

NEBRASKA



INVASIVE SPECIES COUNCIL

Nebraska Invasive Species Council

Meeting Minutes

May 10, 2024

Nebraska Department of Agriculture

245 Fallbrook Blvd Suite 200, Lincoln, NE 68521

In-Person and Virtual

Voting Members Present:

Steven Jara
Trevor Johnson
Justin King
Brent Meyer
Dennis Schroeder
Kristopher Stahr
Kim Todd

Voting Members Absent:

Craig Allen
Jonathan Nikkila
Kimberly Stuhr
John Thorburn

Non-Voting Members Present:

Natalia Bjorklund
Travis Connot
Jeremy Gehle
Chris Helzer
David Nielsen
Mitch Renteria
Bret Schomer
Gary Stone
James Thiele
T.J. Walker

Non-Voting Members Absent:

Justin Krahulik
Lorri Grueber
Kassie Karssen
Mike Koenig
Ritch Nelson

Guests Present:

Josh Nelson

1. Call to order – Meyer called the meeting to order at 10:03 am CST.
2. Review and Approval of [April 12, 2024 Meeting Minutes](#) – King moved to approve the minutes, Stahr second, motion carried.
3. NISC Member Updates – Travis Connot joined the NISC as the new non-voting, ex officio member representing the Midwest Region of the National Park Service of the U.S. Department of the Interior. Connot is the Natural Resources Program Manager/Biologist for the Niobrara National Scenic River in Valentine.

Smith is still seeking a voting member at large to represent agricultural landowner interests. Mike Crosley, the Santee Sioux Nation Land Manager and Rancher, expressed interest in joining the council; Smith has been in communication with him.

King has a contact that may be interested in joining, Smith will reach out to them if Crosley decides not to join the council. Councilmembers can refer any potential contacts interested in joining the council to Smith.

4. NISC Member Feedback Survey Results – Smith reviewed the results from the NISC Member Feedback Survey sent out to all voting and non-voting councilmembers via Qualtrics. Fourteen individuals responded to the survey with the following results:

NISC's Current Strengths: knowledge, expertise of council members (8 responses); collaboration, cooperation, facilitation of conversation to communicate invasive species issues (4 responses); website accessibility and ease of use (1 response)

NISC's Areas for Improvement: define a clear mission and objectives for council – *what are we trying to achieve?* (5 responses); legislative influence/involvement,

council involvement (3 responses); streamlined information on current invasive species threats (2 responses); website accessibility and ease of use (1 response)

NISC in the Natural Resources Field: Interagency cooperation, understanding for streamlined invasive species reporting, processing (6 responses); education and communication – public, agencies – across state on invasive species impact, mitigation (4 responses); hands-on training opportunities for professionals to learn about invasive species threats, impacts (2 responses); translate council work into legislative policy recommendations (1 response)

NISC's Top Three Priorities: 1) strategic plan/annual report/adaptive management plan; 2) public/private education, outreach, and involvement; 3) improved communication, visibility with legislation for funding; other priorities: interagency (local, state, federal, private, NGOs) communication, cooperation on invasive species control, prevention, management; information dissemination, documentation, distribution to public, stakeholders; website redevelopment to align with NISC's priorities/goals/mission; Weed Management Area assistance

NISC Coordinator's Top Three Priorities: 1) coordinate/facilitate council meetings, agendas with tangible results; 2) serve as point of contact for education/outreach of invasive species issues across state; 3) provide recommendations to legislature, improve council's visibility; 3) engage with/build relationships with council members; other priorities: facilitate communication among council, keep informed of invasive species issues (3 responses); conduct survey (1 response); WMA grant coordination (1 response); priorities from LB 391: coordination of the council to develop and update statewide adaptive management plan every three years and annual report every year for invasive species; facilitate communication and updates to the council; seek additional advisory support from representatives of relevant federal, state, or local agencies as it deems necessary to accomplish its duties

How Coordinator Can Better Assist NISC: "identify regulatory gaps pertaining to invasive species issues, advocate the need for more funding, continue communication amongst council members"; "provide more information to [the NISC]"; "get the NISC to be a more cohesive and functional council"; "sharing information from all WMAs; who is doing what, and what is working"; "help keep the council on task to accomplish priorities including development of strategic plan and assist with coordinating those specific actions to be worked on by the council"

NISC Meeting Location Suggestions: Indian Cave State Park, Shubert, NE; Lewis and Clark State Recreation Area and Gavins Point Dam, Crofton, NE and Yankton, SD; Loess Canyons, between Brady and Morefield, NE; Niobrara State Park,

Niobrara, NE; Agate Fossil Beds National Monument, Harrison, NE; Niobrara Valley Preserve, Johnstown, NE; Gerald Gentleman Station, Sutherland, NE; Fort Robinson State Park, Crawford, NE; Rowe Sanctuary/Crane Trust Nature & Visitor Center, Gibbon and Wood River, NE; Nine Mile Creek, Minatare, NE; Eastern redcedar, Central NE; Oak savannah, Southeast NE; Sandhills NE; Gudmundsen Sandhills Lab, Whitman, NE

Should NISC Website Host “Report a Sighting”?: yes (7 responses); no (2 responses); other: provide links to the specific agency’s department to report to directly depending on the species; keep the “Report a Sighting” form, but could it be added to other agency websites as well (i.e., NGPC, etc.)?; what is the current use volume (320 reports since 5/13/2018)? May be valuable to have the information go through NISC for reporting purposes; NISC should be the first line of communication, then have a list of individuals/agencies to share the information with; is the information transferred to NDA for their records?; does NDA need information on all reported species? Can they host the “Report a Sighting” form as well?

Stahr stressed that it may be problematic for neinvasives.com to host the “Report a Sighting” form because some aquatic invasive species sightings are time-sensitive and need to be addressed immediately. The “Report a Sighting” forms are currently only forwarded to the invasives@unl.edu email address, which Smith checks during the week, but it is not reviewed on weekends. Smith mentioned that other invasive species councils (i.e., Minnesota) do not offer a reporting form but instead have direct contact information that submitters can report to. Helzer added that it may be a good idea to keep the reporting form in case a reporter is unsure of where to report. Smith will inquire with the UNL website administrator, Becky Aiken, if it’s possible for the “Report a Sighting” form to be forwarded to Stahr as well so he is able to remain in the loop on potentially urgent aquatic invasive species sightings. Smith will provide several website reporting options at the next NISC meeting in August where members will be able to decide which option they would prefer moving forward.

Guest Speakers at the NISC Meetings: yes (7 responses); no (2 responses); other responses: depends on the topic; good to have speakers, not every month; two to four times a year is enough; maybe quarterly, not every meeting; topics of interest: effects of fire on invasive species; tabletop exercise amongst members simulating an invasive species detection

NISC Field Excursion and Yearly Retreat: field excursion: yes (7 responses); no (2 responses); other responses: combine meeting with field tour; focus on invasive

species treatment; consider council members who may not have funds to cover travel/expenses/time; yearly retreat: yes (5 responses); maybe (5 responses); no (1 response); other responses: consider council members without funds to cover travel/expenses/time; during winter; partners that can help cover costs?

Onward and Upward: ideas for consideration based on council member feedback:

- 1) End future meetings where councilmembers determine objectives/goals for the next meeting
- 2) Coordinator sends out roundup/summaries of relevant news articles related to invasive species sitings, information to council members for review to keep them informed of trends and updates.

Helzer agreed that the news roundup is a good idea but is interested in expanding the audience to reach weed superintendents, land managers, and anyone else who can benefit from the information. Smith will investigate whether we can create a newsletter subscription button on neinvasives.com so that anyone can subscribe.

- 3) Create future work groups for education/outreach, legislature, and website redevelopment once the adaptive management plan and annual report are complete. Collectively, the councilmembers will develop a strategic plan before starting the work groups that will help guide them.

Jara seconded that we should start with a strategic plan and then divide into work groups. Another work group worth developing is updated watch lists for invasive plants and other species.

5. Summer 2024 Education and Outreach – Smith will be participating in the UNL East Campus Discovery Days and Farmers Market on June 8, July 13, and August 10 with the NECFWRU. Councilmembers with promotional items, brochures, and related items can contact Smith to get your items distributed. Smith will also create an Excel spreadsheet with summer education/outreach events where councilmembers can list events they are participating in and/or if they need assistance and/or promotional items/brochures for distribution.

Stahr will be participating in family fishing nights through NGPC and will need assistance as needed.

6. Adaptive Management Plan Work Group – The current work group consists of King, Johnson, and Stahr. Smith met with the work group today to begin working on the

adaptive management plan.

7. Annual Report Work Group – The current work group consists of Thorburn, Stahr, Nielsen, Meyer, and Jara. Smith will send out a scheduling poll to the work group to determine their first meeting date.
8. Interagency Reporting and Collaboration Exercise – Smith created three different scenarios for the council to work through to determine the point of contacts for each situation and how they would go down the chain of command:

Scenario #1: The Nehama County Weed Control Superintendent notices what appears to be a mass of spotted lanternfly eggs on a tree-of-heaven that he is preparing to treat with herbicide in a public park in Auburn, NE.

Response #1: The county weed control superintendent would report the situation to Bjorklund, the NDA State Public Regulatory Official, since tree-of-heaven is a regulated pest. Bjorklund noted that the superintendent could also send an email to the general email address as well for NDA, which is agr.webmaster@nebraska.gov, to get a response. From there, Bjorklund would report to Craig Webb, the Nebraska State Plant Health Director for USDA-APHIS. If it is a federally regulated pest, the report will go up through USDA for mitigation and control.

Scenario #2: The NISC Coordinator receives an email from a member of the public that someone purchased a houseplant from Costco in Omaha, NE that had a live red and grey striped snake on it. You believe it may be a Northwestern Garter Snake, which is native to the Northwestern part of the Pacific Coast and not found in the state.

Response #2: The NISC Coordinator would report the situation to Walker, the Assistant Division Administrator for Wildlife Partners at NGPC. Walker would forward the report to Shaun Dunn, the Natural Heritage Zoologist for NGPC, to view, collect, and dispose of the reptile. Todd noted that a good initial contact would also be Dennis Ferraro, the Conservation Biologist/Herpetologist for UNL, to help identify what type of snake it is and would also know of contacts from there to reach out to. Bjorklund does regulate nursery licenses, which Costco has; however, since ferns are considered houseplants, she would not be involved, since NDA only regulates perennials and woody plant stock.

Scenario #3: You purchased some freshwater koi fish for your backyard pond from a local pet store in Lincoln, NE. When you come home to release them into their new tank, you notice what looks like a cluster of New Zealand Mud Snails in the bottom

of the bag.

Response #3: You would report the situation to Stahr, the Aquatic Invasive Species Program Manager for NGPC. Stahr noted that state regulations allow NGPC to transport and possess aquatic invasive species to and from public bodies of water, but there is a gap in current regulations that do not give NGPC any authority over pet stores and/or the pet trade. The Lacey Act, which is a federal conservation law, prohibits the importation, exportation, transportation, sale, receipt, acquisition, or purchase of any fish or wildlife or plant taken, possessed, transported, or sold in violation of any law, treaty, or regulation of the United States, and can be applied to the pet trade. If a violation of the Lacey Act is suspected, Stahr would contact USFWS to launch an investigation. In this scenario, Stahr would visit the pet store for inspection, track down the distributors who exported the koi fish to the pet store, and inform the game and parks commission in the state where the fish came from. However, that state agency would have the authority of how much they choose to investigate in this situation.

If a similar situation arose related to dogs, cats, or livestock, NDA would investigate and have authority over the scenario. If the situation dealt with an imported plant, the situation would be investigated by USDA to ensure compliance. USDA can check the import status on plants, and if the situation is not related to a plant pest, it would become a Lacey Act investigation where the USFWS would become involved.

Walker noted that mitigation strategies on neinvasives.com need to be updated for some of the species. In addition, some species should be removed, such as the brown mouse, and black carp needs to be added as a species of concern. Stahr seconded that black carp were found in central Missouri, so there may be sightings soon.

9. Council Member Updates:

Walker – Currently battling eastern redcedar encroachment in grasslands and oak woodlands. Found a feral hog skeleton at Yankee Hill WMA southwest of Lincoln near Denton, NE. One specimen does not suggest population; skeleton was most likely dumped in the area. Searching the WMA and surrounding area for more feral hogs to ensure that there is no population out there.

Todd – Backyard Farmer season began. Councilmembers can send show segment ideas to Todd, who is on the content team and reads all submissions. UNL extension educators located in Madison and O’Neill are posting 90-second reels to Crop Watch website, some of which are focused on invasive species. Councilmembers

agreed that neinvasives.com could host these videos on their website to provide visitors with more information on invasive species mitigation.

Helzer – TNC is hosting free plant identification workshops this summer at the Platte Valley Preserve in Wood River, NE and Niobrara Valley Preserve in Johnstown, NE. Councilmembers can reach out to Helzer for more information if they are interested in participating. Four sessions will occur in June and August.

Jara – NFS staff assisted with hazard tree assessments and removals following the tornado damage that occurred over Arbor Day weekend. NFS is transplanting 18,000 trees in the pine ridge reforestation effort and currently in field season.

Bjorklund – NDA is currently in field season.

King – Will be applying Cascade herbicide treatment at Lake Ogallala canal down to Paxton, NE. Will be meeting with public relations personnel to release information about treatment in North Platte area. Another treatment will occur in the canal in June.

Nielsen – Will begin emerald ash borer biocontrol treatment. Working with Erthum, Brown County Weed Superintendent, to begin leafy spurge biocontrol. Biocontrol releases to treat bind weed will occur this summer.

Gehle – Public hearing for Tri-Basin Diversion Project will take place on May 23 in Bertrand, NE.

Thiele – Currently checking out OPPD properties. Arboretum in Omaha experiencing lots of buckthorn, but currently no large patches of teasel.

Stahr – Compiling invasive carp data from various agencies for NASS database, which serves as a public database. Filled 8 of 9 temporary technician positions across the state that are starting this month. Boat inspections will begin for the public on Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day weekend. Participated in a radio interview last week discussing clean drain dry program that will air over Memorial Day weekend. Will be guest starring on Pure Nebraska TV show on June 11 to talk about aquatic invasive species and zebra mussels. Conducted aquatic surveys in North Platte last week. Will be treating hybrid Eurasian milfoil in Iron Horse Park in North Platte in mid-June. Coordinating with Montana State on a genetic study on curl leaf pond weed. Will be hiring a permanent biologist for the AIS program.

Rick Holland, NGPC Fisheries Research Assistant Division Administrator, passed away on April 28, 2024. To honor his memory, council members can donate to The Kearney Area Community Foundation, designated to Nebraska Fishing Activities Fund (Family Fishing Program) or YMCA of Lincoln designated to YMCA Youth Sports – financial support for youth access.

Meyer – Attending signing with Governor Pillen on June 17 proclaiming Noxious Weed Awareness Week with NDA. Leafy Spurge Task Force will meet June 24-25 in Chadron, NE. Completed biocontrol on poison hemlock with moth two years ago, results have been impressive. RV There Yet TV show did a 3-minute video thanking NWCA for invasive species control efforts.

Johnson – Riparian Vegetation Management grants due May 10 by 5 PM. 5 applications have been submitted so far; all exceed the current appropriated amount of \$706,000. Decisions will be made with grants awarded in a couple of weeks. Revising seed program regulations to prohibit sale of ventinata, medusahead, and old world bluestem; councilmembers can write letters of support for the program to submit for regulations.

10. Goals/Objectives for Next Meeting:

- a. Smith will provide rough draft of invasive species news roundup via email for the council to review and provide feedback in June. Smith will elicit feedback on the first roundup from the council at the August meeting.
- b. Smith will provide several options via email prior to the August meeting on reporting invasive sightings. Council members will vote at the next meeting on which option they prefer for reporting invasive sightings on neinvasives.com (this is postponed to continue discussion at the September or later meetings to prioritize report due dates).
- c. Review the Adaptive Management Plan and Annual Report rough drafts to provide feedback and changes.
- d. Review species on neinvasives.com to determine which species should be taken off and which should be added.
- e. Begin brainstorming to create the strategic plan (this is postponed until the completion of the required reports).

11. Next meeting date – Friday, August 9, 2024, 10:00 am to 12:00 pm CST, Nebraska Department of Agriculture, 245 Fallbrook Blvd, Ste 200, Lincoln, NE 68521.

12. Adjourn – meeting ended at 11:56 PM CST.

