



**Nebraska Invasive Species Council
Meeting Minutes
February 9, 2024
Nebraska Game and Parks Turpin Outdoor Education Center
4703 N 44th St, Lincoln, NE 68504
In-Person and Virtual**

Voting Members Present:

Craig Allen
Steven Jara
Trevor Johnson
Justin King
Brent Meyer
Kevin Pope
Dennis Schroeder
Kris Stahr
Kimberly Stuhr
John Thorburn
Kim Todd

Voting Members Absent:

Jonathan Nikkila
Arnie Stuthman

Non-Voting Members Present:

Natalia Bjorklund
Justin Krahulik
Bret Schoner

Non-Voting Members Absent:

Jeremy Gehle
Lorri Grueber
Chris Helzer
Kelsey Jolley

Mike Koenig
Ritch Nelson
David Nielson
Jeff Runge
Gary Stone
TJ Walker
Jennifer Weisbrod

Guests Present:

Tom Heatherly
Keith Koupal
Mike Reed
Rob Schultz

1. Review and approval of December 8, 2023, minutes – Meyer moved to approve the minutes, Stahr second, motion carried.
2. New NISC Coordinator – Shannon Smith, started January 22, 2024. Thank you to Kris Stahr for serving as the Acting NISC Coordinator.
3. Invasives email account – Smith noted that the NISC general email account, invasives@unl.edu, receives mainly education/outreach requests, media/interview requests, and invasive species sightings reported by the public and is unsure of where to forward these requests to. Councilmembers agreed upon the following actions moving forward:
 - a. Education/outreach requests – Present members agreed that education/outreach requests should be forwarded to all members for the time being, but that we need to begin considering what our group priority message is and come up with a strategy for what we would like to address through education/outreach. Members discussed further collaboration to develop a message/strategy and possibly a committee of members to focus on education/outreach opportunities.
 - b. Media/interview requests – Members agreed to forward current terrestrial species requests to Todd and Stahr/Nebraska Game and Parks Commission Aquatic Invasive Species Program for aquatic species.
 - c. Invasive sightings reported by the public – Smith is working on a database of all public sightings reported. Members agreed that credible invasive insect

sightings can be reported to Bjorklund, credible invasive plant sightings can be reported to Johnson/Nebraska Department of Agriculture and/or Nebraska Weed Control Association (NWCA). Reed noted that the public can be redirected to the appropriate county weed management area website contact form for terrestrial invasive plant sightings. Invasive aquatic species sightings can be reported to Stahr/Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, and invasive wildlife can be reported to Walker/Nebraska Game and Parks Commission. Members discussed developing an automated response to these reported sightings with access to helpful information and links to prevent spreading. Members inquired about whether public reports submitted can automatically be forwarded to the appropriate person and flagged based on the species reported. Smith will inquire with our UNL website manager, Becky Aiken, to learn more about our options.

4. NISC member feedback survey – Smith is preparing an online survey for members to provide feedback on how the council can improve and what its current goals are. Such needs to be addressed by the survey are the council’s mission statement and developing working groups to prepare the adaptive management plan (due October 2024) and the focus message for the report to the unicameral. Smith will prepare the survey in Qualtrics and distribute it via email. Once all members complete the survey, Smith will summarize the results and next steps to move forward. The timeline of the survey project from start to implementation of feedback is 24 months.
5. Open discussion and updates from in-person attendees –

Stahr – National Invasive Species Awareness Week occurs from February 26, 2024 – March 1, 2024. Working with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission’s (NGPC) Education Division to develop social media posts on aquatic invasive species. Councilmembers can send any respective information they’d like to put out to the public to Stahr for online publication. NGPC received approval to treat areas along the I-80 in North Platte for aquatic invasive species. NGPC is hiring temporary AIS technicians, 5 3-month positions and 4 7-month positions. Stahr will send out links and information on how to apply to distribute to interested individuals via email.

Jara – Nebraska Forest Service (NFS) hired a western area forester.

Nielsen – U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is hiring seasonal positions. Nielsen will send out job announcements to the council members for distribution via email.

Todd – UNL Extension's Backyard Farmer (BYF) program wrote a USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) grant to create BYF as a hub for science-based, consistent information for Nebraska. If awarded the 3-year grant, they will create a new position for an editor to review all BYF content and hours to determine what information is relevant and accurate for current conditions across the state. Todd also inquired from the council on what they expect for invasive species in the future since southern Nebraska, which includes Lincoln and Omaha, has moved from its previous plant hardiness zone, Zone 5B, to Zone 6A. Southern Nebraska can expect to see new insects and plant species migrating into new areas with this change.

Pope – Smith will work with the Riparian Task Force in addition to NISC, which will assist in determining the needs and direction of the NISC.

Allen – Current eastern redcedar invasion in Montana and Nebraska. Allen is currently working with conservation professionals to determine recommendations being made and further working to understand what drives grasslands' conversion to woodlands. Allen found through research that part of what drives the conversion is the proximity to the invasion as well as the proximity and immediate experience of professionals and eco-network that they can interact with to determine what drives risks and what recommendations and corrective action they can take to eliminate them.

Krahulik – U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) Nebraska Water Science Center currently looking for a director. Krahulik mentioned updates made to the Non-Indigenous Aquatic Species (NAS) database, which is used for aquatic invasive species reporting, research, and collection. Environmental DNA can be entered into the site. Anyone can fill out an online form for a committee to verify, but they will need to provide two qualifications to report, quantitative PCR and database PCR. NAS is not a repository for data, but it can help determine the presence or absence of aquatic invasive species.

Schroeder – Planning for 2024 farming. Currently researching herbicides to use and corn and soybeans are at their lowest price for the past 3-4 years, so there are many challenges ahead for the season. Moving forward with the NISC, it is important for council members to determine the fine line for providing information to the public versus making recommendations.

Thorburn – NE Natural Resources Districts (NRDs) are hiring across the state. NRDs are accepting orders for trees and shrubs through March, which includes Eastern

redcedar.

King – Tim Rogers is the new environmental manager for Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD). King will be on the Lower Loup board of directors through 2026.

OPPD extended an offer to a candidate for the environmental specialist/biologist position.

Lowest number of monarch butterflies on record reported this year.

King is working with Stahr to obtain a grant match to help control zebra mussels spreading from the Missouri River. Working on vegetation control in Lake Maloney in mid-June and work being done on vegetation issues in the Keystone canal from Lake Oglala to Sutherland reservoir that restricts water flow and could limit power plant capacity.

Heatherly – Nebraska Department of Environment and Energy (NDEE) is hiring technicians for the summer to assist with sampling, lab work, and surface water research. NDEE is sampling 101 stream sites every month and analyzing nitrite found in streams. Heatherly is working on a report of their findings to be approved for release to the public. Heatherly found that turfgrass treatment is causing unwanted bacteria in streams.

Bjorklund stated that spotted lanternflies are still not detected in Nebraska and that the Nebraska Department of Agriculture (NDA) is currently hiring a state survey coordinator.

Johnson announced that the NDA Noxious Weed Program is fully staffed. He also noted that Legislative Bill 218 is on select file in Legislature. If approved, it will increase the budget from \$700,000 to \$6 million to assist Nebraska counties with noxious weed control. NDA will oversee the grant administration process to distribute the funds to each county and provide guidance on how the money is spent.

Meyer - Legislation Bill (LB) 218 passed in Legislature but may not get funded. LBs 828 and 831 also progressed; LB 831 includes an amended restricted plant list, which testified neutral, but Lancaster County opposed. Lancaster County is hiring 7 seasonal weed technicians for the summer, applications close on February 18, 2024.

Reed – Renewed appointment with the Riparian Vegetation Management Task Force with several other appointments being reviewed by NDA. Meeting with the task force later this month will put out an announcement looking to fill these appointments with new members. The task force oversees state-wide projects using funds from the Nebraska legislator to manage floodplains and river basins across the state. The task force comes up with goals and objectives for state-wide projects and is required to report to the legislator every year. Appointments filled this year will serve through February 2026.

Schultz – Nebraska Weed Management Area Coalition (NEWMAC) will host its conference in April 2024. During the conference, attendees will address how weed management projects are carried out across the state. The NWCA Conference occurred February 5-7 in Norfolk with weed superintendents from across the state. Topics included the Artificial Intelligence (AI) drone development project with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) through the Agricultural Intelligence Research (AIR) program under Dr. Yeyin Shi and UNL PhD candidate, Kevin Steele, and the Weed ID program. The North American Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA) Annual Conference for 2024 will take place from September 30 – October 3 in Missoula, Montana. As part of NISAW, NAISMA will host a webinar on quagga mussels in the Idaho River.

6. Next meeting – Friday, March 8, 2024, 10:00 am – 12:00 pm CST, at the USGS Nebraska Water Science Center, 5231 S 19th St, Lincoln, NE 68512.
7. Meeting adjourned – 11:47 AM CST.