

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:	December 15th & 16th 2025	Time:	1:00 pm & 8:30 am
Minutes Prepared By:	Nicole Hallsten	Location:	Helena-DNRC HQT
Attendees:			
<p><i>MISC: Dec. 15th: <u>Steve Wanderaas</u>, <u>Karen Lititala</u>, <u>Jason Allen</u>, <u>Sara Ricklefs</u>, <u>Jake Caldwell</u>, <u>Andy Welch</u>, <u>Jasmine Chaffee</u>, <u>Lori Witham</u>, <u>Tom Woolf</u>, <u>Taylor Tidwell</u></i></p> <p><i>Dec 16th: <u>Steve Wanderaas</u>, <u>Karen Lititala</u>, <u>Jason Allen</u>, <u>Jake Caldwell</u>, <u>Sara Ricklefs</u>, <u>Tom Woolf</u>, <u>Jasmine Chaffee</u>, <u>Taylor Tidwell</u>, <u>Lori Witham</u></i></p> <p><i>MISC Virtual: Dec 15th: <u>Dylan Brown</u>, <u>Megan Martin</u>, <u>Brenda Witkowski</u>, <u>Michelle Cox</u>, <u>Mike Bias</u>, <u>Monica Pokorny</u></i></p> <p><i>Dec 16th: <u>Jared Beaver</u>, <u>Michelle Cox</u>, <u>Monica Pokorny</u>, <u>Dylan Brown</u>, <u>Megan Martin</u></i></p> <p><i>MISC Staff: <u>Liz Lodman</u>, <u>Russ Hartzell</u>, <u>Nicole Hallsten</u></i></p> <p><i>Other: Dec. 15th: <u>Amy Seaman</u>, <u>Bryce Maxell</u></i></p> <p><i>Virtual Dec 15th: <u>Tim Tilton</u>, <u>Caleb Music</u>, <u>Leah Elwell</u>, <u>Clarissa Orton</u>, <u>Megan Hoyer</u>, <u>Erin Bjorklund</u>, <u>Dyar Frank</u>, <u>Stephanie Murphy</u>, <u>Brent Smith</u>, <u>Chet Neufeld</u>, <u>Emilie Henry</u>, <u>Phil Matson</u>, <u>Robert Thompson</u>, <u>DeNeill Trombley</u></i></p> <p><i>Dec 16th: <u>Megan Hoyer</u>, <u>Tim Tilton</u>, <u>Robert Thompson</u>, <u>Brent Smith</u>, <u>Molly Masters</u>, <u>Mindy Wilkinson</u>, <u>Erin Bjorklund</u>, <u>Emilie Henry</u>, <u>Leah Elwell</u>, <u>Clarissa Orton</u>, <u>Ian Mcryhew</u>, <u>DeNeill Trombley</u></i></p> <p><i>*MISC voting members are underlined.</i></p>			
Agenda & Notes, Decisions, Issues			
Topic		Discussion	
Day 1 December 15		Steve Wanderaas (Chair) opened the meeting at 1:00 pm. Conducted roll call and confirmed the quorum. Attendees introduced themselves.	
Welcome, Role Call & Minutes		<p>Motion: approve minutes from the October meeting.</p> <p>1st: Karen Laitala</p> <p>2nd: Sara Ricklefs</p> <p>No further discussion.</p> <p>Motion passed</p>	
MISC Staff Updates		<p>Liz Lodman and Russ Hartzell shared MISC updates:</p> <p><u>Council Member Updates:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charles Headdress, representing Fort Peck tribes stepped down, he recommended Adrian Spotted Bird to be the representative. Liz reached out and is awaiting a response. Dennis Longknife, representing Fort Belknap has retired. Megan Martin will be the new representative. Megan introduced herself via zoom. <p><u>AIS Grants:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> FY26 AIS grant cycle will close December 31st. Review meeting and hearing will be held in the spring of 2026. AIS Grant reviewers: Tom Woolf, Jason Allen, Andy Welch, and Jasmine Chaffee. <p><u>Woody Invasives Working Group:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MISC funded ISAN/ Flathead Lake Biological Station (Nanette Nelson) to conduct an impact report on woody invasive species. A presentation is planned for the next quarterly meeting. <p><u>Don't Move Firewood:</u></p>	
MISC Staff Updates			

- Outreach program has successfully operated in western/central Montana, but there is remaining work in central and eastern Montana.
- Looking for a partner to host and supervise an intern in eastern/central Montana; Helena or Missoula hosting remains an option if needed.

Eastern Heath Snail Update:

- Several new detections have been reported, including a new detection in Lewistown.
- Megan Hoyer (Depart of Ag) is developing a packet for landowners that provides identification and management options.
- Working with Jason (MDT) to add an interpretive sign at the Armington Junction rest area near Belt.
- Discussion with Frank Etzler (Dept of Ag) for a targeted “BioBlitz” to survey during optimal visibility periods, possibly partner with conservation districts.
- Working with CEMIST and MTNHP to develop an Eastern Heath Snail specific iNaturalist card for reporting, in response to a request from the Fergus Conservation District.

Outreach and Communications:

- Outreach materials currently available are t-shirts, coffee mugs, hats, coloring books, and brochures; members were encouraged to take items and to request hats/vests/jackets if not yet equipped.
- New t-shirt designs for consideration: feral pigs, Salt Cedar, and rush skeletonweed. Jasmine proposed blueweed on a t-shirt.
- A small run of “Squeal on Pigs” hats will be ordered in partnership with the Dept of Livestock as thank you gifts for people who report feral swine.

Bucket Biology Video:

- A bucket biology video on illegal fish introductions was produced with “Stories for Action” and FWP. It will be released in the spring of 2026.
- The group viewed a rough cut of the video. A long and short version will be available.
- Deployment will include hosting on MISC and FWP channels; partners are encouraged to share via social media and at outreach events.
- Members discussed the broader challenge of keeping video content “alive” over time and suggested repeated social media sharing, embedding on web pages, and playing at tabling events.

Budget:

- There are two accounts that support MISC activities, each with \$50,000.
 - 3309 – Invasive Species Support: used for events, outreach materials, staff travel, and general program support.
 - 3303 – MISC Council: used for council meeting expenses, member travel, and council requested activities (contracts, events).

MISC staff presented an accounting of FY26 expenditures to date, payments pending, and funds remaining, and potential projects.

Sponsorship

Three requests for sponsorships were received by MISC. The council discussed the intent of the events related to invasive species and amount of funds available from MISC. In 2025 the MISC funded two sponsorships totaling about \$2,000.

- AIS Short Course in Missoula (April 29–30) with sponsorship levels from about \$250 to \$2,500.
- Montana Watershed Coordination Council (MWCC) annual sponsorship package, starting around \$1,500–\$1,800 and up, with options to customize services.
- Great Plains Fisheries Workers Association conference in Billings (February), with sponsorship levels of roughly \$300, \$600, \$1,000, and \$2,000, plus an in-kind request for t-shirts.

	<p>The Council did not endorse any dollar amounts but decided to discuss it at a future MISC executive committee meeting once overall budget allocations are clearer.</p>
<p>Saskatchewan Invasive Species Council</p>	<p>Chet Neufeld is treasurer and a founder of the Saskatchewan Invasive Species Council https://www.saskinvasives.ca/, and Executive Director of the Native Plant Society of Saskatchewan https://www.npss.sk.ca/ . Both groups collaborate on invasive plant issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flowering rush has become Saskatchewan’s biggest emerging threat, now widespread in eastern Canada and moving west. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Manual removal and herbicides are both used; a biocontrol agent is approved and expected to be released. • SISC implements national campaign: Play Clean Go - boot brush stations, Don’t Let It Loose - signage, Grow Me Instead – wallet cards, and Clean, Drain, Dry/Pull the Plug – signage and advertisements led by province. • Updates to the Weed Control Act added new invasive species to the plant list. SISC used the APHIS-style weed risk assessments for potential plants to add to the list and provided those recommendations to the Ministry of Environment. • Contact Chet at info@npss.sk.ca
<p>2026 Summit Discussion</p>	<p>The council discussed the upcoming Invasive Species Summit:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning committee is Steve Wanderaas, Karen Laitala, Pam Schwend, Tom Woolf and MISC staff. • Plan to hold in Helena in October–November 2026 to maximize participation from legislators, agency leadership, and statewide partners. • Discuss hiring a facilitator to develop the agenda, recruit speakers, develop questions to conduct interactive sessions, and produce a written report. Estimated budget of up to \$20,000. <p>Suggested goals and themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Theme could be “pathways” of spread. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How can we bridge gap between programs and pathways? ○ Are there gaps in regulation, compliance or awareness in pathways? • Include a “state of the state” look back over last 10 years when first summit was held in 2016. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review the gaps/challenges from 2016 -- is Montana better off ten years later? Bryce Christiaens possible speaker. ○ What priorities should guide the next decade? • Legislative and policy discussion <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Invite legislators who aren’t familiar with invasive species. ○ Include legislative panel featuring invasive species “champions.” ○ Invite SJ42 sponsor, other legislators and EQC members. ○ Invite Montana Association of Counties (MACo). • Share results of SJ42 weed study bill and recommended legislation; discuss this process to advance invasive species policy and identify remaining gaps. • Explore offering continuing education credits (work with Dept of Ag), and possibly a communications/community based social marketing component if the budget and agenda allow. <p>Motion: Secure a Summit facilitator not to exceed \$20,000 1st: Sara Ricklefs 2nd: Karen Laitala Discussion: \$20k is a lot, are there other priorities we could dedicate monies to such as MTNHP? Can we put out for an RFP to several bids? Yes Motion passed</p>

<p>Woody Invasive Management Plan</p>	<p>Sara Ricklefs (ISAN) provided an update on the Woody Invasives Working Group (WIWG) activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education and outreach efforts over 2-month period resulted in 1.75 million impressions. • Statewide management plan released in November for public comment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Includes 13 strategies/actions and identifies 5 gaps and challenges. • Next steps: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Public comments and responses will be included in the appendix with explanation of adoption/non adoption. ○ Plan to have edits and a final draft released in January. ○ The plan will be hosted, for now, on the MISC website (with a vanity URL woodyinvasives.mt.gov) and shared through ISAN. • Planning is underway for a boat tour on the Yellowstone river near Billings in summer 2026. The tour will showcase both managed areas and impacted areas of the three woody invasives.
<p>Citizen Science</p>	<p>Bryce Maxell (MTNHP) provided an update on the MISC Citizen science committee activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Committee is working on tools that help the public report invasive species. <p>Web pages and resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • https://mtnhp.mt.gov/submit/Citizen_Science • https://mtnhp.mt.gov/submit/Report_Invasives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Webpages highlight reporting through iNaturalist plus links to other options: FWP-AIS, EDDMapS, Wild Spotter, MISC’s web forms (AIS, noxious weeds, tree pests, feral hogs, other). ○ A phone number and email contact is offered for people who do not • How To Use videos - hosted on YouTube cover how to create an account, collect observations, make identifiers, etc. • How To Presentation - explains iNaturalist global scale, usage, and contributions to Montana data. • Information cards that explain iNaturalist resources and how to make reports. MISC printed 10,000 for distribution. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Information cards focused on Eastern heath snail, in cooperation with CEMIST and the Department of Agriculture, are in development. ○ Other possible info cards for hunters/anglers, pollinators, native species of greatest conservation need, and SEEK app for youth. • Plan to host meetings to update partners quarterly and answer questions.
<p>Science Advisory Panels</p>	<p>The council discussed a Science Advisory Panel (SAP) for 2026 and whether to select a topic and convene a panel this year. Since no new topic or “champion” has been identified, it was suggested a future SAP ideas could emerge from the 2026 Summit.</p> <p>The council discussed follow-up activities to the 2025 SAP to Assess Invasiveness and planning for a workshop to identify an assessment tool for Montana.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Assessment Tools Training Workshop will be held in the spring and lead by Deah Laurence MTNHP and taxonomic experts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Travel expenses for the trainer, estimated to be around \$2,000, were endorsed by the council. • Following the workshop, it was recommended to select 12–15 test cases across taxa as that MTNHP will run through the chosen risk-assessment tool, then gather feedback from species managers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expect a 1-year timeframe to validate the tool, build a defensible invasiveness scoring system <p>Motion: Continue the work of the 2025 SAP to Assess Invasiveness by implementing a risk assessment tool.</p>

	<p>1st: Karen Laitala 2nd: Jasmine Chaffee Motion passed</p>
Strategic Planning	<p>The council discussed creating both a strategic plan and work plan to guide the Council members and staff activities during the next several years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MISC has never had a strategic plan but has other guiding documents including the Invasive Species Framework, Charter and By Laws, and work plan. A document is need that provides clear direction, expectations and a formal way to set and defend priorities; the ability to say “no” to projects that do not align; and to provide continuity over time. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The current informal “4P” document (prevention, preparedness, priority species, partnerships) has been useful but is no longer enough to guide priorities, budgets, and staff time. The council agreed to seek a strategic planning facilitator experienced with conservation and invasive-species organizations to guide the process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expectations are that council members will participate in multiple sessions, spread over a year, to work through this process. It was emphasized that “what you put in is what you get out.” <p>Motion: Move forward with strategic planning process. 1st: Tom Woolf 2nd: Andy Welch Discussion: How long will this process take, what are the expectations of council members, and how much will it cost? Expect the process to take 1 year to finish, council members are expected to be involved in the process with perhaps two half-day sessions, estimated cost of around \$6,000, which may be low. Motion passed</p>
Other Discussion Wrap-Up	<p>Discussed Woody Invasive Working Group funding for the river tour, continued support for work group coordination and meetings. WIWG has applied for grants, so the amount of funding is not known. Decided to put off future funding discussion until the next meeting.</p> <p>Meeting paused at 5:08pm. Day 2 will start December 16th at 8:30 am</p>
Day 2 December 16	<p>Chair Steve Wanderaas opened the meeting at 8:30 am</p>
AIS Response Plan	<p>Tom Woolf (FWP) provided information about the AIS Response plan for a mussel detection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mussels are moving closer and Montana needs to be prepared. Only a few states with no mussel detections: MT, OR, WA, WY. Golden mussels in California are a new threat. Montana’s Invasive Mussels Rapid Response Guidelines were created in 2018 and updated in July 2025. Past Response Exercises: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flathead Rapid Response with CSKT - 2018 Fort Peck Reservoir Rapid Response with USACE - 2021 CSKT & FWP EDRR Overview - 2022 Koocanusa Rapid Response with BC – 2024 Montana does not use eDNA as a primary early detection method for Dreissenid mussels.
EQC & SJ42	<p>Jasmine Chaffee (MT Department of Agriculture) shared information about SJ42. This EQC study bill will review current noxious weed laws, weed control strategies, compare Montana with other states, and make recommendation for the next legislative session. See more here: Summary of work on SJ42</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MWCA sent a survey to their membership about the top issues/challenges.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EQC panel meets January 13th. MWCA conference on February 10-12 in Billings.
NAISMA Recap	<p>MISC members/staff (Steve, Karen, Jason, Jasmine, Russ and Liz) shared their experience and thoughts about attending the North America Invasive Species Management Association (NAISMA) conference in Lake Tahoe, Nevada last November.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unfortunate that federal partners were unable to attend. Networking and sessions on treatment, policies, outreach, and new technologies were of interest. MISC staff appreciate that the conference is all-taxa. Karen and Liz assisted with moderating sessions; Russ presented on Montana’s “don’t move firewood” project and co-organized the banquet entertainment “Wait, wait, don’t tell me” show. The next NAISMA conference is Oct 19-22, 2026, in Alexandria, Virginia.
Round Robin Updates	<p>Tom Woolf – Fish, Wildlife & Parks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 120,000 boats inspected and 3,000 samples collected in 2025 – no evidence of mussels. Inspection stations and surveys were conducted by FWP and partners (CDs, tribes, etc.). High Plains CD is taking over the Highway 12 inspection station to help resolve HR issues. <p>Taylor Tidwell – Department of Commerce</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provided ideas to MISC staff before October meeting and has a list from Tom. Has check-ins with the six-tourism region leadership after the holidays to gather ideas for partnering with the council and what the tourism regions need. <p>Lori Witham – USDA APHIS PPQ</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CAPS pest detection traps will be in southwest and eastern Montana counties looking for exotic wood-boring bark beetles and moths in tourism and industry pathways. Spongy moth traps deployed in cooperation with DNRC and MDA; MDA trapped 2 moths in 1 trap near Hungry Horse. Japanese beetle traps deployed at airports in cooperation with MDA; Japanese beetle is attracted to scent of jet fuel. One beetle trapped in Kalispell. Port Environ survey will be placed along import pathways (international airports, border crossings, cargo hubs, railways, weigh stations) focused on Asian defoliators species. Some shipping containers were off loaded from a vessel in Seattle before spongy moths and egg masses were detected. Forty states got containers, two containers headed for Montana (Butte and Kalispell). PPQ will do survey in winter and set traps in spring. MDA got report of dead spotted lantern fly in Butte; PPQ will collaborate on surveys and trapping. <p>Jasmine Chaffee – MT Dept. of Agriculture - Noxious Weeds</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding has been restored for AmeriCorps program and Noxious Weed Trust Fund (NUTF) after being short nearly \$1 million last funding cycle. NUTF grants due January 6 with hearings in March. CABI, based in Europe and does biocontrol research, had funding cut 80%. Wyoming and Montana are providing about \$80K (combined) to continue needed research, other states may contribute also. Expect a shortage of biocontrol researchers in Montana as people retire (e.g., Jeff Littlefield); down to one part-time person compared to 5 or 6 researchers seven years ago. Western Weed Coordinating Committee is updating Western Weed Action Plan; it includes data sharing and collaboration on dashboards.

- AgCorps program will have 14 members in 2026.

Jason Allen – Montana Department of Transportation

- Rush skeletonweed remains a major focus; new site on Highway 200 will get containment spraying in spring.
- Ventenata trying to contain along I-90 near Bozeman and south of Billings.
- MDT part of drone spectral-imaging research project for rush skeleton weed with University of Montana (about \$250K). Hope to build AI detection tools (down to quarter-sized rosettes) that multiple agencies can benefit from.

Sarah Ricklefs – Conservation Organization (ISAN)

- Next pet rehoming event in Bozeman this spring.
- Received a QZAP grant to do more paddler outreach.
- Will conduct a risk assessment project for WID stations in the west, evaluating operating status and night operations; funded by BOR.
- Have a coordinating agreement with the Forest Service (via Michelle Cox) to support AIS prevention/eradication/outreach in MT and ND, including potential community-science BioBlitz work around Lake Sakakawea.
 - Suggested MISC/MTNHP tools and website could support a broader regional BioBlitz initiative.

Jake Caldwell – DNRC (Forest Pests)

- Upcoming emerald ash borer (EAB) outreach events at AMTOP and MNLA conferences; includes destructive sampling demonstration to show EAB galleries to help improve detection skills and presentation on EAB.
- DNRC will be doing spongy moth and possibly wooly adelgid survey work this summer.

Karen Lititala – County Weed Districts (Powell County Weed Coordinator)

- Provided letter of support for a Missoula County Ecology proposal with Working Dogs for Conservation to train dogs to detect rush skeletonweed, citing success with dyer's woad detections.
- Acting as Ag Extension in Powell county and will put on training for private applicators.
- Described rush skeletonweed finding along Highway 200 with credit to Dylan Brown.
- Reported on coming changes in herbicide label and licensing rules; urged applicators to not let their licenses lapse before changes take effect January 1.

Andy Welch – Northwestern Energy

- No updates to share.

Dylan Brown – Agricultural Representative

- Plans to attend more producer conferences to better capture agricultural priorities and represent producers' interests to the council.
- Expressed concern about rapid spread of rush skeletonweed along roadside in western Montana and uncertainty about impacts east of the Continental Divide.
- Intends to track SJ42.

Megan Martin

- No updates to share.

Brenda Wachowski – BLM (via chat)

- BLM remains under a hiring freeze; she is covering both her current role and her former Miles City field office weed specialist duties.
- Conference travel requires formal requests; submitted MWCA attendance requests,
- BLM remains on a continuing resolution, no budget yet but possible 10–15% reduction.

Michelle Cox – U.S. Forest Service (via text)

- AIS agreement has been awarded to MT Fish, Wildlife & Parks.
- Appreciate concerns about Forest Service reorganization.
- Will share link to a report.

Steve – Chair - Conservation Districts

- High Plains Conservation District will take over management of the Helena-Highway 12 watercraft inspection station.

Round Robin Updates

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • McCone CD will host a drone workshop on January 19. • Steve will sit on the SJ42 panel at the EQC meeting representing conservation districts. • Steve and MISC staff are meeting with DNRC director Amanda Kastor on 12/16/25 and DOA director Jillian Street, Jasmine Chaffee, and Ian Foley on 12/17/25 to talk about weed district funding. • Steve and MISC staff are meeting with Montana Natural Heritage Program on 12/16/25 about more stable funding. • Discussion: would MTNHP benefit from a letter writing campaign from users to show support. SJ42 could be an avenue to show the benefits of MTNHP. Industry could be an ally as they use MTNHP when complying for certification or environmental regulations, i.e., Sustainable Forestry Initiative – certificate of wood product manufacturing.
Public Comment	<p>Tim Tilton – Upper Missouri Watershed Alliance (public comment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will the new bucket biology video be posted on the MISC website under Reports and Publications? <i>Yes, it will be posted there and on the DNRC and FWP YouTube channels.</i> • UMOWA hired Josh Seckinger as part-time executive director (also on EQC). Hope to do enhance efforts in weed control and conservation work. <p>Bryce Maxell – Montana Natural Heritage Program (public comment)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan to expand citizen-science work and improve workflow for data sharing and automation of EDDMapS data. • Will collaborate with CSKT on invasion-risk models across the Crown of the Continent (into Canada), which also builds Canadian data layers useful for future modeling. • Can offered support meetings for GIS/mapping needs of county weed managers (coordinated with DoA). • Will change predicted habitat-suitability/invasion-risk models and incorporate climate-exposure maps. <p>Brent – CEMIST</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning a central Montana invasive annual grasses workshop with Petroleum County and the Winnett Aces on March 11th. Will include CEU for private applicators. • Will apply for an AIS grant to extend education/outreach and increase focus on agriculture and irrigation industry. <p>Megan Hoyer – MT Dept. of Agriculture (education/outreach)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thanked MISC for education and outreach opportunities; highlighted Montana Realtor workshops and collaboration on AIS and stream-permitting education with conservation groups. • Hosting a Growing Invasive Species education workshop on January 28, 2026.
Wrap-up & Adjourn	<p>Motion: to adjourn the meeting 1st: Jason Allen 2nd: Sara Ricklefs Motion passed Meeting closed at 11:44 am</p>