Nebraska Invasive Species Council

Meeting Agenda

August 14, 2026

Ogallala Aquifer Conference Room, NE Department of Agriculture, 245 Fallbrook Blvd, Lincoln, NE 68521

Zoom Meeting Link: https://unl.zoom.us/j/92139027068 **| Meeting ID:** 921 03902 7068

Voting Members Present:

Natalia Bjorklund
Steven Jara
Justin King
Joshua Nelson
Dennis Schroeder
Dr. Jonathan Spurgeon
Kristopher Stahr
John Thorburn
Kim Todd
Cheryl Dunn

Voting Members Absent:

Jonathan Nikkila
Kimberly Stuhr

Non-Voting Members Present:

Travis Connot
Justin Krahulik

Non-Voting Members Absent:

Chris Helzer
Ritch Nelson

Advisory Support Members/Guests Present:

Braymond Adams

Carson Jones
Keith Koupal
Heidi McMaster
Ryker Starr
Gary Stone
TJ Walker

1. Call to order – Stahr called the meeting to order at 10:01 AM CST

2. Introductions

3. Approval of May Meeting Minutes Stahr motioned to approve the meeting minutes, Spurgeon seconded, motion carried.

4. Agenda:

Member Changes – Natalia Bjorklund now holds the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) acting voting member seat as Trevor Johnson vacated his position at NDA in mid-July this year.

Cheryl Dunn has applied to the governor's office for the University of Nebraska – Lincoln Voting Member seat and is awaiting confirmation from the governor's office. Dunn has more than 17 years of experience in grassland ecology and is currently the Grassland Herbarium Curator at UNL, where she also teaches plant ID. Her graduate work focused on old world bluestems and she is currently President of the Nebraska Section of the Society of Range Management.

Landowner Member At-Large Voting Member seat is still vacant. Members agreed that while filling vacancy was most important, it may be ideal to find a landowner from the Sandhills region due to low area representation on the Council. Paugels to follow-up on provided contacts.

Website Updates - Species profiles on the Council website have been completed, and members can send any suggested edits to Paugels as they encounter them. Paugels also requested that members send resources to add to the Get Involved/Resources section of the website including events, articles, newsletters, or work that Council members would like to highlight.

"Invasive Species of the Month" on the website homepage will continue. Please send suggestions to Paugels if you would like anything highlighted. September species will be purple loosestrife per Todd's suggestion.

Review of Council Survey and Upcoming Priorities – Paugels reviewed the Council feedback survey that she had sent at the beginning of the summer. Survey showed that Council generally agreed that priority items included policymaker engagement and education/outreach. Suggested changes to Council by members included increasing member engagement and changing meeting locations/times. Members agreed that meeting dates should remain on second Friday of the month, but discussed designating two months of the year in which to hold one meeting in Central Nebraska and another in Western Nebraska.

Paugels then reviewed the 2025-2027 Adaptive Management Plan action items and identified which action items had been accomplished, and which had yet to be started.

- Action Item 1.3: Maintaining a database of statues, regulations, and legislation related to invasive species in Nebraska.
    - Council discussed that this should remain an internal reference document for Council members, and that legal questions should still be directed to appropriate authorities rather than answered by other Council members. Suggestions included consulting legal counsel during creation of database and formatting into a flow chart. A workgroup will be considered to develop the database and compile resources.
- Action Item 2.1: Provide a comprehensive annual report on invasive species activities in Nebraska
    - Paugels envisions developing suggestions that are concrete and action-invoking to include in both annual report and adaptive management plan, which has not been completed in previous years.
- Action Item 2.3: Invite policymakers and staff to council meetings or informational sessions hosted by the Council.
    - Paugels stated that there are currently no studies or proposals relevant to invasive species, but this may change when session starts in January. Members discussed potentially hosting an annual event to provide invasive species information to Legislature, similar to the February 2026 senator's breakfast held by Council and Nebraska Conservation Roundtable.
- Action Item 3.2: Facilitate outreach and education
    - Paugels thought that this was an ongoing action item that the Council had a good start on but should continue to work on as many identified education and outreach as a Council priority in the feedback survey. Paugels suggested that there should be discussion about whether the

Council wanted to host a 2027 Nebraska Invasive Species Awareness Week and how we can better partner within and outside of the Council to expand education/outreach efforts. Paugels also suggested the creation of an Education and Outreach Committee on the Council since this was a priority for many members.
    - Members discussed that individual education/outreach completed by Council members were often resulting directly from Council efforts, and that collaborative Council education efforts were also important to increase Council awareness.
- Action Item 3.4: Identify information and funding gaps in invasive species control, management and prevention
    - Paugels stated that this would be a large project that would likely require both Council-wide involvement and discussion to determine the goals of this project and what information would be valuable as well as a dedicated workgroup to gather information, develop a plan to achieve pre-determined goals, and enact aforementioned plan.
    - Members suggested looking into how other states dispersed funds for invasive species issues and programs.

Council discussed the development of Council bylaws and committees. Members discussed that, without definitive objectives or action items, committees may be unnecessary but that the development of committees may also increase member engagement and promote action.

Council also discussed that action items may be difficult to evaluate quantitatively and that overall Council was on a good trajectory to accomplishing action items outline in 2025-2027 Adaptive Management Plan.

Spurgeon suggested that Paugels should summarize action items into a one-page report and have Council members indicate priority levels of each. Paugels will send out summary and request priority indications before September meeting.

Paugels requested additional input or comments regarding how Council would like to continue. Nelson suggested that priorities should continue to focus on ensuring that the public and Legislature knows that the Council exists and is here to answer questions and provide information. Dunn suggested that Council and members could present at Nebraska Natural Resource Conference in Kearney October 27-29th. Paugels tentatively agreed to present on behalf of Council and requested that members send topic suggestions to her **before proposal deadline of September 9th.**

Members discussed continuing to invite speakers and agreed that speakers were valuable, especially when those speakers were tied to a meeting location that allowed for a valuable tour or field trip. Paugels will try to schedule a guest speaker quarterly. Paugels requested a topic for the next guest speaker and suggested new world screwworm. Bjorklund offered to give talk on new world screwworm. Members also agreed that the invasive species round-up was a valuable resource and Paugels will begin sending round-up monthly.

2026 Annual Report - Paugels requested volunteers for the 2026 Annual Report workgroup as report is due December 15th. Stahr volunteered, Nelson volunteered as back-up. Please contact Jena if you would like to join this workgroup.

New World Screwworm Open Discussion – Spurgeon asked if the Council had been contacted regarding the Nebraska New World Screwworm Taskforce and Paugels replied that she had not received anything. Bjorklund informed that the Nebraska Department of Agriculture Entomology Program had also not been contacted.

Bjorklund informed that new world screwworm entered through wounds on mammals and was considered a significant threat to the cattle industry. New world screwworm had been eradicated from the United States until confirmed report in Texas in January. Currently, the infestation has been reduced to four active cases and threat to Nebraska's cattle industry is perceived to be low.

Member/Supporter Updates:

Kim Todd - Backyard Farmer has shorts available still, but segments have all been filled. Contact Todd at ktodd2@unl.edu if interested in promoting any messaging via shorts. Backyard Farmer season ends in September.

Travis Connot – Grant to be submitted to Nebraska Environmental Trust to spray invasive plants along Niobrara River Corridor.

Gary Stone – Nebraska Extension hosted series of webinars regarding invasive species management on rangelands, which required paid registration. Stone to see if webinars will become available to public free-of-charge.

T.J. Walker - Eastern red cedar removal efforts continue across the state. Removal project nearly completed at Merritt Reservoir WMA and SRA; considering submitting a Nebraska Environmental Trust grant for projects at surrounding areas. Starting to make efforts to control cheatgrass in the Panhandle and southwest portion of the state.

Braymond Adams - No updates to share aside from excited to be at first Council meeting!

John Thorburn – No updates from the NRD. However, Thorburn was in neighborhood of emerald ash borer (EAB) infestation in Kearney and noted that he saw no ash trees present when visiting, indicating that the community may be aggressively managing the problem. Thorburn was also on a Cody Park tour during which the park superintendent was unaware of four dying ash trees identified by the tour group as being affected by EAB. Thorburn noted that many of the group were south-central Nebraska landowners who were interested in grassland management and health.

Cheryl Dunn - Weeds of the Great Plains books are free and many are available. Please contact Dunn if interested in copies. Old world bluestem identified at Southeast High School in Lincoln. Dunn has received reports on Caucasian and yellow bluestem in Nebraska, as well. Education trunks about grassland biomes are available at NE Game and Parks locations across the state and are geared towards middle and high school students but are adaptable for elementary students. Dunn is open to including Council materials in these trunks. 7th grade students to visit UNL East Campus in spring 2027, presenters from Council welcome.

Jonathan Spurgeon – Co-op continues to seek pathways for funding invasive carp research and is pursuing some federal pathways through NE Game and Parks. Co-op will begin transitioning away from research and increase focus on removal efforts statewide. Students are finishing carp movement research studies this year and co-op received a grant to extend project throughout the fall to increase receival in the Platte.

Ryker Starr - No updates.

Carson Jones - The Pollinator Program has been active and many pollinator surveys have been conducted. A grant from the Federal Highway Program has been awarded to build a comprehensive pollinator program across state agencies with invasive species control a crucial element of this program. A consultant will be hired to develop invasive species management protocols. The Natural Resources Conservation Service conducted a private burn in the Sandhills that was conducted up to the road to burn eastern red cedar trees in the right of way.

Justin Krahulik – US Geological Survey folks would be happy to present in front of the Council and have available meeting space, if desired.

Justin King – Cooper Nuclear Station has a year-round fisheries study via a hired consultant for which they are taking zebra mussel veliger samples to analyze. There has

been a significant increase of veligers from the beginning of the year (0 veligers) to present (40,000 veligers).

Josh Nelson – NWCA quarterly training took place last week during which Paugels presented a Council update. A professor from UNO is conducting microorganism monitoring pre and post herbicide application at Fontenelle wetland as a partnership with Sarpy County. Last week, helicopter surveys were performed to determine spray areas along the lower Platte (spray costs shared between Sarpy County and landowners); main channels remain open but floodplains are being lost to invasive weeds. Elkhorn River has many sandbars overtaken by phragmites. Recently gave a presentation and had quality Q&A with the Master Gardeners Association.

Natalia Bjorklund – Nursery inspections, surveys, and trapping continues and will remain consistent through September.

Kristopher Stahr – Approximately 300 attendees were at Know Your Nebraska Invasives Day during NE Invasive Species Awareness Week. AIS Program received first ever report of Asian swamp eels caught live at Holmes Lake in Lincoln. Subsequent surveying did not find any eels and no further reports have come in. Grace Dowding appointed new AIS Program biologist in June. Hybrid and Eurasian watermilfoil treatments conducted at Hershey, Chappell, Cottonmill, and Bufflehead lakes with one more treatment planned for this fall. Thus far, 7,000 watercraft inspections have been conducted statewide, the second highest ever conducted. Several boats with zebra mussels attached have been found. Early detection efforts continue through monthly zebra mussel veliger sampling and analysis of 50-60 public waterbodies; all samples have been negative thus far. Approximately 20 aquatic plant surveys have been conducted statewide and 1 new brittle naiad infestation was identified at Zorinsky.

Steven Jara – Nebraska Forest Fest is on September 11th at 4pm. About 1 million acres in Nebraska have been affected by forest fires. 96% of forest fire resources are currently deployed nationwide, meaning fewer resources are available in the event of an emergency in Nebraska. State Forester John Erickson is retiring at the end of August.

Heidi McMaster – Bureau of Reclamation is developing an invasive species strategic plan. FY27 spend plan for aquatic invasive species projects is likely to be heavily focused on golden mussel projects, including potential development of a golden mussel management plan.

Keith Koupal - Egg drift study for invasive carp has been changed to a dye study that should be completed this fall. NE Game and Parks has approved an invasive carp removal team consisting of three individuals that should be on the ground next year.

5. Next Meeting Date – Friday, September 11th, 10am-12pm at the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

6. Goals/Objectives for Next Meeting
    a. Review Council member selected priority action items

7. Adjourn – Kristopher Stahr adjourned the meeting at 11:51 AM CST.