



**Nebraska Invasive Species Council
Meeting Minutes
March 8, 2024
United States Geological Survey Nebraska Water Science Center
5231 S 19th St, Lincoln, NE 68512
In-Person and Virtual**

Voting Members Present:

Trevor Johnson
Justin King
Dennis Schroeder
Kris Stahr
John Thorburn

Voting Members Absent:

Craig Allen
Steven Jara
Brent Meyer
Jonathan Nikkila
Kevin Pope
Kimberly Stuhr
Kim Todd

Non-Voting Members Present:

Chris Helzer
Justin Kraulik in lieu of Brenda Densmore
Ritch Nelson
David Nielsen
TJ Walker

Non-Voting Members Absent:

Natalia Bjorklund
Jeremy Gehle
Lorri Grueber
Mike Koenig
Keith Koupal
Jeff Runge
Bret Schoner
Gary Stone
Jennifer Weisbrod

Guests Present:

Scott Erthum
Tom Heatherly
Rob Schultz

1. Call to order – Kris Stahr called the meeting to order at 10:06 AM CST, Thorburn second, motion carried.
2. Review and approval of February 9, 2024, minutes – Thorburn moved to approve the minutes, Schroeder second, motion carried.
3. NISC Meeting Schedule Survey – Smith emailed a meeting schedule survey to all NISC voting and non-voting members on March 5, 2024, to determine the future NISC meeting frequency and schedule. The deadline to submit the survey is Friday, March 15, 2024.
4. NISC Member Survey – Smith is creating an online survey via Qualtrics for distribution via email at the end of the month to all current voting and non-voting members. The survey addresses 2024 field day location preferences, guest speaker preferences and frequency, topics of interest, invasive species reporting guidance, website (neinvasives.com) information and updates, current council strengths and weaknesses, and how the coordinator can better serve you. Helzer suggested including an open-ended question about what the NISC can do to be helpful in the field of natural resources. Smith will send out a survey draft to all council members to review the questions and provide feedback before sending out the survey for completion.
5. NISC Information Session – Smith will be attending the NWCA Spring Training on March 28, 2024, to present about the council, its mission, and its resources. Nebraska Weed Management Area Coalition (NEWMAC) expressed interest in having Smith assist with grant writing for some weed management areas requiring assistance. Smith has been attending Platte Valley, Lower Platte, and Southeast (Otoe and Nehama County) Weed

Management Area meetings. Smith will also be attending the NEWMAC meeting in Broken Bow on March 13, 2024, with Johnson. Erthum noted that during the meeting, NEWMAC members will discuss how to write better grants to secure funds. Current NEWMAC members consist of weed management areas over 21 counties in the Sandhills and western part of Nebraska, totaling roughly 31% of the state overall. Schultz mentioned that weed management area personnel can become NEWMAC members with a yearly \$100 membership fee. NEWMAC can administer and apply for grants for current member use. The Nebraska Weed Management Association (NWMA) Conference will take place on April 11, 2024, in Kearney for weed management areas.

6. New Agricultural Landowner Interest Member Needed – Stuthman resigned from NISC on February 26, 2024. Smith requests that any eligible candidates to fill the vacant position be forwarded to her. Candidates can apply through the Governor’s Office and must submit a resume and three letters of reference. A thank you card is being circulated for council members to sign thanking Stuthman for his service and support of the NISC. Smith will mail out the card to Stuthman next month after the April NISC meeting. Schroeder recommended that the NISC consider what region we want the next candidate from when selecting a new council member. Thorburn suggested looking for a council member in the Sandhills or western region of the state. Nelson mentioned that NISC may want to recruit a NWCA member since most have an agricultural background. Smith will email superintendents in regions of interest to see if they have any interest in participating as a NISC council member. Smith is also interested in contacting several tribes within Nebraska, including Ponca and Sioux, to attempt to find an agricultural landowner who is affiliated with a tribe.
7. NE Invasives Website Updates – Smith reported that the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL), which hosts the current NISC website, neinvasives.com, as an affiliate website, is transitioning to a new platform, [Next-Gen CMS](#), by September 2024. Next-Gen GMS creates websites in the no-code UNL web framework, which appears cleaner to website visitors. Smith proposed [rebuilding the website](#) using the new platform so the NISC can “clean out the closet”, since many links and information listed on the current website are outdated. This may also mean that the NISC can switch to a [unl.edu domain name](#). The NISC member feedback survey will include questions relating to website rebuilding and establishing a work group to determine the council’s communication and outreach strategy. Stahr noted that the phrase and outreach material with “Don’t Move a Mussel” are no longer being used but that it is still prominently featured on neinvasives.com. The new phrase and logo with “Protect Our Waters” is now being used.
8. Adaptive Management Plan Work Group – Smith is seeking 3-5 voting and non-voting members for a work group to write the Adaptive Management Plan due October 2024. The work group will meet virtually and/or in-person from April 2024 to August 2024 for

approximately 2-4 hours per month to collaborate, plan, write, and edit the plan. Stahr volunteered to serve on the work group and suggested Meyer, the current Chairperson, as another potential member to assist. Smith will send out a follow-up email to all voting and non-voting members next week to recruit more volunteers to serve on the work group.

9. Open discussion and updates from in-person attendees –

Erthum – Working on biocontrol program for the upcoming year. The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) will give \$10 million to each county for Eastern redcedar removal. Interested in observing what comes back after cedars are removed.

Working on leafy spurge biocontrol in the Nebraska Sandhills using flea beetles. The plant roots grow deeper in the sandy soils of the sandhills, so the beetles have a hard time burrowing down to them. May not be an effective use of biocontrol for leafy spurge in the sandhills.

Helzer – The Nature Conservancy (TNC) will be hosting several plant identification and habitat workshops this summer at either the Platte River Prairies (PRP) or Niobrara Valley Preserve (NVP). The workshops are free, and a registration will be forthcoming from TNC. The workshop dates are as follows: 6/12/24 (PRP), 6/18/24 (NVP), 8/6/2024 (PRP), and 8/13/2024 (NVP). Councilmembers can reach out to Helzer if they are interested in creating more specific targeted workshops for specific groups.

Interested in having University of Nebraska-Lincoln Agronomy and Horticulture Assistant Professor Nic McMillan present to NISC at an upcoming meeting. Smith reached out to McMillan regarding speaking to the group in February. McMillan's schedule is quite full through April, but he may be available later in the Spring to speak at an upcoming NISC meeting.

Johnson – NDA created and shared several social media posts on noxious weeds, invasive plants, and invasive bugs for NISAW.

NDA field staff are currently mapping and preparing for noxious weed survey season

NDA is moving over to grant funding software Amplifund for the upcoming grant administration season. Additional information and system training will be provided later once administrators are fully trained on the system. The system will help provide additional oversight for the additional grant funds available in the future.

King – Attended both the Nebraska Chapter's American Fisheries Society and American Wildlife Society meetings this year.

Gerald Gentleman Station in Sutherland, NE experiencing starling infestation. 10,000 – 20,000 birds are nesting there every night, and their droppings tested positive for histoplasma. The cleanup of the station costs roughly \$100,000 - \$120,000; however, the birds are feeding erratically, so NPPD cannot find out where to place poison to eradicate them from the area. Hoping that the nice weather will cause them to continue migrating north and leave the area. NPPD is also working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) on the issue.

R. Nelson – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) received a large influx of money from the Inflation Reduction Act. Most funds will be targeted for spending on climate-smart practices, invasive species control opportunities, combatting new cheatgrass in the west with new herbicides, improving native prairies, addressing woody encroachment, and improving wetland communities through phragmites control. NRCS typically received \$20 million for these efforts but received an additional \$35 million from IRA.

Attended National Pheasant Fest and Quail Classic 2024 last week in Kansas City, MO on behalf on NRCS. Private industry plays an important role in spreading information about invasive species.

Nielsen – Working on weed biocontrol program with Erthum for the upcoming year. Will be out of state most of the month studying the emerald ash borer and in California conducting fruit fly work.

Schroeder – High soil temperatures and lots of crop growth this season. Some crops are growing too early for the season.

Schultz – The NWCA Spring Training will take place on March 27 – 28, 2024 in Kearney, NE for all county weed superintendents. Smith will be attending on behalf of the NISC to provide council updates and general information.

The Weed Management Area (WMA) Conference will take place on April 11, 2024, in Kearney, NE. The conference will cover weed management area issues, boundaries, and projects. Johnson will be giving grant funding updates for the upcoming 2024-2025 fiscal year.

Legislative Bill 218 was reduced from \$6 million to \$3.7 million. The bill has one month left in session.

Stahr – Reports that local bait dealers are selling European nightcrawlers, which can be invasive. Members are encouraged to contact Stahr if they would like additional information on them. No Asian jumping worms, which are invasive, have been found

for sale in bait stores yet. Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) is pushing law enforcement to complete more bait shop checks to determine if any invasive species are being sold as bait.

Stahr attended the Midwest Aquatic Plant Management Society Conference in Columbus, Ohio last week. In Minnesota, the starry stonewort, a type of micro-algae, is overtaking water spaces through fragmentation. There is no herbicide available that can eradicate them. The state started Starry Trek, a citizen science program checking local lakes for the species.

A bio sponge surfactant, Top Film, is available that may help eradicate duckweeds, giant cane, and watermilfoils. The surfactant is being tested out on watermilfoils at Victoria Springs State Recreation Area in Anselmo, NE. Top Film seems to work for floating weed plants and could potentially be used more extensively and in drones to eradicate these types of species.

Stahr sat in on the Nebraska State Agencies for State Water meeting. There is no update on the basin diversion from the Nebraska Department of Natural Resources, but one is expected by early summer.

Stahr will attend the annual NGPC border water coordination meeting in Yankton, South Dakota to discuss how SD will have a hands-on approach to protect water bodies from zebra mussel infestation.

For National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW), Stahr shared some aquatic invasive species-focused social media posts for NGPC, which received some interesting comments from the public. Comments ranged from stating that NGPC is extorting boaters by charging fees to stating that it is only a matter of time before zebra mussels take over the state's water bodies. However, the government and public are currently working well to combat zebra mussels. The NGPC is working on a press release next month to dispute zebra mussel misinformation, such that waterfowl does not spread zebra mussels.

Hybrid watermilfoil treatment will start earlier than May because of the lack of snow cover.

Thorburn – NE Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) are currently selling trees and shrubs through their Tree Program online (nrdnet.org/tree-program) through March. Seedlings will be lifted early March from the Charles E. Bessey Tree Nursery at the Nebraska National Forest in Halsey, NE and shipped for pickup at NRDs in mid-April.

Walker – Continued Eastern redcedar battle in Nebraska's grasslands. There are no new grants.

The Habitat Partners Section Meeting met for the first time in five years last month for major conservation NGOs in Kearney, NE. There were 110 attendees.

10. Next meeting – Friday, April 12, 2024, from 10 am – 12 pm CST at Lower Platte South Natural Resource District, 3125 Portia St, Lincoln, NE 68501.

11. Meeting adjourned – Stahr ended meeting at 11:16 AM CST, Johnson second, motion carried.