

# Minnesota DNR AIS Advisory Committee

*April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2024 Meeting Minutes*

*Sauk Rapids and online via Teams*

**Members Present:** In-person: Shelly Binsfeld, Beto Garcia, Spencer McGrew, Mike Sorensen, M. Mahmood Tajbakhsh, Amanda Weberg, Charlie Brandt. Online: Nick Bluhm, Carrie Ohly-Cusack, Christine Maxwell

**Members Absent:** Chris Magnotto, Chris DuBose, Ryan Wersal, Will Bement, Patrick Selter

**Ex-officio Members Present In-Person:** In-person: Maddie Hayden. Online: Amy McGovern.

**Ex-officio Members Absent:** None

**DNR Staff Present:** Tina Fitzgerald, Doug Jensen, Kelly Pennington, Eric Kenney, Greg Husak

**Motions made to approve agenda and approve Meeting Minutes from March 28, 2024.**

## Meeting Summary

- The Committee was provided an overview of the DNR's AIS communication plan and then strategically brainstormed ideas for broadening, deepening, and strengthening communication efforts around AIS prevention in Minnesota.

## Motions and Action Items

- **K. Pennington** will find out how IDEC started and how IDEC/CMMI are funded.
- Share the link to the [Observing Boater Actions at Public Water Accesses to Prevent the Spread of Aquatic Invasive Species](#) study.
- **Motion:** DNR staff review the suggestions made today, identify some priority areas that they have the capacity to work on, determine what is feasible, and bring those back to the committee. Based on what the committee approves, that gives DNR staff a "backbone" to work on communications and outreach to work toward those goals.
- **Motion:** Investigate an opportunity to bring on a staff member through grants, etc. for 2-3 years to develop a relationship with the "other" category i.e., non-traditional underserved AIS-related audiences and not traditionally served by DNR.
- **T. Fitzgerald** and **D. Jensen** share a timeline for DNR budget decisions/planning.

## Today's Meeting Goals, Expectations, and Discussion Questions

### Goals

- Learn about the DNR's AIS Communications Plan.
- Learn about the behavior change approach to AIS prevention.
- Provide individual and organizational perspectives to inform the plan.
- Participate in strategic brainstorming for specific communication needs.
- Provide communication recommendations to the DNR.

### Scope

- In-Scope
  - DNR communications with residents and visitors about AIS issues.
  - New priority activities that fit within current capacity (funding and staffing). Eric is here to help!

- Future priority activities that would require additional short-term or long-term capacity.
- Out of Scope (Important, but not today's focus)
  - Working with other organizations like the university, counties, tribes, state/federal agencies, etc.

### Expectations

- Open and honest conversations
- All ideas are welcome
- Keep in mind:
  - Some things have already been tried and DNR has learned from those efforts.
  - Some things may not be feasible (e.g., DNR has specific authorities, responsibilities, and capacities).
  - There are limited resources. What needs to be taken off the list or moved to a lower priority to try something new?

### Strategic Brainstorms

- Questions:
  - What audiences are we missing? How do we reach them?
  - What communities or audiences are best engaged at in-person events?
  - What are the high priority messages for social media, videos, newsletters, and signage?
- Process:
  - Generate as many ideas as possible from the diversity of perspectives that members have to offer.
  - The Committee can provide specific recommendations in various ways (formal, informal, individual, full committee, different levels (e.g., program, Division, agency), etc.).
  - The DNR Invasive Species Program will document this feedback and keep the Committee informed on how their ideas influence ongoing communications planning.

## DNR Updates

Kelly Pennington, Invasive Species Unit Supervisor with DNR

- DNR capacity:
  - Eric Kenney on communications through Conservation Corps of Minnesota and Iowa (CCMI) is a valuable position. It is a one-year service term, first time we have used it for communications focus. Website updates, working with communications team at DNR, social media presence, and strategic ways to increase use of channels. We haven't been able to do it because we haven't had dedicated capacity. Already paying huge dividends. Expertise in communications and dedicated time.
  - There are 10 Invasive Species Specialists. Tim Plude and Jenna Nelson left. Region 4 Jeffery Florey just started.
  - Additional CCMI staff over the summer – monitoring non-native Phragmites treatments via federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funding for a coordinated project. Plan jointly developed and administered by Minnesota AIS Research Center (MAISRC) and the DNR. Treatments are successful – either no longer finding or small additional treatment needed. They will also help with purple loosestrife – renewed interest in biocontrol – Region 3 and statewide beetle monitoring and training held to collect, rear, and release beetles.
  - Without these additional funds, we couldn't do these things.
  - Increasing Diversity in Environmental Careers (IDEC) will also add two interns to the program co-hosted by the regions and central office.

- K9 Unit for zebra mussel detecting dogs are funded through the federal Aquatic Nuisance Species State Management Plan for Minnesota. Supports these K9s owned and trained by DNR Enforcement. Very successful and growing. They are getting an award today.
- **S. Binsfeld** asks, what are the IDEC interns going to do? **K. Pennington** says the goal of the program is broad exposure and to sell the DNR as a fun natural resource job. Typically, college freshman or sophomores, trying to get as diverse experience as possible. They will be based in central office, but work with specialists for field work. Plant surveys, purple loosestrife, non-native phragmites, etc. April Rust will be coordinating those experiences – shared spreadsheet with lots of ideas. Interns get to pick what program they are most interested between three agencies and two picked us. Also, an opportunity for cross pollination with other EWR programs.
- **S. McGrew** asks about supporting capacity, internships, funding – is that through the DNR Commissioner? Minnesota law? How high up the chain to add capacity? **K. Pennington** says it depends. CCMI has a permeant relationship that might be in law. For IDEC, she can look into how the program originated and is funded. Goal is to provide experiences in natural resource agency – professional development in future career opportunity. Early in their college career – nudge them. **S. McGrew** says the legislature is not involved in hiring, right? **K. Pennington** says no, not on an individual basis. For filling permanent positions, it is internal and annual budgets. As we think about growing – that is the budget for the program to increase to accommodate that. Federal funding opportunities supports program work too. **S. Binsfeld** asks about internships, is it a line item, grant, who is paying? **K. Pennington** can get back with more information. Another example is the organisms in trade (OIT) position which is supported with federal funds for a 3-year term – temporary full-time position. Opportunity to try it out and see if it is something to add. **B. Garcia** says he was a DNR intern in the 1980s, it is a funding item in the legislature. Rules and eligibility are in there too. **K. Pennington** adds that we also pay for interns programmatically, like Level 1 inspectors. **S. Binsfeld** says it might help us understand capacity and what we can advocate for. Where is the funding coming from, who we can write a letter to, type of positions (temporary, intern, full time). **Action Item: K. Pennington will find out how IDEC started and how IDEC/CCMI are funded.**
- **D. Jensen** is the Co-Chair of the Upper Midwest Invasive Species Conference (UMISC). It will be on November 12-14 at the DECC in Duluth. Theme is people, passion, experience: pathways to success. Abstracts are technically due April 26<sup>th</sup> but will be extended for another 2 weeks. Talk to **D. Jensen** or **T. Fitzgerald** if you are interested. Program committees are reaching out to presenters to form sessions. DEI (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion) emphasis including a plenary speaker and panel. Seven field trips. Professor will present the results of the communications study at the Aquarium. Three plenary speakers. Exhibitors, workshops. New DEI fund. New art meets science show. Celebrating 10 years of the AIS Prevention Aid. \$350 registration, opens in July. **S. McGrew** wants to be part of the 10-year celebration.

## DNR AIS Communications Plan

**Greg Husak, DNR Information Officer**

**Eric Kenney, Communications Specialist, CCMI Individual Placement Member with DNR**

*Power Point presentation will be shared with the Committee.*

- **G. Husak:** We are thinking about those brainstorm questions every day. The program has grown exponentially, especially with the interactions with the counties through the AIS Prevention Aid. Drilling down on a few items. Our duties are very broad, invasives species is a top priority for the agency. **E. Kenney's** capacity allows another layer of exploring.

- Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM) is positive messaging that fosters behavior change. Staff have taken training from Doug McKenzie Mohr who wrote the book on it. DNR hosted training at the county level in the past. Cornerstone approach. Positive is a more effective motivator – particularly in local areas. Proven framework. All about behavior change by establishing social and behavioral norms.
- Program Goals: Prevent the introduction and spread and reduce the impacts on the environment, recreation, and economy.
- For target audiences, a common question is who are we missing? For instance, if we have 97% compliance, who are the 3% and how do we reach them? **D. Jensen** adds that even within those target audiences we need to support the “doers” that are doing it; those that don’t always do it, move the needle; those that aren’t doing it at all, identify excuses/motivation deficiencies and move the needle. Audiences listed are broad categories – the message gets much more specific, think about individuals. Makes the messaging more focused and effective. The political environment today – the ways that influences perceptions of reality. Very different today than even 10 years ago. Changes in demographics.
- **A. Weberg** shares an example from the Rainy River Watershed Committee. A US custom boarder presentation into Manitoba – by law you have to ask every boater, is your boat clean. They found 80% were lying.

#### Discussion about language

- **S. Binsfeld** says one person can define clean one way, another a different way. Challenged by this list, who are missing? Fringe people – those that don’t own a boat, aren’t anglers, aren’t shoreline residents. Observing people swimming and speaking lots of different languages. They are part of the community, they can be advocates for clean water and AIS. At some point may become one of those target audiences. How can we interact with them now? **G. Husak** adds, those perceived as fringe, they aren’t, they are massive and are important. At a state level – language access initiative – much more needs to be done with content in languages other than English. There is a language access team at DNR. Full time staff on language access with other related issues, developing language access plan to identify key materials to be translated, then be more fine grained in the approach. People can find the information in languages they need. For example, DNR translated the fishing regulations into Hmong, Karen, Somali, and Spanish – within 1 month there were more than 900,000 downloads. Clear message – the demand there is there.
- **S. McGrew** asked, how many more called DNR information center? **G. Husak** could ask them. We do have contract translation services available. Same pattern as accessibility – they don’t have to ask. No one should have to ask for accessibility materials, apply the same principle. For examples, the invasive carp reporting sign – those audiences do a lot of fishing.
- **S. Binsfeld** – wish list – having a grant to develop relationships and engage with people that speak these other languages.
- **A. Weberg** mentions the DNR’s bait dealers’ program – we (locals) have that connection. Those kind of initiatives – give the local leads the material, do they work for them. That has been tremendous.
- **M. Tajbakhsh** says we see this guy all over the state (immigrant, maybe English is not their first language, limited education, etc.), he has no idea how any of this works. He has no idea there is an enforcement agency looking for you. Has fear and doesn’t have the advocacy – they are going to become one of those audiences – angling is one of those things. Being that person is important. FYI, the Spanish translation is really weird for fish. Make sure to interface with people that speak the language to fact check it. **G. Husak** says now translated content will be tested by people in the community; one of the contractors is no longer used, because it was not consistent with those communities. Relationships – grappling how to build

authentic durable relationships with those communities and audiences. It takes that, we can't just write it and put it out there. Very conscious of that need. New full time staff for DEI. Going from 1 to 3 tribal liaisons. Emphasis on reaching directly into the specific communities. Most program staff don't have the capacity. Did a pilot of translating a news release for a media outlet and they said they didn't need it. They want the relationship. **B. Garcia** says that resource intensive – good to see the needle moving. Leverage influencers and leaders in those communities. **S. McGrew** says do it at all levels. Go into the schools, building a pipeline of educated people for the future. Engage in genuine way.

- **B. Garcia** asks, who is not on this list? Water users – e.g., water toys, etc. are huge. **M. Sorensen** says for Minneapolis Parks, they have 5-10 million visitors, and most are not those audiences.
- **S. Binsfeld** says support the counties. Develop relationships that aren't the mainstream. Look outside the people on this list, water users in general. **G. Husak** says that is why we are here! Specific materials that would be most helpful to have in those four languages – let us know.

#### Communications plan continued

- **E. Kenney:** Have capacity to post more this year on social media. Bi-weekly on the agency wide platforms and integrate those with news releases, field work, and events. Share and coordinate communications. Stronger on video and photo content. Program wide meeting – field staff take some videos. Social media team says video is more engaging. Statewide coverage of AIS events, work, and best practices. Viewing it as a pilot project since we haven't done much in the past. Data tracking, positive, negative, engagement, etc. **S. McGrew** will connect with **E. Kenney**. **S. Binsfeld** suggests connecting this with DEI – the value of DNR and working with/for the DNR. Younger people are on those platforms. Free way to spread the message.
- **E. Kenney:** Pilot projects like bait shops. Asking counties to work with one person consistently throughout the fishing season and get to know them and build a relationship. **T. Fitzgerald** says the bait pilot and organisms in trade (OIT) pilot are similar – DNR developed materials and content based on past behavior studies and then provides the material for free to local program managers. We also provide and require basic evaluation, a key part of any behavior change initiative, so that we know what works and what does not. The stores are places where people prefer to receive information, DNR is a trusted messenger, and local program managers are seeking to build relationships in their communities.
- **Action Item:** **T. Fitzgerald** will share the link to the [Observing Boater Actions at Public Water Accesses to Prevent the Spread of Aquatic Invasive Species](#) study. **N. Bluhm** asks if there are plans to do it again in the future. **T. Fitzgerald** says not necessarily, but if we see it as a priority and can get funding, we can do it again. **S. Binsfeld** says doing the pre/post assessment shows that DNR cares and shows transparency to learn and grow. Trust building. **T. Fitzgerald** adds, 94% anglers trust the DNR for invasive species information.
- **G. Husak:** News releases are important, but the landscape is changing. Only local area release for new zebra mussel and starry stonewort discoveries. Still statewide for invasive carp, invasives new to Minnesota, and seasonal messages.
- **G. Husak:** For the counties and AIS Prevention Aid, their role in communications and messaging has been more important than ever. They are making decisions. They know the local reach and what might work in their area. Strength in that. Some people aren't interested in state agency information, so we share locally to push out the same messaging, to have that greater reach and get beyond prejudices.
- **G. Husak:** There are so many other channels! **E. Kenney's** fresh set of eyes with communication expertise is extremely valuable. Ongoing projects is to do a web audit, make sure it is up to date, links are working, and information is not dated. Reach out to **E. Kenney!** Restructuring the look and making it more accessible. If a typical person wouldn't want to read through, build accordions in species pages for instance. What you

should do – creating individual tabs for activities. Easier for average website users. Balance repository with topline information quickly and easily. Species pages were rebuilt for consistency.

- Key partnerships include Mississippi Headwaters Board social media campaign – they have depth of knowledge and skill on this. **S. McGrew** asks, for capacity to connect with the research center, what is it? One FTE for DNR/MAISRC liaison? **G. Husak** says we need to find ways to establish those relationships. Might need to shift priorities. **S. McGrew** says **M. Hayden** is the N magnet, need DNR south magnet. There should be a liaison. **G. Husak** clarifies the program has extensive interactions with MAISRC, he was speaking about communications specifically. **E. Kenney** is working to set up meetings. **S. Binsfeld** says it might just need intention.
- **E. Kenney** is here to support the staff this year. Reach out!

## Ex-Officio Updates

- **A. McGovern:** Most on her plate is invasive carp. Budget package for MICRA (Mississippi Interstate Cooperative Resource Association) includes invasive carp project list with 6 basins. Keep some funds, but most goes to states (\$18 million). MRBP (Mississippi River Basin Panel) – Minnesota engagement for Prussian carp, a risky fish we are looking at with eDNA work in North Dakota and Canada. They are not in the national plan (like the other 4), it is a separate thing, so trying to figure out how funding might work for that. Snakehead surveillance in Missouri – made a jump in range expansion. **D. Jensen** adds the new location is very remote, so managing there might be challenging. **A. McGovern** is talking with others who have managed them. **B. Garcia** asks, how is Illinois Copi program going? **A. McGovern** says they will say it is successful. They are still doing it, federal doesn't get involved. **D. Jensen** adds their program continues to expand, trying to develop markets in other states to allow importation. Silver carp is the most consumed fish in the world. Develop markets and grocery stores. **S. McGrew** asks, you cannot import into Minnesota? **D. Jensen** says that is correct. **A. McGovern** says it is a fine line between facilitating the idea this is a sustainable fishery, we don't want that. **D. Jensen** adds they are shipping back to China. **A. McGovern's** role is making sure we are communicating across the basin, transfer of expertise, knowledge, marketing, etc. They get lots of questions about using fish in different ways, lots of ideas out there. Their funding is for managing fish right now.  
**M. Hayden:** MAISRC researchers are getting ready for summer field season. Selection of research projects will be announced shortly. Based on new funding, the Lab to Lakes position has been filled. Her name is Sarah Unruh. They are working on future strategic planning and have been meeting with other communications units within the U of MN to learn about how their communications works. The purpose is to improve communications and to complement each other. For example, if there is a project that relates to what MAISRC is doing, the desire is to communicate consistently. She would like to explore development of common carp commercial market for arts, food, fertilizer, etc. Based on a tour that she gave yesterday, there is a lot of confusion over what is a common carp versus invasive carp. They have also received inquiries about mystery snails and snakehead. **M. Sorensen** says that the Lab to Lakes event MAISRC hosted last year at Cass County was really good. Discussion turned to communications with other state agencies. **S. McGrew** says that he reached out to State Patrol officer about making sure to communicate the AIS component of laws: 21-d law for docks and lifts. Other agencies like MDA, MPCA, MNDOT move equipment around. **T. Fitzgerald** responds that today's focus is on public communication. **D. Jensen** responds that there is communication between many of the state agencies and organizations including the Minnesota Invasive Species Advisory Council. Most state agencies send representatives to MISAC meetings, except MPCA. So, there is an opportunity for cooperation and collaboration.

## Overview of Minnesota's Community Asset Map (CAM) for AIS Prevention

Tina Fitzgerald, DNR AIS Prevention Planner

- How do we bridge the gap between intention to act and actions? Example: Use of live bait. How do we get anglers to dispose of unwanted bait in the trash so that they do not become an invasive species? All earthworms are invasive to Minnesota. Minnows and bait water may be or may contain invasive species. How do we help them bridge the gap?
- Community-based social marketing (CBSM) is a stepped approach to establish sustainable behaviors long term. It reaches beyond traditional information and outreach campaigns by singling out individual behaviors.
  1. Select discrete behaviors. It's not about trashing bait. It's about disposing of unwanted minnows in the trash. Messages must be very specific. Trashing could mean dumping on the ground or beside the boat, need to be very selective in the messages that are promoted.
  2. Uncover the barriers for those people to take actions. Develop strategies to get around those barriers.
  3. Pilot before implementing them broadly.
  4. Evaluation! Community social marketing is all about evaluation through the entire process.
- DNR took a pathway approach for assessing behaviors in Minnesota. The five main pathways are: 1) Watercraft, 2) Live Bait, 3) Gear and Equipment, 4) Docks and Lifts, 5) Retail and Aquarium Trade. Within these pathways are actions needed around specific behaviors. Evaluated 150 behaviors using expert opinions, the top ten were disposal of live bait, drying gear and equipment for 21 days, and seven related to aquarium and plant trade such as being able to identify invasive species, only installing low risk species, purchasing low risk species, and disposing of plants in the trash.
- So, that is a summary of the DNR's program and how we are prioritizing our work. Watercraft users were not on the top of the list because they are already doing the actions. They are complying with the laws and regulations. Obviously, they are still a priority pathway.
- The next step in the process was to identify existing community resources, programs and people who are conducting work on AIS in Minnesota. This committee was part of this research. We had a facilitated discussion along with DNR staff and counties to brainstorm ideas especially how to reach underserved audiences. DNR contractor compiled this information into a Community Asset Mapping report that was shared with the Committee via email. Over 800 entities were identified.
- Recommendations:
  - Keep spreadsheet of entities updated. Drive for diversity. Developing messages. Statewide there are several recommendations; a handful of those are being implemented. Organisms in trade is an area that DNR has not dove into much but now DNR has an AIS in Commerce staff to focus on. Working with bait dealers, working with other states, non-profits, boat manufacturers, etc. are areas in progress.
  - Local recommendations include: connecting to local gathering places, cultural events, community centers, schools, and continue to engage water recreators and identify AIS influencers. Results of the report suggests that there are many places to help get prevention messages to the public. It showed that DNR is really well-connected. The process really helped define the message including why people have a reason to care about, what kind of information that they are looking for and how people can complete the actions based on discrete behaviors. As trusted sources, managers can

drive social principles. What channels should they use to get the messages out? Conversely, where do audiences get their information? Where do they go most? Go to where they already are. This framework can be applied to any of the audiences that pose risks. The report highlights the many opportunities for DNR to dive deeper. The next step is to prioritize them. Project was funded through federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative and State-Interstate Plan funding.

- The Committee received a link via email to recorded presentation about CBSM if they want more information. This was a very high-level summary of where we are headed.

## Discussion

- **G. Husak** asks when working with CBSM consultant and characterizing those relationships, how did that come together? **T. Fitzgerald** responds that it was the first time this has been tried statewide. Previous work has been conducted at the community level.
- **S. McGrew** recalls that the McKenzie-Mohr workshop held in St. Cloud was one of the most intense events he has been to. McKenzie-Mohr came by to check on our work. Clean, Drain, Dray was not enough! Actions that recommended during the breakout group sessions needed to be very detailed, broken down into all of the steps. **D. Jensen** recalls from the McKenzie-Mohr trainings that he attended in 2000s, as an example: don't say open the door, instead say turn the handle or push the door open. That is what is needed to get those durable actions to be repeatable and sustainable.
- **N. Bluhm** says he looked at 83 counties who receive prevention aid funding. If you took the top 10%, that would be eight counties, how would we prioritize those eight counties? Could it be done based on infested waters? Lack of infested waters? **T. Fitzgerald** asks to clarify: prioritized for communications? **N. Bluhm** says yes. What should be our target? What sort of ranking system can be used? How do you focus? **D. Jensen** says he can partially answer from a historical perspective. When the watercraft inspection program was first established in Minnesota, it was legislatively mandated that 10,000 hours shall performed by watercraft inspectors only at infested waters. It was later revised to 20,000 hours. DNR recognized that there was a lot of redundancy as watercraft inspectors were contacting the same boaters and anglers at the same accesses throughout the summer and for years. The Legislature in turn allowed more and more inspections conducted at uninfested waters; they realized that the pathway is a two-way street.
- **N. Bluhm** says we now have more current information. Information he loads into his tablet includes second destination lakes, information that can be used to adjust our thinking. What are the top eight counties that we should focus on? It is a challenging question. **S. McGrew** says that his Ottertail County Program is the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> largest in the state. His county commissioners authorize him to conduct watercraft inspections at all lakes across the county. Just because a lake has zebra mussels, we do not write them off. That is because there are other AIS of concern including Eurasian watermilfoil, spiny waterfleas, starry stonewort, invasive fishes, and parasites, etc. that he wants to keep out of Ottertail County. Past DNR Commissioner asked if we should prioritize fixing broken things or protect those that are not broken? It's a lot cheaper to do the latter. That is a partial answer that leads to his decision making. **N. Bluhm** asks if it is easier to prevent something from leaving a lake vs preventing something from coming in? **D. Jensen** adds that introductions of AIS can come from many pathways, not just watercraft. All lakes have similar but different pathways for introduction. For example, it is also about shoreland property owners. **B. Garcia** responds that AIS is a statewide problem which requires statewide solutions. Counties are already working with DNR and their partners already, so it is already happening statewide. **N. Bluhm** says the top 75% of the \$10M goes to 19 counties and they have a majority of the infested lakes. **D. Jensen** counters that half of the funding, ~\$5M, goes to the top ten counties.



## Strategic Brainstorm Session

**T. Fitzgerald** emphasizes that our intent is to get as many ideas as possible using online platform called Jam Board. Members were encouraged to get on their electronic devices to create a sticker to post ideas.

### What audiences are we missing? How do we reach them?

Responses: Tourists – especially out-of-state tourists; construction crews; vacation home rental owners; swimmers; People who currently do not engage in aquatic activities; Non-angler water users; cabin renters, VRBOs - not used to lake life living; New Americans; Remote and lesser traveled boat launches; Carp bow hunters; BWCA users; Kids - drill it into them early childhood in school through outreach; Watershed homeowner for example people who live some distance from the lake but their street drains direction into the lake; Unmotorized water redactions user that do not use license equipment; Paddle boards; Kayaks; Scuba; Waterfowl hunters; High school fishing leagues; Outfitters and campgrounds that organize day trips; Utilities and utility contractors; Landscaping companies; Seeding companies; Installers; High school leagues; Remote and less-traveled boat launches; goal to have signage and cleaning tools at every one; Smaller tool stations/budget curated per situation; Charter boats; Sailors, especially yacht clubs; Regatta organizers; High school science teachers/students; Local gov staff who move public docks, and equipment in and out of water bodies; Relator associations.

### What communities or audiences are best engaged at in-person events?

**T. Fitzgerald** provides orientation for this question. We conducted a poll of DNR AIS staff which showed that ten staff attend 150 events per year. Some are going to 60+ events per year including lake association meetings, festivals and fairs, high school events, etc. They are conducting outreach. But, where would we have the best bang for our buck for in-person events? **S. Binsfeld** asks if staff have outreach as a part of their position? **T. Fitzgerald** recommends looking what percent of staff have public outreach as a part of their job responsibilities. All watercraft inspectors conduct public outreach. **T. Fitzgerald** says her, and **D. Jensen's** job responsibilities are 30% outreach. For most, outreach is a subset of staff do; it's really about their capacity which varies between staff and regions.

Responses: Children; People who do not see AIS info elsewhere in their lives; Boat shows; Outdoor shows; Kids; Art festivals; School fishing teams (so they can ask questions and really get more out of the messaging); Fishing tournaments; Culture festivals; Local festivals; Art festivals; Nature center's educational programs; New anglers; Lake associations; Senior citizens; Children; New Americans; Events with opportunity to hold, touch, see AIS (making the words tangible); People who are cynical/not supportive of the DNR; In-person events offer the opportunity to have an actual two-sided conversation with them; Holiday parades; Colleges; Universities; Tech schools; Larger Aquatennial event; Families; Job fairs.

### Discussion

- **D. Jensen** says specimens are important as an attractant during public events. **S. Binsfeld** has used specimens that attracted visitors.
- **S. McGrew** reached 500 kids at a utility/safety event first week of May.
- **B. Garcia** suggests labor union events that reach 80 – 500 people or job fair reaching 1,000 people, booths of every kind, cultural event, food.
- **S. Binsfeld** says Elk River has an event, but SWCD has nothing there; missing opportunity with a ton of people on the lake, but it is a challenge to staff.

- **T. Fitzgerald** adds that weekends are challenging for DNR staff. AIS specialists cover 15-20 counties, so that is challenging too. How and where do we prioritize our time and effort? **S. McGrew** asks if there is flex time? Comp time? He has limited time so uses flex time - can't work over 80 hours/week. **D. Jensen** says DNR staff and their supervisors approach things differently. **T. Fitzgerald** also says that there are also union labor agreement issues that come into play here. **S. McGrew** asks if there is any talk about allowing for flex hours? **T. Fitzgerald** says that we can look into this.
- **S. Binsfeld** suggests that there may be ways for DNR staff to better interact with the AIS Detectors, MAISAC, etc. to provide AIS outreach support. Based on experience at booths, **M. Sorensen** is not getting highly technical questions, more general questions, like how fast can zebra mussels reproduce, how fast do they grow. Maybe put together a list of 50 most asked questions. **M. Sorensen** mentions use of volunteers at State Fair booth. **T. Fitzgerald** adds that DNR invites AIS Detectors to help at the State Fair. DNR uses a volunteer management system. We can look into how to use the AIS Detectors better. **D. Jensen** says that when he secured booth space for multi-day events, he would invite all the partners in the Duluth area all the way to Cook County (~13) to sign up for time slots to help staff booths. Over the course of each summer, we were able to have staff at 15-20 events, which educated thousands of visitors. This was mutually beneficial to all involved and really helped get the word out. He says he usually only needed to fill the first and last slot (~4 hr) to set up and tear down booths on first and last days. To the best of his knowledge, staff from other organizations all used flex time to allow them to help staff on weekends.
- **S. Binsfeld** says asking the question spurs thoughts - what about the metrics template? 63 of 83 counties report but many are small programs. Maybe pressure neighboring counties or work with AIS Detectors to partner to staff booths. Is there a question that can be asked about which community events they attend? What are the missed opportunities? **T. Fitzgerald** says the current metrics get at some of this including number of events and number of people reached. Some of the county programs are very small and do not have capacity. Some local AIS coordinators have 5% of their time dedicated to AIS.

### What are the high priority messages for social media, videos, newsletters, and signage?

**T. Fitzgerald** suggest that we focus on social media and videos. What 20 second videos would be helpful to post on the DNR's website and social media?

Responses: Field notes – staff take short videos in field; AIS identification; Commonly missed places where AIS can hide on watercraft/trailers; Bait handling – either disposing or the reuse procedures – extra water left in cooler in vehicle; Team with marginalized community influencers - ton social media info projects; Positive messages on how prevention is slowing the spread; Watch science happening; Multi-lingual versions of AIS videos; Before and after images; Job recruitment to people that are outside of the natural resource education ex: Eric!; Local celebrities doing AIS prevention; Signage – never seen an AIS sign at a beach/lakeside park without a boat ramp or at popular shoreside fishing locations; Anything with highest positive messages such as: AIS victory stories; how high compliance rates are, etc.; humor; Proper ways to decontaminate your boat; Behind the scenes; How to use tool stations/CD3 stations; K9s searching ice fishing gear for AIS; Videos showing; Spencer – how to dispose bait/reuse.

### Discussion

- **Erika Gilsdorf** produced a series of videos. **T. Fitzgerald** says those videos are posted on the DNR's website. Examples viewed. A new series is planned for this year. She is not sure if DNR shares other people's content on social media or if it is just DNR content on our page. **G. Husak** responds that DNR will occasionally repost content from elsewhere. Everything is checked out pretty carefully.

- **T. Fitzgerald** comments that DNR struggles to post on social media. **G. Husak** says Fisheries recently posted a video of fish from a hatchery coming out of a tube into a lake which generated 2.2M views. If you look at DNR's Facebook page, you will see many more videos than before. Whether viewing videos causes viewers to do something is not known.
- **T. Fitzgerald** asks if members liked the use of this platform (Jam Board) to generate ideas? Yes, members liked it because it allowed more voices to be heard. Please let us know if you have any ideas on how we can be more engaging.
- **S. McGrew** says one of the barriers for anglers who want to keep bait is that they are not bringing water from home and leave in their vehicle. Need content that shows anglers how to exchange and replace bait water would be good. That is the biggest heartburn - being able to re-use leftover bait. **D. Jensen** says that when he has done events, many visitors said that the DNR told them that they couldn't re-use bait. **S. McGrew** says we need something like Myth Buster Mondays. **B. Garcia** says: couldn't the bait shops help with this? Maybe anglers could get extra water for their bait.
- **C. Brandt** says it should be shown on every fishing show, a montage of guy launching a boat. What about sponsoring some of the more influential professional anglers to promote during their shows; show them cleaning off their boat, draining water, etc. **D. Jensen** adds that fishing ambassadors have been used in TV ads including Babe Winkleman, Al Linder, Ron Shara, Scott and Marty Glorvigan, others. **T. Fitzgerald** says a handful of counties support ads on Linder's Angling Buzz **A. Weberg** pays for ads.

## Next Steps on Communications

**T. Fitzgerald** asks, how does this committee want to recommend suggestions? How does this committee influence what the DNR does? There are a lot of ways to make recommendations to the DNR. This meeting is one way. It can also be emails to **K. Pennington** and/or **D. Jensen** and **T. Fitzgerald**, other invasive species staff, letters to our division director, commissioner, or legislature – lots of ways to provide recommendations. **T. Fitzgerald** and **D. Jensen** will try better track recommendations and outcomes. For DNR communications, are there any high-level recommendations? It could be formal through a motion process or more informal ways. It is a conversation we want to have. Moving forward, how does the committee want to handle recommendations? Using motions is a good way, because it allows us to document agreement and disagreement – there does not need to be consensus. This discussion makes **S. Binsfeld** think of SMART goals. We have gathered a lot of information here. Are there 1-3 goals we want to focus on? Then, let's see if meet those goals. Then, decide how we want to share that information.

**S. McGrew motions that DNR staff review the suggestions made today, identify some priority areas that they have the capacity to work on, determine what is feasible, and bring those back to the committee.** Based on what the committee approves, that gives DNR staff a "backbone" to work on communications and outreach to work toward those goals. **B. Garcia** seconds. Discussion: **S. Binsfeld** suggests two specific things that we wish to have accomplished. **T. Fitzgerald** suggests developing goals and strategies based on discussion today. **G. Husak** adds that these sort of things would pass through the division directors to the commissioner's office for their perspectives too. **S. McGrew** says then we need the "what, where, when and who" to develop the goals and strategies that will be used to improve communications. **S. Binsfeld** recommends that we want this by August. **Motion passes unanimously.**

**S. Binsfeld motions to investigate an opportunity to bring on a staff member through grants, etc. for 2-3 years to develop a relationship with the "other" category i.e., non-traditional underserved AIS-related audiences and not traditionally served by DNR.** **M. Tajbakhsh** seconds. Discussion: **B. Garcia** does recall seeing a plan to

reach out to marginalized communities. He is sure that there must be one but does not remember seeing it here. **G. Husak** says that it is not explicit in what has been presented. Along with the language access initiative that is underway, there is a concurrent diversity, equity and inclusion effort which includes the DNR Office of Communications and Outreach, and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Office working together. More explicit guidance is forthcoming. It is a very important part that we do not have yet. **B. Garcia** asks what is the timeframe? **G. Husak** says this has been worked on for over a year but because of attrition and other things being worked on in the Commissioner's Office, we are not there yet. Maybe in the 12-18 months is realistic. **B. Garcia** suggests an update on progress at our next meeting in August. **T. Fitzgerald** suggests having staff from the DEI Office speak to this committee at one of the fall meetings. **G. Husak** adds that needs from existing staff is greater than anyone expected – we recognize the urgency but also the need to do this right. There are steps and layers that are being taken to get us in the best position possible. **S. Binsfeld** says that those relationships will need to be built. Let's pilot study this to see how it could possibly happen, not fully within DNR, aligning with DNR is already doing, but just regarding AIS. **G. Husak** says it is easy to make assumptions about who is in the 3-5%. **T. Fitzgerald** emphasizes that is just for boater and anglers, one segment of the population. We should expect a wide array of answers including "not at this time." **S. Binsfeld** says the purpose of this motion is to give them a backbone – it has been brought up by this committee and we would like to investigate this. If we get a letter back saying that DNR is working this, that would be great to know that this has been made priority. **G. Husak** says that it is one thing if they hear it from staff, it is another if they hear it from you – it carries some weight. **Motion passes unanimously.**

**S. Binsfeld** emphasizes that this discussion will continue. She says that we can add future motions that you would be added to future meetings. She thanks DNR staff for pulling all of this together – we were very successful today because of it.

**B. Garcia** asks if there is a Teams chat to discuss more informally? **T. Fitzgerald** says we are working on setting up a SharePoint platform and does not know if a forum aspect is offered. All meeting materials will be posted there. Eventually, there will be Teams channel to discuss specific topics that can be offered for use by outside organizations like this one. Timeline for availability is unknown.

## Member Updates

- **S. McGrew:** Their watercraft inspection program is starting May 13 with a total of 25 inspectors - 20 inspectors returning and five new hires. As many as possible tool station signs will be installed. Rinse station that pumped lake water that got shut down was recently converted to groundwater. City will test the water for proper pressure next week. It can be used for bait saving, rinsing down boat, gear, trailer, flushing live wells, etc. Planning to build more at two other sites.
- **S. Binsfeld:** Company is adding more staff and doing more surveying.
- **M. Tajbakhsh:** Is a member of the BIPOC Twin Cities Outdoors group which has over 2,900 members. If there is something that you would like to bring forward, please let him know. **S. Binsfeld** says it would be good to know what they know about AIS and where they get their information, what are their trusted sources? **D. Jensen** says that those are really good questions, but it can be split into two parts: 1) Where are they getting their information? and 2) What are the best sources to reach you? What types of channels do they use? **S. Binsfeld** says that people respond to "Clean Water." **D. Jensen** responds that maybe the first question to ask is how important is clean water to them? Followed by a second question concerning their attitudes towards AIS. How are AIS important to you? Then, the source questions.

- **B. Garcia** says he has been involved in field surveys related to nanobubble installations. Maybe work with MAISRC to look at impacts on veligers and zebra mussels as a deterrent at boat ramps. Interest is really growing. In the Tri-Lakes District, impacts on cyanobacteria has been dramatic.
- **C. Brandt** says Jeff Forester reached out about work on Stop Starry Project, a brainstorm on how to reach fishing community in west central Minnesota, how to get people to use station tools, basically create a culture and make these systems worth their while. Could there be a specific person, events for public outreach? MN Bass Facebook page was mentioned. Michaela, former member of this committee, has great insights on this. He connected Michaela and Jeff on the idea that many of the larger boat launches are being addressed, but what about the smaller, more remote ones? Can we get stations at all launches? This would reach everyone regardless of where. **S. McGrew** says that what he is doing. **B. Garcia** asks do those have to go out on bid? **S. McGrew** says it depends on the agency and the amount to be purchased. If under \$50k, do not need bids. **C. Brandt**: circle back to CBSM, tools are now at every landing, common things to use now which boaters will get used to seeing and using.
- **N. Bluhm** says he has ordered over 350 tool stations including 150 Aqua weed sticks. Also submitted LCCMR proposal which received a positive response. There are 200 tool stations installed in Cass County. He has signed up for upcoming MAISRC AIS Detector workshop in Hackensack.

## Discussion Time for Committee

- August meeting topics:
  - **D. Jensen** mentions that he has been in contact with **A. McGovern**, who has agreed to try to attend more meetings, send a designee and/or provide written updates for our minutes so that we can keep up on the important work they are doing. She has volunteered at the August meeting to provide an update on U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's AIS Program, which is largely focused on invasive carp.
  - DNR Budget: Recommendations, when is the timing right? What does the committee want prioritized? **Action Item: T. Fitzgerald** and **D. Jensen** will look into that.
  - Letters of Recommendation: **S. Binsfeld** would like to move forward on this. **B. Garcia** agrees that we should use this platform to help do good things. Words can turn into action and dollars. **S. McGrew** asks if anyone from the committee led testimony with the Legislature? No. Only past member has been Jeff Forester in his role with Minnesota Lakes and Rivers Advocates.

Motion to adjourn by **S. McGrew**, seconded by **M. Tajbakhsh**.

**Adjourned 2:38 PM. Next Meeting to be held ONLINE August 22, 2024.**