says that partnerships will help extend AIS outreach even further.
- **A. Weberg** says retired DNR Conservation Officer Mike Scott was really great about partnering with Cook County AIS Program at public festivals and fairs. Having a Conservation Officer present really improves outreach. Since he's retired, she had a really hard time getting them to come to Cook County.
- **S. McGrew** suggests that DNR staff get out in their communities. Empower lower-level field staff to meet with the public. They should be able to meet with communities without the need for submitting a lot of red tape for approval. **S. Binsfeld** recognizes that DNR staff have a lot on their plates. They are also having hiring struggles. **T. Fitzgerald** responds that there only 23 AIS staff statewide. Every region manages their outreach and priorities a little differently. If there are recommendations that this committee could make to the DNR, how to prioritize, how to merge that kind of work with field work, so it doesn't become overwhelming.

#### Discussion Time for Committee

- **S. Binsfeld** concludes that she really appreciates how this committee has come together, the preparation, open questioning, the expertise and knowledge, time for sharing, and how respectful everyone has been during our meetings.
- **T. Fitzgerald** asks if there is anything needed as follow up from **A. Rust** or **S. McBride**, please let us know. We can add those to next meeting, which is in-person on April 25<sup>th</sup>, 10AM-3PM. It will be our last meeting before our summer break, reconvening in August. Lunch will be provided. A poll will be provided to get your dietary preferences. Members can also be reimbursed for milage, a form will be shared. Meeting will focus on communications. Lots of things discussed that we can really dive deeper into. Announcement for local AIS Partner Workshops April 3 (Chanhassen) and 8 (Brainerd) will be shared with members. Please come as able.
- **D. Jensen** added that he will share the announcement for the next Minnesota Invasive Species Advisory Committee that will be meet virtually on April 9-10<sup>th</sup>.
- **S. Binsfeld** mentions that if there are any upcoming events the members and DNR should know about, please share those in the chat, links work, during the next meeting.
- **P. Selter** invited members to help with field work to get a better understanding herbicide work they do.
- **N. Bluhm** asks when DNR puts together a plan for displays and give aways at the State Fair? **T. Fitzgerald** says planning starts the day after the fair ends to plan for the next year. State Fair plans can be discussed during the April meeting. About ¼ of the DNR's building is invasive species focused. Our interactive game called "Muck Hunt" is being updated. Tables are staffed each day from opening until 9pm. Fishing license holder will be the emphasis for give aways this year. A challenge is there is not a lot of storage in the DNR building so we do not have a lot of space for large boxes.

***Adjourned at 2:07 PM. Next Meeting to be held IN-PERSON April 25, 2024.***