## MEETING MINUTES

These abbreviated summary minutes will become the official adopted minutes at the next Montana Invasive Species Council meeting when they will be approved. Until then, they are considered a draft.

### Meeting Name: Montana Invasive Species Council

| Date of Meeting: | Minutes Prepared By: | Time: | Location: |
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| April 21, 2026 | Russ Hartzell<br>Liz Lodman<br>Nicole Hallsten | 08:30am | Gallatin County Weed District Office, Bozeman<br>Zoom |

### Attendees:

*MISC Voting Members In Person: Steve Wanderaas, Tom Woolf, Jason Allen, Andy Welch, Sara Ricklefs, Jake Chadwell, Pam Schwend, Karen Laitala, Mike Bias*

*MISC Voting Members Virtual: Dylan Brown, Jasmine Chaffee, Jared Beaver, Martin Charlo*

*MISC Staff: Liz Lodman, Russ Hartzell*

*Partners In Person: Melissa Nicolli, Michelle Cox, Pilar Ziegler, Danielle Jones, Jeff Littlefield, Abby Butler, Jennifer Mohler, Mary Baumstark, Dan Rostad, Mark Bostrom, Madison Wellman*

*Partners Virtual: Donna Stafford, Brenda Witkowski, Becky Kington, Brent Smith, Robert Thompson, Kylee Macks, Erin Bjorklund, Megan Hoyer, Amy Seaman, Josh Wagoner, Molly Masters, Nanette Nelson, Elizabeth Emeline, Michelle Barton.*

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### Agenda & Notes, Decisions, Issues

| Topic | Discussion |
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| **Welcome, Roll Call, Minutes and Vice Chair Vote** | Chair Steve Wanderaas opened the meeting and roll call was conducted. The Gallatin Weed District welcomed the group and gave a brief orientation to the weed districts' work and to the building.<br><br>**Meeting Minutes:** Approve meeting minutes from December.<br>**Motion (Karen Laitala)**<br>**2nd (Pam Schwend)**<br>**Discussion:** Steve noted that Brenda Witkowski's name was misspelled and needed corrected.<br>**Motion Passed Unanimously** |

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| | **Vice Chair Election:** Two-year staggered terms for co-vice chairs, Jason Allen's term ends this month.<br>**Motion (Jason Allen):** Nominate Sara Ricklefs as co-vice chair.<br>**2nd (Karen Laitala)**<br>**Steve Wanderaas called for further nominations two additional times**<br>**No further discussion**<br>**Motion Passed Unanimously** |
| **Public Comment** | Madison Wellman, a student from Montana State University, presented an extended statement focused on climate change, invasive and migratory insects, and the need for earlier prevention and public education. Citing a paper that referenced Montana's winter weather as a natural biocontrol for some species. Madison specifically referenced the spread of ticks, mountain pine beetle impacts, and the public-health and ecosystem risks of warming winters. The speaker urged the council to expand public-facing invasive species education at trailheads and through hiking materials and suggested that possible funding sources could include the Recreational Trails Program, the Access Fund, and the National Park Service Challenge Cost Share Program. The speaker's main request was that the council help move prevention and early detection to the center of strategy, while making guidance on identification and reporting easier for the public to access. No additional public comments were made. |
| **MISC Staff Updates** | Staff updates were included in the packet. Russ highlighted tabling at the Montana Trails Recreation and Parks Association conference in Missoula was well received; this audience was engaged and the reception underscored a gap in outreach to parks and trails professionals. Staff will follow up to present at their 2027 conference. Michelle Cox noted that the Adopt-a-Trailhead program can address more than weeds. |
| **Budget and Sponsorships** | Liz reviewed the MISC budget status for two accounts, explaining that both were tracking close to their respective $50,000 amount. Liz explained the expended funds, pending payments, and amounts left to spend before end of fiscal year on June 30th.<br><br>MISC received requests for sponsorship from the Montana Biocontrol Coordination Project (MBCP) and the Montana Watershed Coordination Council. Council members discussed their impressions and experience with these groups. No final sponsorship decisions were made but tended to support the MBCP. Staff will follow up with MBCP on deliverable items for the sponsorship. The council indicated development of a process for sponsorship as a decision point for the council. The chair and staff linked this topic to a broader discussion |

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| | about how MISC should allocate limited remaining funds and how future work should be prioritized. |
| **Woody Invasives Working Group & Economic Impact Report** | Nanette Nelson presented findings from her research project to create the Current & Future Expected Costs of Woody Invasive Species in Montana report. She noted several takeaways:<br>• Delaying mitigation of Russian olive and tamarix will substantially increases future costs<br>• Provision of ecosystem services can be used to guide the development of management priorities<br>• A critical gap is the absence of data on public preference for outcomes associated with focal species control<br>Council members praised the report. The council requested a shorter one-page or executive summary to make the findings easier to share, especially in advance of the river tour. |
| **Woody Invasives Working Group Coordination Funding Request** | Sara and Molly explained the Woody Invasives Working Group (WIWG) request for support for the upcoming river tour, work group coordination, and travel for outreach activities. The river tour would bring decision makers to project sites to see managed and unmanaged areas along the Yellowstone river near Billings. Work group coordination would allow the continuation of the WIWG since the Noxious Weed Trust Funds grant has concluded. Funds for travel and outreach activities will allow for the continued promotion of this effort, especially to landowners and producers. The agreement would be managed by the Custer County Conservation District<br><br>WIWG has applied for support or grants for the river tour from DNRC, the Jerry Metcalf Foundation, and Northwestern Energy. Corteva is sponsoring lunch for the river tour. Major cost categories for the river tour include boat rental, supplies, and meeting space rental.<br><br>Note: MISC hosted a meeting on April 13th for council members to learn more about this effort and where this information was discussed more in depth.<br><br>The council asked for more line-item details about expenses for the river tour with clearer details and a breakdown showing how MISC funds would be used. Staff will arrange for a special zoom meeting for members to revisit the request once the information is available. |
| **State Trust Funds** | Barb Wagner, lead fiscal analyst for the Montana Legislative Fiscal Division, presented on the Invasive Species Trust Fund, the Invasive Species Fund, and the Invasive Species Grant Fund. She distinguished between money in an account and appropriation authority, explaining that the legislature may authorize spending in one context while funds |

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| | may or may not actually be available in another. She contrasted constitutional and statutory trusts, explaining that the noxious weed trust is a more traditional example while the invasive species trust operates differently because its earnings are transferred into the active fund rather than retained until a cap is reached.<br><br>The Invasive Species Trust was originally established in 2015, with a cap that later increased to $100 million; currently the balance is only a few million dollars, so it remains far from the cap. She described how unspent money from the Invasive Species Fund transfers into the trust, how the trust generates earnings, and how those earnings move back into the active fund and are used for aquatic invasive species work. She also reviewed the revenue sources for the active fund, including lodging tax, private hydroelectric invasive species fees, and boater/angler invasive species passes.<br><br>The presentation gave members a clearer frame for understanding where current MISC funding comes from and why those dollars are managed the way they are. |
| **Grow Wild**<br><br>**Gallatin CD** | Jen Mohler and Abby Butler from Grow Wild provided an overview of projects and programs they support. The core principle of their work is land stewardship, including noxious weed work, AIS prevention and education for both youth and adults. Water conservation and native garden/pollinator projects are among their projects.<br><br>Elizabeth Emeline from Gallatin Conservation District gave an overview of their work. They conduct education and outreach throughout the county, often in partnership with Grow Wild and county weed district. They will host a land tour in July focusing on three different producers in the county with innovative ways they deal with the economy, natural resource issues and next-gen family farms. She works with landowners to provide technical assistance on natural resource issues, pollinators initiatives and other projects. She also conducts AIS sampling in partnership with FWP on Hebgen and Ennis lakes. |
| **Strategic Planning Update** | Mary Baumstark provided a background and timeline on the upcoming strategic planning process that MISC is undertaking. She laid out the steps that the process will entail. Over the next year she will meet with stakeholders one on one and in focus groups. During Q1 she will review all the input gathered from those stakeholders and bring that into a 4-hour session with council members in early 2027. In Q2 of 2027 the strategic plan will be finalized and will serve as the NorthStar for MISC moving forward. |

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| **Charter and By Laws** | The committee working on review of the MISC Charter and By-Laws includes Jason, Karen, Sara, Steve, and Tom. Questions the committee had after the first meeting prompted Liz to contact the Governor's Boards and Commission office. Lieutenant Governor Juras provided suggestions and clarity on how to update this document. Juras advised MISC to create an Operating Policy rather than a Charter and By-Laws. The Operating Policy will cover items not included in statue. Juras and the committee have identified a few changes to statues (update the definition of invasive species, the makeup of the council, quorum required for voting). If MISC moves forward on the changes, this will prompt a cleanup bill that DNRC will present at the next legislative session. Liz presented several items for possible revision in a new operational policy. Council members reviewed the suggestions and provided input. The committee will continue to work on project. |
| **MISC Topics, Priorities, and Activities** | Tom Woolf led a discussion with the council about establishing priorities and developing a work plan for the council. Questions sent to voting members are (1) issues and priorities for your group or organization/agency (2) things you need help with (3) questions, concerns, observations of current operations (4) things you want to see moving forward. Discussion included how MISC is uniquely positioned to fill all-taxa big picture coordination and items the MISC organization and council members need to improve upon. |
| **Round Robin Updates** | Steve (CDs): Nashua WIS is open and things are going really well. CEMIST hosted an invasive annual grasses workshop that was a success.<br><br>Andy (Hydropower): Going to be a terrible water year with likely early season hoot owl restrictions.<br><br>Mike (Fishing): Hosted guiding for the future training (advanced guide school). Aquatic invasive species education is always a component of that. Had the Wyoming AIS Coordinator attend a past training.<br><br>Sara Conservation Organizations: Pet rehoming event in Bozeman next week. Conducting outreach to county fair boards to discourage pets as fair prizes. Conducting outreach and advocating to get federal funding for AIS work out to those who rely on it.<br><br>Tom (FWP): Fish and Wildlife Services AIS funds are now over a year late which has resulted in several states having to make program cuts. Golden mussels are now listed in Montana. First case of golden mussels outside of California recently found. Most Montana stations are up and operational, 7 mussel fouled boats intercepted so far. Sampling will start next week. Training at FLBS first week of June and |

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| | the Missoula AIS short course next week. Tom has been working with Canadian partners and attended a meeting in SK.<br><br>Michelle (USFS): Reorganization for the Forest Service, state capitals will serve as primary base of operations. Missoula offices will become service centers but the structure of those is not entirely clear yet.<br><br>Jake (DNRC/Forest Pest): Annual spongy month surveys will be underway soon. Distributed Don't Move Firewood signs to AIS check stations. Working on securing funding for 2027 white pine blister rust project. Working with USFS on balsam wooly adelgid survey south of Deer Lodge this summer. Alexis Armstrong is the new Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator. FPM tabled at several events this winter/spring.<br><br>Pam (Private Landowner): Will be participating as part of farm fair conducting education and outreach and teaming up with Megan from MDA to help out as much as possible.<br><br>Karen (Weed Districts): Was appointed to the Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP). First council meeting is next week, intends to be the voice for invasive species in that capacity. Starting outdoor education projects with school groups.<br><br>Jason (MDT): Business as usual except seeming to begin the season early. With have assistance from 50 counties on weed work. High priorities remain blueweed, rush skeletonweed (Missoula county and other counties are working hard on rush skeletonweed). The few other populations of rush found last year have been treated. MDT has a drone project in the works that is mainly focused on mapping and spectral imaging for rush skeletonweed and scotch broom. UM is working on some of that imaging work for MDT.<br><br>Jasmine (MDA): SJ42 the noxious weed law study bill being looked at by EQC has had three meetings and will have a couple more. The working group is working on statute changes to present to EQC. EDRR taskforce work continues, just held a water hemp/palmer amaranth task force meeting. Water hemp will be listed as a restricted seed for the entire state. Target education campaign for landowners for those species. Spring EDRR taskforce meeting is May 20th in Ronan, spring webinar is May 11th. Will be doing a tour with folks from Idaho to look at high priority species. Will conduct phragmites surveys this summer and fall as its been 8 years since those were last done, will |

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| | look to update the data and take samples to determine native vs. invasive.<br>Education: ton of pull your share work. Also conducting a ton of realtor education and planning for noxious weed awareness week that will include a bioblitz. First planning meeting April 27th for kNOweeds education summit which be a train the trainer workshop on the off years of MISC summits with the first one in 2027.<br>Grants: Contracting noxious weed trust fund grants currently. Fund 52 of 56 proposals for a total of 2.145 million. 25% of those grants were EDR and that is all federal funding.<br><br>Dylan (Agriculture): Continues to be a lot more invasive annual grass work on the ground both inside and outside of Montana. Doing a lot of pine beetle mitigation work and mountain pine beetle has become a high priority.<br><br>Jared (Extension): Potential for working with Dept. of Livestock on conduction some more targeted outreach for wild pigs. Recently completed the MontGuide for wild pigs. An idea could be to conduct a webinar for those groups we are looking to target with education and outreach for the wild pig issues, such as county sheriffs etc. That effort could be expanded into a series that evolves to promote webinars for other campaigns/species.<br><br>Brent (CEMIST): Incorporating citizen science and the Seek/iNaturalist apps into youth education programs. Will be reaching out the Lewis & Clark regarding Eastern Heath Snail and attending a couple of their employee orientations a couple grants in the works to conduct both AIS and all taxa outreach. |
| **Adjournment** | **Motion to Adjourn:**<br>**Motion (Andy Welch)**<br>**2nd (Pam Schwend)**<br>**Motion Passed Unanimously**<br>**Meeting Adjourned** |