



Nebraska Invasive Species Council

Meeting Minutes

February 14, 2025

USDA APHIS

In-Person: USDA APHIS, 5940 S 58th St, Lincoln, NE 68516

Online: Microsoft Teams (link available in Microsoft Outlook calendar invite)

Meeting ID: 297 116 009 55 | **Passcode:** B6CY6vF3

Voting Members Present:

Steven Jara
Trevor Johnson
Justin King
Josh Nelson
Dennis Schroeder
John Thorburn
Kim Todd

Voting Members Absent:

Jon Nikkila
Jon Spurgeon
Kris Stahr
Kim Stuhr

Non-Voting Members Present:

Chris Helzer
Justin Krahulik
David Nielsen

Non-Voting Members Absent:

Travis Connot

Advisory Support Members Present:

Jeremy Gehle
Carson Jones
Bret Schomer
Gary Stone
James Thiele

Advisory Support Members Absent:

Natalia Bjorklund
Lorri Grueber
Kassie Karssen
Mitch Renteria
T.J. Walker

Guests Present:

Sam Cowan
Brent Meyer
Jena Paugels
Blayne Renner
Craig Romary
Rob Schultz

1. Call to order – Johnson called the meeting to order at 10:04 AM CST.
2. Review and approval of [January 2025 Meeting Minutes](#) – Schroeder moved to approve the minutes, King seconded, motion carried.
3. [NE-ISAW Proclamation Final Draft Approval](#) – Paugels asking for amendments to the final draft of the Nebraska Invasive Species Awareness Week proclamation to submit to the Governor’s Office, mainly the numbers provided in the document (i.e., number of invasive species) to verify they are correct.

NE-ISAW will take place from May 26-30, 2025, and will plan to feature a webinar each day during the afternoon or evening on different invasive species issues in Nebraska. Would like to plan for at least one in-person event to take place on Saturday, May 31, 2025 to close out NE-ISAW. Council members who are interested in hosting a webinar should reach out to Paugels or Smith, who are organizing events. Target audience is the public, specifically Nebraskans who will begin doing outdoor activities, such as hiking and boating, to raise awareness about “[Clean,](#)

[Drain, Dry](#)” and [“Play, Clean, Go”](#) practices. Interested in organizing a webinar with the [Pet Advocacy Network](#) on the [“Don’t Let It Loose”](#) campaign, which urges the public not to release pets or other nonnative/exotic animals into the wild. Putting together a list of organizations in Nebraska that can take in surrendered pets and/or nonnative/exotic animals as a resource for the NISC website.

4. NISC Mission Statement – Smith requested meeting attendees spend three minutes writing down words and/or phrases that could be used for the Council’s mission statement. Smith collected all documents and will compile a final list of mission statement options that members and supporters can use or select from to draft a final mission statement at the next council meeting in March.
5. Invasive Species News Roundup – Smith will restart sending out the monthly Invasive Species News Roundup email in March. March’s news roundup will include a recap of invasive species-related news events from January and February.
6. Education Opportunities – Smith and Nelson will appear on KZUM 89.3 Lincoln’s [“How’s It Growin’”](#) on October 1, 2025. Smith is receiving emails for upcoming STEAM nights at Lincoln elementary schools via the NISC official email account and inquired whether any council members or supporters have interest/capacity in participating. Schomer requested Smith forward the emails to him in case USACE can attend. NARD will also be hosting its annual Water Jamboree at Harlan County Reservoir from April 28-29, 2025, and requested any council members or supporters interested in participating reach out to Thorburn. Johnson will reach out to Twin Valley WMA to see if they can attend as they are in the area.
7. Council Member/Supporter Updates:

Gehle – Governor Pillen testified before the Nebraska Legislature’s Natural Resources Committee in favor of [LB317](#) to merge the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) with the Department of Environment and Energy (DEE) on February 13, 2025. Senator Tom Brandt [introduced LB317](#) at the Governor’s request. There were 28 opponents and 2 proponents.

Helzer – The Nature Conservancy will host four plant identification and habitat workshops in 2025, two at the Platte River Prairies in Wood River, NE on 6/8 and 8/12 and two at Niobrara Valley Preserve in Johnstown, NE on 6/3 and 8/19. Please reach out if you would like to sign up for one of the workshops or receive more information.

Jara – Nebraska Forest Service is in pre-fire season. Hired two additional staff members that will start in March, one will be stationed in western NE, the other will work out of Lincoln.

Johnson – Nebraska Department of Agriculture is hiring a [Noxious Weed Inspector](#) that will close on March 6, 2025. Pay is between ~\$17.00-~\$20.00/hour, depending on experience and qualifications. Four weed management areas received funding from the Nebraska Environmental Trust grant program this year: Panhandle, Southwest, Twin Valley, and Sandhills.

King – Attended the Nebraska chapter’s annual meeting for the American Fisheries Society in Aurora, NE on February 11-12, 2025. Will also be attending the [Nebraska chapter’s annual meeting for The Wildlife Society](#) on February 25-27, 2025 in Kearney, NE.

Krahulik – Kansas Water Science Center and Nebraska Water Science Center merged to form Central Plains Water Science Center. Financially the merger will not be complete until fiscal year 2025. Brenda Densmore is now the Associate Director for Hydrologic Investigations for Central Plains.

Meyer – Attended hearing in favor of [LB145](#) – Require the Director of Agriculture to administer a grant program relating to noxious weeds and restate intent regarding appropriations for vegetation management on January 28, 2025. Currently the bill faces no opposition. Lancaster County is looking to fill several temporary noxious weed technician positions. Positions pay \$20.52/hour with work hours from 7:30 am – 4:00 pm Monday through Friday. Email if you would like more information.

J. Nelson – Attended the NWCA Annual Conference from February 3-5, 2025, in Kearney, NE.

Nielsen – USDA APHIS currently has no seasonals, may not be able to hire any for the summer due to the [Executive Order signed on February 11, 2025](#), by President Trump implementing the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) workforce optimization initiative. The Executive Order has limited federal hiring to essential positions.

Paugels – Nebraska Game and Parks Commissions’ AIS Program is still seeking two 3-month seasonal watercraft inspectors for Norfolk and Kearney. A flyer for the position is available [here](#).

Renner – Jim Macy was [appointed to EPA Region 7 Administrator](#) on February 6, 2025.

Stone – UNL’s Dr. Mitch Stephenson held a meeting on January 22, 2025, for ranchers, industry professionals, and government agencies to determine a management outline for cheatgrass in NE’s Panhandle region. A follow-up meeting will be held later, will let the Council know when it is scheduled.

Thorburn – Testified in favor of [LB145](#) – Require the Director of Agriculture to administer a grant program relating to noxious weeds and restate intent regarding appropriations for vegetation management on January 28, 2025. The bill was introduced on January 13 by Senator Ibach. Tree and shrub orders are now available through Nebraska’s Natural Resources Districts through the [Conservation Tree Program](#).

Todd – New Backyard Farmer season will begin in six weeks. BYF content team is meeting once a week. For any invasive species-related topics for BYF, please send an email.

8. Presentation: [Monarch Butterfly Conservation Updates With Endangered Species Listing](#) – Mercy Manzanares, Program Coordinator, Monarch Joint Venture

Key Takeaways:

- [Final endangered species listing decision for the monarch butterfly](#) will be determined in December 2025
- Listing is currently in the 90-day comment period, seeking public comments from infrastructure managers on exceptions for the use of pesticides
- [Monarch CCAA](#) – conservation agreement with assurances developed in 2017
- Counties can enroll in CCAA if monarch is still a candidate species for 4(d)

9. Next meeting date – Friday, March 14, 2025, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm CST – Audubon Rowe Sanctuary, 44450 Elm Island Rd, Gibbon, NE 68840, featuring presentation from Cody Wagner, Conservation Program Manager, on effects of invasive riparian vegetation on sandhill crane roosting habitat along Platte River.

10. Goals/objectives for next meeting:

- a. Avian influenza speaker for April – Resolved: Kevin O’Neill, DVM, MS – USDA APHIS
- b. Review NISC mission statement options, select new NISC mission statement

11. Adjourn – Johnson adjourned the meeting at 12:05 PM CST, King seconded, motion carried.