

Indiana Invasive Species Council – Q1 Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday 26 February 2025; 10:00 am to 1:00 pm Eastern Time
Location: The Nature Conservancy, 620 E Ohio St, Indianapolis, IN 46202

1. Call to Order (K. Werling)

2. Roll Call (K. Werling)

Council Members Present

- Kelli Werling (IISC Chair), Director of Swine Health Programs, representing Indiana State Board of Animal Health, kwerling@boah.in.gov
- Alicia Kelley, IN CAPS State Survey Coordinator, representing Dean of Agriculture, Purdue University (Secretariat), ajkelley@purdue.edu
- Phyllis Boyd, Director, representing Indianapolis Parks & Recreation, phyllis.boyd@indy.gov
- Rick Haggard, Executive Director, Indiana Nursery and Landscape Association, representing industry, haggard.rick@att.net
- Matt Kraushar, Roadside Maintenance Specialist, representing Indiana Department of Transportation, mkraushar@indot.in.gov
- Heather Reynolds, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in Biology, Indiana University, representing research, hlreynol@indiana.edu
- Kate Sanders, Resource Specialist, representing Indiana State Department of Agriculture, kasanders1@isda.in.gov
- Joe Schmees, IN Freshwater Strategy Manager, The Nature Conservancy, representing land trusts, joseph.schmees@tnc.org
- Aubree Szczepanski, Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, IN DNR, representing IN DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife, aszczepanski@dnr.in.gov
- Mike Warner, President of ArborTerra Consulting, Inc., representing Indiana forest industry, mwarner@arborterra.com

Non-Council Members Present:

- Dawn Slack, III Project Manager/Coordinator
- Les Zimmerman, Legislative Manager for the Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
- Ray Chattin, Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, SICIM Board member
- Jen Larson, Invasive Plant Specialist, United States Forest Service
- Marissa Striefel, Entomologist, United States Forest Service
- Bob Bruner, Exotic Forest Pest Educator, Purdue University

3. Adoption of Agenda (K. Werling)

- Discussion:
 - Motion: Mike
 - Second: Matt
 - Vote: Unanimous

4. Review and approval of minutes from prior meeting (K. Werling)

- Discussion: Minutes didn't arrive until the start of the meeting due to issues with listserv. Minutes for November meeting will be reviewed and voted on during May meeting.

5. Member Reports/Updates

- The Nature Conservancy/Land Trusts (J. Schmees)
 - The internal review of the strategic implementation plan for 2025–2030 was completed at the end of the last quarter. The current focus is on financial planning, including budgeting for the upcoming fiscal year and the full five-year scope of the plan. This involves assessing current funding sources, identifying future funding opportunities, and preparing to integrate these budgets at the Midwest division level. External communication about the plan is expected by the end of Q1 or early Q2. The official start of the plan is set for July 1st.
 - Preparations for spring fieldwork are underway. Two to three prescribed burns have already been conducted in the past week to help control invasive species and promote healthy vegetation growth.
 - Federal funding remains uncertain. Several grants are currently active, being contracted, or on standby. The team, along with many partners, is closely monitoring the situation and will continue to advocate for support in conservation work, especially related to invasive species.
- Purdue University College of Agriculture (A. Kelley)
 - Small farm conference is next week, March 4th through 5th. Bob and Alicia will provide outreach at the invasive species booth.
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division Fish and Wildlife (E. Fisher/ A. Szczepanski)
 - The Mississippi River Panel meeting recently took place in Gulfport. Staff also participated in the boat show over the past two weekends, where they supported invasive species outreach and education efforts.
 - Current work includes coordination with Eric on the Interstate Early Detection initiative.
 - A presentation on invasive species is scheduled for March as part of the Master Watershed Stewards program.
 - There is a potential amendment to the Starry Stonewort contract.
- State Board of Animal Health (K. Werling)
 - The start of 2025 has been extremely active due to the resurgence of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI). After nearly a year without cases, Indiana reported its first case of 2025 on January 3, followed by a rapid increase to 20 cases in six weeks. The outbreaks span the state and include:
 - Commercial flocks: 8 turkey (Adams, Jay, Washington Counties), 5 egg layer (Jackson and Jay Counties), 3 duck breeder (Elkhart and LaGrange Counties)
 - Backyard flocks: 4 in Jasper, Shelby, Randolph, and Union Counties
 - The widespread distribution has made response efforts more challenging, with many staff deployed and significant agency time devoted to managing cases.
 - A new case of Chronic Wasting Disease was also confirmed in a wild deer in Posey County, discovered through a hunter harvest sample submitted at a check station. This brings the state's total to two confirmed cases.
 - Two foreign animal disease investigations were conducted last quarter to rule out foot-and-mouth disease and New World screwworm. The screwworm is of growing concern as it moves north into Mexico.
 - Avian metapneumovirus, an emerging poultry disease, has now been confirmed in 451 cases across 33 counties since March 2024.

- There are now 975 confirmed cases of HPAI in cattle across 18 states, though none in Indiana. Indiana is preparing to participate in the national milk testing strategy mandated by USDA to monitor for H5N1 in dairy herds. The launch is anticipated in March.
- Staff remain engaged in both emergency response and ongoing regulatory responsibilities as the state continues to address multiple animal health threats.
- Discussion focused on the detection and response protocols surrounding avian influenza (AI), along with its impact on both domestic and wild bird populations, and its recent emergence in dairy cattle.
 - Producers often first observe increased bird mortality and reduced water consumption. Other signs include lethargy and neurologic symptoms, particularly in ducks. These early symptoms trigger testing and confirmatory diagnostics.
 - The current federal and state-level strategy remains eradication through depopulation of infected flocks. While historically effective, the ongoing nature of the current outbreak—beginning in February 2022—has led to discussions about potentially shifting to a vaccination strategy. However, trade implications remain a major concern.
 - HPAI is also significantly affecting wild birds. Mortality events, such as large die-offs of Sandhill Cranes in southern Indiana, often serve as early indicators. Testing is conducted by DNR, with positive results shared periodically. There is uncertainty about resistance or genetic immunity in bird populations, and comprehensive monitoring remains a challenge.
 - Certain waterfowl species can carry the virus asymptomatically, facilitating its spread through fecal matter during migration. This contributes to its infiltration into poultry operations.
 - Avian influenza has also been detected in dairy cattle, with 975 confirmed cases across 18 states. The virus targets mammary tissue, making milk a key sample type for testing. Pasteurization remains effective, and milk from sick cows is excluded from the food supply. Cows recover from the virus and can return to production. There is no national eradication strategy for dairy cattle, and state-level responses vary. Indiana plans to participate in the national milk testing surveillance initiative.
- Indiana Department of Transportation (M. Kraushar)
 - As federal funding issues emerge, INDOT will continue move things forward from a vegetation management perspective as it aligns with priorities.
 - Discussion centered on the costs and logistics of roadside vegetation management, as well as public perception and outreach strategies.
 - Assigning a precise cost per mile is complex due to a mix of owned and rented forestry equipment and embedded overhead costs. INDOT tracks internal metrics such as labor hours and acres treated, but exact comparisons to private contractors are difficult. As a reference point, contracted roadside mowing averages around \$150 per acre. This data can be compiled into reports if needed for broader discussions.
 - Since 2019, INDOT has purchased several forestry mulchers and attachments for vegetation work. Equipment use varies by district, with each district executing its own vegetation management plans under broad agency guidance. A new coordinator has been hired in the Crawfordsville district to provide more focused planning, while other areas such as Seymour and southern Indiana are actively engaging in woody vegetation clearing and treatment.

- While vegetation removal supports ecological goals and invasive species control, it has also received pushback from adjacent landowners. Some have escalated complaints to representatives.
 - The council discussed the potential to expand targeted outreach through partnerships, such as SICIM or Purdue Extension, and better utilize existing communication channels. Although INDOT has a public-facing website and social media communications, these channels have limited reach. Reaching approximately 330,000 adjacent landowners is very challenging. Heather suggested phased outreach targeting smaller groups each year to improve engagement and understanding of INDOT's vegetation management practices.
- Indiana Department of Agriculture (K. Sanders)
 - The Indiana State Soil Conservation Board has awarded \$1.3 million in Clean Water Indiana competitive grant funding to 16 Soil and Water Conservation Districts and one organization. The majority of funding supports agronomic practices, but several grants also include components for invasive species control.
 - Invasive species-related projects primarily focus on management and removal, with fewer projects incorporating native plantings. Past years included a mix of removal and planting efforts, while the current year is more centered on invasive species control alone.
 - **Action item: Kate will share a link to the full list of funded projects with the Council.**
- Research (H. Reynolds)
 - Heather followed up on her previously emailed list of five potential speakers, all researchers focused on invasive species ecology and management in the Midwest. She recommended starting with Michael Jenkins (Purdue), who specializes in bush honeysuckle. Kelli agreed to follow up and explore the possibility of having a speaker join the next meeting in May.
 - Heather shared a resource from the gardening community identifying native species that are particularly effective in resisting invasive species. The list includes plants noted by naturalistic gardeners for their competitive traits, and although largely anecdotal, Heather is interested in initiating formal research on the topic.
 - Matt shared that he is part of a national research panel (under the National Highway Cooperative Research Program) examining barriers and best practices for establishing native vegetation along transportation corridors. The initiative is federally sponsored and aims to produce a best practices guide for DOTs nationwide. The research began two months ago and is expected to conclude in two years. Topics include funding mechanisms, seed banking models, and case studies from other states.
 - Kate noted that in Fort Wayne, the city's Director of Right-of-Ways is incorporating native plantings in roundabouts and median strips. Public feedback has varied, but the visible use of natives has been a valuable learning tool.
- Nursery (R. Haggard)
 - Indiana Green Expo 2025 Recap: The Indiana Green Expo had over 1,600 attendees, with strong engagement at the IISC/MIPN/CISMA booth. While classroom sessions saw less traffic—likely due to higher registration fees—the trade show floor drew more participation. Plans are underway to explore hosting future invasive species talks on the trade show floor, which requires only a \$40 entry fee. This approach could increase accessibility and attendance, especially for those not affiliated with INLA or MRTF. Next year's event is scheduled for February 8–11, 2026, with booth setup on the 8th, workshops on the 9th, and main expo days on the 10th and 11th.

- Organizers will coordinate with Heather regarding booth arrangements and may invite additional speakers for invasive species-focused sessions. Kyle Daniel is expected to reach out with ideas for speaker participation during trade show talks.
- The IOMA group met with Senator Glick through their lobbyist to express support for continued Clean Water Act funding. This advocacy was part of a collaborative effort by a coalition of five associations to advance shared conservation goals.
- Parks and Recreation (P. Boyd)
 - The City of Indianapolis has received a \$12 million multi-year grant through the USFS Urban and Community Forestry Grant program. The funding supports:
 - Invasive species removal
 - Tree inventory (covering all trees on city-owned public land, with completion targeted for 2029)
 - Tree plantings, with work already underway in Washington Park and one additional site
 - Projects across seven parks and greenways throughout the city
 - The initiative involves both in-house staff and contracted services, with registration as a state vendor required for contracting eligibility. The grant is part of IRA-funded urban forestry programs, which allow for extended timelines due to federal funding structure.
 - Indiana Park and Recreation Association's Natural Resources and Trails Group will be holding a meeting on April 3rd. Phyllis will attend and update the group.
- Forest Industry (M. Warner)
 - Mike shared that the Indiana Forest Forever Coalition, a group of approximately 35 organizations (including forestry, wildlife, sportsmen, and woodland owner groups), is involved in initiatives addressing invasive species and other natural resource issues. This coalition has been actively engaged in legislative efforts over the past few years.
 - Mike discussed the role of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in funding invasive species management through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program. \$10 million has been allocated to invasive species management, largely funded by the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) in recent years. However, due to changes in the current administration, IRA funding has been paused, creating uncertainty for ongoing projects. Other funding sources like the Joint Chiefs Initiative in southern Indiana remain unaffected by the IRA pause and continue to support invasive species management.
 - Discussion
 - Kelli inquired whether there is a compilation of all federal dollars and grant funds being directed towards invasive species management. Mike clarified that while the NRCS tracks their funding, there is no comprehensive compilation of all funding sources for invasive species across different programs. Matt noted that invasive species funding is often part of broader programs, which can make it difficult to track expenditures specifically dedicated to invasive species.
 - Kate discussed the challenges in mapping invasive species, as some restorationists prioritize management and control over mapping and formal tracking.
- Indiana Plant Advisory Committee and SICIM (D. Slack)
 - The Midwest Invasive Plant Network (MIPN) Conference will be held in Burlington, Kentucky on March 19-20. The keynote speaker will be Daniel Simberloff, and there will be several field trips associated with the event. Those interested are encouraged to register online.

- The Invasive Plant Advisory Committee (IPAC) is currently in a holding pattern. The team is waiting for the amendment process to be completed for the latest round of assessments.
- SICIM attended the Green Expo, which was well attended with over 70 people in the room. The booth was continuously busy, and there was strong interest in native plants and avoiding invasive species listed on the terrestrial plant rule and other state invasive species lists.
- The Indiana Invasives Initiative is now represented by 45 CISMAs across 54 counties. The initiative is expanding and currently covers 75 counties, with six additional counties joining since the January IASWCD (Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts) Conference.
- 47,000 acres have been walked with landowners, and the number of landowner surveys is growing. The initiative continues to hold over 200 weed wrangles annually.
- The next statewide Weed Wrangle will be held on October 11, with a goal to increase participation beyond the 22 counties that joined last year.
- A SICIM representative spoke at the Ambassadors Conference in Alabama, a global event for CISMAs. Participants included people from Australia, New Zealand, Africa, and several Indiana CISMAs. The conference attracted 56 attendees, and there was great interest in Indiana's work. Several states have reached out to learn more about Indiana's approach.
- EDRR (Early Detection Rapid Response): The initiative is moving forward with EDRR efforts. Two meetings have been held with CISMAs to discuss early detection and rapid response strategies.
- Going forward, CISMAs will begin collaborating with DEPP (Division of Entomology and Plant Pathology), the Indiana Plant Advisory Committee, and others to define what EDRR should look like in Indiana and how CISMAs can contribute.
- **Discussion**
 - Les discussed the growing momentum around invasive species management, especially within the forestry sector. The IASWCD played a crucial role in supporting Senator Glick's bill that will enable the State Soil Conservation Board to use Clean Water Indiana funding to address invasive species. The bill passed with unanimous support from the Senate and is moving to the House. The association plans to testify in favor of this legislation.
 - Les also shared that the issue of invasive species is becoming more urgent, with a growing recognition within the legislature, particularly about the \$10 billion hardwood industry in Indiana being threatened by invasive species.
 - There has been a \$4 million appropriation bill authored by Beau Baird for forestry management with a focus on invasive species; although the bill did not pass, it marked a significant development in the legislative conversation.
 - Les emphasized the need for further engagement with various stakeholders, including landscape industry groups and nurseryman associations, to develop a comprehensive plan to address invasive species.
 - Mike highlighted that a recent survey within the Indiana Hardwood Lumberman's Association and other forestry-related organizations identified invasive species as the top priority affecting the industry, supporting the need for continued collaboration.
 - Les expressed optimism about involving more diverse stakeholders, including Indiana Hardwood Lumbermen's Association, landscape contractors, and others, to address invasive species in a coordinated way.

- Kelli discussed the limitations of state-appointed members who cannot directly lobby or participate in certain legislative actions, making the Soil and Water Conservation District and other associations essential for driving legislative efforts.
- Motion: Mike made a motion for an IISC member to serve as IISC liaison for the State Association's initiative to work on recommendations regarding invasive species.
- The motion was seconded by Heather and passed with unanimous approval.
- Mike agreed to be the Council representative. Ray agreed to support this during strategic planning discussions.
- Les and Matt agreed that this initiative should specifically focus on the forestry-related invasive species, but emphasized the importance of a broader approach that could also extend to other areas like agriculture and highway systems.
- Ray raised concerns about the impact of recent layoffs within NRCS (National Resources Conservation Service) on the availability of funds for invasive species management. Forty NRCS employees in Indiana have been laid off, which could affect discretionary spending and program execution. However, SICIM's contribution agreement is currently unaffected.
- Ray also highlighted the importance of reestablishing weed boards at the township level in Indiana to support invasive species management. Townships hold a significant amount of funding, potentially up to \$750 million, which could be accessed for invasive species efforts.

6. Old Business

- Council reviewed outstanding Action Items from prior meeting. The following action items are rolled over:
 - K. Werling will evaluate agency links that are on the IISC website.
 - D. Slack to put together statewide Weed Wrangle interim report.
 - M. Abraham work with R. Haggard to write an article on vascular streak.
- Indiana Invasive Species Conference Planning Committee (A. Kelley)
 - The conference agenda is mostly finalized with only two speaker spots left, and they already have good leads on filling them. Field trips are also planned.
 - The conference will be held at the South Shore Welcome Center in Hammond, Indiana, which is in the northwest part of the state. The capacity is about 250, and this year's focus will be on the Dunes area.
 - The conference is currently focused on securing sponsorships, with \$3,000 raised so far, aiming for a goal of \$8,000-\$10,000 by the end of April. This is to keep registration costs affordable.
 - One of the main goals is to encourage more participation from northern Indiana, as past conferences have been in central and southern parts of the state. This year's location is expected to attract attendees from nearby states like Michigan and Illinois.
 - The plan is to open general registration in early May. Volunteers are encouraged to help with sponsorship calls and promotion of the event.
- Media Committee Update (A. Kelley)
 - The outdated resources page was removed and replaced with a link to the SICIM page for CISMA.
 - A new section for quarterly meetings was added, with all meeting links now available on the website. This should make it easier for attendees to find the information.
 - Kelli suggested changing the meeting end time to 1 PM, and Alicia agreed to make that change.

- The website now has the ability to post news articles, which was one of the original reasons for the update. This allows for easy sharing of news and articles related to the group.
- Matt suggested that the website could also serve as a platform for external organizations to share relevant news.
- Dawn mentioned that SICIM's annual report is available and could be posted on the website. She will also make a list of others who might have content to share, such as Tippecanoe and Hamilton counties.
- Matt proposed adding the IISC's general email to newsletters from various organizations, which could help centralize news distribution.

7. New Business

- HB 1638 update and discussion
 - Kelli noted that the bill is effectively "dead" unless it gets reintroduced through another bill. This bill proposed dissolving the IISC and replacing it with a new commission on invasive species and pests, which is no longer progressing through legislature.
 - Ray suggested the council should take a more proactive stance by improving its functionality and expanding its inclusiveness in addressing statewide invasive species efforts. Dawn emphasized that there is a need to take the council's work seriously, particularly given how easily it could have been dismantled. She stressed the importance of having a clear rationale for the council's existence, beyond just the biennial report.
 - Ray proposed that the council should develop a structural plan for how the IISC should operate. Les suggested revisiting the council's representation and ensuring broader involvement from other agencies, such as the Division of Forestry.
 - Les emphasized that legislators tend to respond to economic impact. He suggested framing the council's work around its economic importance. Mike proposed that the council should build partnerships outside of its immediate scope to amplify its voice. This could involve collaborating with stakeholders who can advocate for the council in ways that the council itself cannot.
 - Les recommended that the council start developing materials to clearly communicate its goals and needs, particularly around economic impacts, to legislators. This could be part of a longer-term strategy for legislative advocacy, looking ahead to the next budget session.
 - Mike suggested that the council's document outlining concerns about the bill be kept in reserve for future use, as the bill is unlikely to progress further, but the council could use the document to inform future discussions if necessary.
 - Key takeaways include that the IISC needs to be more proactive in its legislative strategy, focusing on educating legislators, strengthening partnerships, and framing its work in terms of economic impact. The biennial report alone isn't enough to ensure the council's survival and relevance; additional materials and strategies need to be developed. Future actions should involve engaging legislators, revisiting the council's structure, and advocating for the council's importance, especially in relation to forestry and other economically significant sectors.
- Open Door Law
 - Kelli raised an important point regarding the upcoming Open Door Law, which will go into effect on July 1, 2025. This law requires that all governing bodies of state agencies live stream public meetings and make the recordings available for 90 days following the meeting. She mentioned that while it's unclear whether the Indiana Invasive Species Council falls under this new requirement, it is something to consider. Kelli suggested reaching out to legislative affairs (LA) representatives from individual agencies to gather their opinions on whether the council would need to comply.

- Matt confirmed that, based on the guidance he received when he chaired the council, the group would likely fall under the requirements of the law. He explained that this was one of the reasons the council adopted a policy for live streaming and online participation during meetings. The council has been operating as an open public forum with advertised meetings and therefore should meet the live stream and public access requirements.
- Joe raised a question about whether the recordings of meetings need to be publicly posted or made available upon request. Alicia clarified that she uploads the recordings to a box folder but does not post them publicly.
- Matt suggested getting a professional opinion from LA representatives to ensure the council is compliant with the new law.

8. Action Items

- Alicia will share conference Sponsorship information with the Council.
- Kate will share a link to the full list of funded projects with the Council.
- Previous meeting items:
 - Kelli will evaluate agency links that are on the IISC website.
 - Dawn to put together statewide Weed Wrangle interim report.
 - Megan to work with R. Haggard to write an article on vascular streak.

9. Next Meeting dates:

- May 7, 2025; The Nature Conservancy, 620 E Ohio St, Indianapolis, IN 46202
- Discussion about the location for the meeting on August 6
 - Potentially some locations in Fort Wayne or Huntington were discussed. Updates will be provided at the May meeting.

10. Adjournment

- Motion: Matt
- Second: Mike
- Vote: Unanimous