



Nebraska Invasive Species Council

Meeting Minutes

April 12, 2024

Lower Platte South Natural Resources District

3125 Portia St, Lincoln, NE 68521

In-Person and Virtual

Voting Members Present:

Steven Jara
Trevor Johnson
Justin King
Brent Meyer
Jonathan Nikkila
Kevin Pope
Dennis Schroeder
Kris Stahr
Kim Stuhr
John Thorburn

Voting Members Absent:

Craig Allen
Kim Todd

Non-Voting Members Present:

Natalia Bjorklund
Jeremy Gehle
Kassie Karssen
Ritch Nelson
Mitch Renteria
Bret Schoner
TJ Walker

Non-Voting Members Absent:

Lorri Grueber
Chris Helzer

Mike Koenig
Justin Krahulik
David Nielsen
Gary Stone
Jennifer Weisbrod

Guests Present:

Scott Erthum
Josh Nelson
Rob Schultz
Jonathan Spurgeon
James Thiele

1. Call to order – Meyer called the meeting to order at 10:10 am CST.
2. Review and Approval of March 8, 2024 Meeting Minutes – Meyer moved to approve the minutes, Johnson second, motion carried.
3. NISC Meeting Schedule Survey Results – Smith reviewed the results from the NISC Meeting Schedule Survey sent out to all voting and non-voting councilmembers via Qualtrics. Sixteen individuals responded to the survey with the following results:

Meeting Frequency: Monthly (31%), Quarterly (38%), Between 8-10 times/year - somewhere between quarterly and monthly (1%)

Day of the Week: Monday (31%), Tuesday (44%), Wednesday (38%), Thursday (50%), Friday (69%)

Time of Day: Between 8 am and 10 am (19%), Between 10 am and 12 pm (75%), Between 12 pm and 2 pm (56%), Between 4 pm and 6 pm (6%)

Length of Time: 45 minutes (6%), 1 hour (56%), 2 hours (44%)

Meeting Attendance During Summer (June-August): Can attend (81%), Might be able to attend (6%)

Based on the survey results, the council will maintain current meeting schedule through May 2024 and take a two-month meeting break in June 2024 and July 2024 before meetings resume in August 2024. The break will allow the Adaptive Management Plan Work Group and Annual Report Work Group to focus on completing the 2024 Adaptive Management Plan and 2024 Annual Report. During the break, council members can forward any pertinent updates to Smith via email to distribute to the rest of the council. Members who have not yet completed the survey can email Smith if they want to provide meeting schedule feedback. Council

members agreed on the meeting plan moving forward.

4. NISC Member Feedback Survey – Smith provided council members with a draft of the NISC Member Feedback Survey that will be distributed via email to all voting and non-voting council members. Members reviewed the survey with no further updates or additions. Smith will distribute the survey via email to NISC members on Monday, April 15, 2024. Members have until Friday, May 3, 2024, to complete the survey. Smith will go over the results at the following NISC meeting on Friday, May 10, 2024.
5. Adaptive Management Work Group – Three council members volunteered to serve on the work group: Trevor Johnson, Kris Stahr, and Justin King. Smith is seeking 1-2 additional members to be involved in the work group. The Adaptive Management Plan Work Group will meet approximately 2-4 hours per month from April 2024 to August 2024 to collaborate, plan, write, and edit the 2024 Adaptive Management Plan. The work group will meet briefly after today’s meeting to determine their first meeting.

Several members indicated potential interest in serving on the Annual Report Work Group, which included Dennis Schroeder, Steven Jara, Gary Stone, Justin King, and Trevor Johnson. Smith inquired if any of those individuals who are not currently signed up to serve on the Adaptive Management Work Group would be interested in assisting there instead, in which Jara volunteered.

6. Annual Report Work Group – Four council members volunteered to serve on the work group: John Thorburn, Kris Stahr, David Nielsen, and Brent Meyer. The work group will meet approximately 2-4 hours per month from June 2024 to October 2024 to collaborate, plan, write, and edit the 2024 Annual Report. Smith will contact members via email in May 2024 to schedule the first meeting date for June 2024.
7. 2025 Weed Watch List – Smith provided current copies of the 2024 Weed Watch List, used by all county weed superintendents for voluntary submission to the Nebraska Department of Agriculture by January 31 of each year. The Nebraska Weed Control Association discussed the current list at their Spring 2024 Training on March 27 in Kearney, in which Johnson brought up the lack of list submission consistency from superintendents each year. Many counties stopped reporting all together. Johnson and Meyer want council members to review the current list and assist with additions and changes needed to make the 2025 Weed Watch List to encourage more superintendents to report each year. They suggested breaking down the watch list plants into six ecoregions for Nebraska and only include a select few species for superintendents to look for. The council will work with Nebraska Department of Agriculture and the Nebraska Weed Control Association to create the list for 2025.

In addition, Meyer and Johnson will teach superintendents about weeds approaching Nebraska as potential threats and provide more training on species unfamiliar to them.

8. Updated Terrestrial/Aquatic Field Guides – Smith reviewed the current invasive plants, aquatics, and insects field guides hosted on the neinvasives.com website. Smith requested that council members begin to review the field guides at their convenience to provide feedback and changes needed to create updated guides. Council members inquired about how the printing and creation of the previous guides got funded. Pope clarified that the previous council coordinator’s role included a substantial budget for education and outreach since their duties were 80% education/outreach and 20% council coordination. Smith’s current duties are 100% council coordination, so there are no funds available for printing or creating education and outreach materials.

Thiele suggested that funding for printing and updating the current field guides could potentially be obtained through the Public Information and Education (PIE) Grant program from the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET). Smith reviewed their website and found that the PIE Grant has been paused since Summer 2023 with no indication on their website of when they will begin accepting applications again.

Stahr has funding as the Aquatic Invasive Species Program Manager to get the invasive aquatics field guide updated and reprinted. Thiele inquired if it is possible for the council to match the AIS grant. Stahr did not know but will check to find out if we can. Jara mentioned that the council could try to get a state match to obtain funds to update and print the other field guides. There are new AIS brochures and rack cards available, council members can reach out to Stahr if they would like any. The field guides were initially created under the Nebraska Invasive Species Program, which no longer exists. Meyer inquired if there are drafts of the current field guides available online to update. Smith reviewed the former council coordinator’s folders and was not able to find any draft copies of the field guides that the council can directly update, so new field guides would need to be created.

Smith will form several field guides working groups in the fall after the Adaptive Management Plan and Annual Report are completed for 2024.

9. Council Coordinator Role Updates – Pope clarified some of the new responsibilities for Smith as the new council coordinator. With responsibilities shifting to 100% coordination, there is some interest in having the coordinator help with the Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force by assisting with grant funding and management. This role in turn would assist the Nebraska Weed Control Association

since they receive grant funding through Riparian Vegetation Management Grant from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture.

Smith will be attending the Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force meeting on Wednesday, April 24, 2024, in McCook, NE.

10. Website Update with Next-Gen CMS – Smith received more information regarding the transition to Next-Gen CMS in fall 2024. The council can keep the neinvasives.com URL, but the website will be redirected to neinvasives.unl.edu. The format of the website will also follow the same font and theme as the unl.edu website, but eventually a different theme will be available for affiliate websites in the future. Councilmembers agree with the website moving to neinvasives.unl.edu.

Jara mentioned that the council will need to maintain the neinvasives.com domain through godaddy.com in order to ensure that the domain does not get taken. Pope stated that are currently paying \$800 per year to keep the domain and we will need to renew the subscription in November 2024 or December 2024. Jara mentioned that since we will not be using neinvasives.com and just want to keep the domain, we may be able to pay a lower subscription of \$8-9 per year. Smith will contact Becky Aiken from UNL to get more information about what the cost should be. The cost will be included in the next budget.

11. NISC Vacancy Updates – Smith is still recruiting one member at large to represent agricultural landowner interests and a non-voting member to represent the Midwest Region of the National Park Service. Thiele recommended either Carolyn Campbell or Travis Connot to represent the NPS. Smith received contacts from Brooke Stansberry of USFWS that she will contact as potential candidates for the member at large to represent agricultural landowner interests.

12. “Report a Sighting” on neinvasives.com - Smith is continuing to forward credible sightings to Stahr (aquatic invasive species), Walker (wildlife), Bjorklund (insects), and Johnson and/or relevant county weed superintendents (plants). Smith is working on a database of all reported sightings to create a map in ArcGIS where we may be able to note relevant trends in species sightings and/or reporting areas.

13. Council Member Updates

Thiele – new to position as Natural Resources Specialist with OPPD. Koenig is currently representing a power generating utility as a non-voting member with NISC, but Smith will add Thiele as a non-voting member as well as a representative of OPPD.

Thorburn – NRDs are in prescribed burning and tree planting season.

Meyer – Attended Nebraska Weed Management Area Conference on April 11 in Kearney, NE with Smith, Johnson, and county weed superintendents representing each weed management area to discuss project goals for the upcoming grant cycle for the Noxious Weed and Invasive Plant Species Assistance Fund managed by the Nebraska Department of Agriculture. Legislative Bill 218 was pulled by the speaker at the final reading, so available funding for the 2024-2025 grant cycle is reduced from \$2.7 million to \$706,000, the amount appropriated from previous legislation.

Meyer will attend the Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force meeting with Smith and Johnson to review projects done in the area.

The Nebraska Weed Control Association held its spring training on March 27-28, 2024, in Kearney, Nebraska. Smith and Johnson also attended. Smith presented on the NISC, Johnson presented on the NDA's new grant application platform and the weed watch list.

Thistle season is in progress.

Karssen – Joined USFWS's Lincoln office in October 2023 after working at their office in Southern Indiana. Attended all-staff meeting on 4/11/24 for USFWS. Office is fully staffed now and is currently redividing tasks among new employees.

Spurgeon – Replacing Pope as the voting member representative for the Nebraska Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit.

Stahr – Field season will start in two weeks. NGPC hired 8 temporary AIS positions and is looking to fill one more 7-month position in Valentine, NE.

Monthly sampling of water bodies will begin in May for zebra mussel detection. Jenna, NGPC temporary biologist, will examine samples at headquarters.

Boat inspections will start Memorial Day weekend with the goal of completing 10,000 inspections through Labor Day.

Met with SePRO Corporation regarding Natrix herbicide for watermilfoil and mussel treatment. Water milfoil treatment will begin in North Platte in the last week of April. Natrix was used to treat the Snake River in Idaho for quagga mussels and proved to be very effective. The chemical works to treat all types of mussels and is a better

option than Earth Pro because it can be used at lower rates.

Nelson – The Environmental Protection Agency updated regulations related to endangered species impacts. Nelson is working with Craig Romary from NDA to inform private landowners of the new requirements so they don't apply herbicides or pesticides where it could potentially impact endangered species.

Gehle – Working with other agencies on Platte-Republican Trans-Basin Diversion application and will meet with partners today after meeting to discuss progress on project.

Flow and water supply of the North Platte River and South Platte River are good this year and above last year's quantity and performance. Flows are closer to normal amounts this spring. The Big Blue River Basin is in short supply this year. Field season will impact dams soon.

Bjorklund – NDA is experiencing insect trap setting season. Currently setting traps for spongy moths, as some were caught last year, Asian long horned beetles, and emerald ash borer. There are currently no approved traps for spotted lanternfly. Both spotted lanternfly and Asian long horned beetles haven't been detected in Nebraska yet.

King – Currently in zebra mussel reproduction season on the Missouri River near the NPPD power plant. Water is currently warmer than last year, which may mean aquatic invasive species sightings will occur sooner.

Schroeder – Planters are going for the season.

Johnson – Riparian Vegetation Management Grants are rolling out this month, using the Amplifund software system for the first time. There are 600 grants to give out.

Johnson wants to make the weed watch list shorter to ensure better participation with the NWCA in order to receive good data to detect species trends. Meyer added that these weed watch lists are annual reports that are not state required, so many counties don't complete them. Current participation is at 70%. Johnson and Meyer both want to work with the NISC, NDA, and NWCA to determine who will distribute the list, what species will be listed, and how to make it simpler to encourage more completion. They would also like to eliminate aquatic invasive plants from the list since many county superintendents do not know how to identify them.

Jara – Hired new forest health staff for Omaha, Lincoln, and Scottsbluff. The NFS is

hosting workshops on tree health.

6,000-8,000 acres were burned in February.

A new North Platte Forester was hired.

Pope – Announced this is his last meeting with the NISC. Pope accepted a national level position with the Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit that he will officially begin on April 22. He will work out of the USGS Water Science Center in Lincoln.

Walker – All 5 NGPC districts performed a prescribed fire on the same day during good burn weather.

Walker is working on completing an America the Beautiful Challenge Grant.

Erthum – Attended the biocontrol forum in Annapolis, MD several weeks ago. Ordered leafy spurge flea beetles to help with biocontrol that should arrive in June or July.

Schoner – Assisting with some outreach events coming up this month. If you have any material you would like to pass out, send it to Schoner for distribution.

14. Next Meeting Date – Friday, May 10, 2024, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm CST, Nebraska Department of Agriculture, 245 Fallbrook Blvd, Lincoln, NE 68521

15. Meeting Adjourned – Meyer ended the meeting at 11:46 am CST.