

Indiana Invasive Species Council – Q1 2026 Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday 4 February 2026; 10:00 am to 1:00 pm Eastern Time

Location: IN DOT - Indianapolis Sub District; Address: 7105 S Brookville Rd, Indianapolis, IN 46239

1) Call to Order (K. Werling)

2) 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
- Aubree Szczepanski, Aquatic Invasive Species Coordinator, IN DNR, representing IN DNR Division of Fish and Wildlife, aszczepanski@dnr.in.gov
- Heather Reynolds, Professor and Director of Graduate Studies in Biology, Indiana University, representing research, hlreynol@iu.edu
- Matt Kraushar, Roadside Maintenance Specialist, representing Indiana Department of Transportation, mkraushar@indot.in.gov
- 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

Non-Council Members Present:

- Vince Burkle, Assistant Director and Survey Coordinator, Division of Entomology and Plant Pathology, bvincent@dnr.in.gov
- Eric Fischer, Aquatic Invasive Species Supervisor, Indiana Department of Natural Resources Division of Fish and Wildlife
- Ray Chattin, Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, SICIM Board member
- Dawn Slack, III Project Manager/Coordinator
- Liz Rice, Executive Director, Indiana Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts

3) Adoption of Agenda (K. Werling)

- Discussion: None
- Motion: Joe
- Second: Kate
- Vote: unanimous

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

- Discussion: Minor changes needed.

- Motion: Matt
- Second: Kate
- Vote: unanimous

5) Old Business

- House Bill 1003
 - IISC Informational document to circulate to legislators
 - Megan shared a one-page overview modeled after the Indiana Pesticide Review Board describing the Council's role; draft letter/pamphlet format reviewed.
 - Council discussed finalizing a similar one-page document explaining the Council's purpose for legislators and stakeholders.
 - General agreement that the document is useful but needs edits
 - Improved tone in opening sentence
 - Clearer comparison of roles between IPRB and IISC
 - Members encouraged to review the draft and provide feedback quickly.
 - Legislative Update
 - Bill proposes merging the Council with the Pesticide Review Board into a single commission under the Department of Agriculture.
 - Concerns raised:
 - Different missions and functions between the two entities.
 - Risk of reduced efficiency rather than improvement.
 - Quorum challenges due to larger combined membership.
 - Limited or unclear funding benefits despite potential shared funds.
 - Capacity concerns for the Department of Agriculture to manage the merged entity.
 - Some potential benefits noted:
 - Opportunity for increased funding or grant access.
 - Possibility of stronger positioning within a state agency.
 - Merger may not improve effectiveness and could create operational challenges.
 - Need to clearly articulate differences between the Council and Pesticide Review Board in communications.
 - Possibility that parts or all of the bill may move to a summer study committee.
 - Uncertainty remains about final legislative outcome and timeline.
 - Action item: Kelli to coordinate final edits to draft letter and follow up with Council on revisions. Liz will assist with sharing document with legislators.
 - Action item: Alicia will update box folder in preparation for possible restructuring.
- Parks and Rec chair vacancy
 - Seat remains unfilled; action paused pending legislative outcomes.
- Invasive Species Awareness Week
 - Proclamation confirmed (Feb 23–27)
- Conference committee reported:
 - 2025 conference generated ~\$16,540 revenue and ~\$11,592 expenses (~\$5,000 net).

- Funds expected to transfer to Council account.
- Future conference planning on hold due to uncertainty around organizational changes.

6) New Business

- Biennial Report submitted by the deadline.
- New IISC Chair
 - Joe is interested
 - Matt: Motion to table discussion of new chair until next council meeting.
 - Second: Joe
 - Vote: Unanimous
- Discussion: Additional meeting will be explored after legislative session
- IISC is invited to the next Forest Stewardship Advisory Meeting on Wednesday, March 18th. A Council representative is welcome to attend.
- Next IISC meeting date:
 - Q2 – May 6, 2026 @ 10 am

7) Member Reports/Updates

- Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division of Entomology and Plant Pathology (Vince Burkle)
 - Terrestrial plant rule updates remain on hold; carbon rules are currently taking priority. Legal review expected in coming months.
 - Field season preparations underway, including:
 - Surveys for Spotted Lanternfly
 - Bark beetle monitoring
 - Surveillance for invasive moth species
 - Statewide effort to document Tree-of-Heaven populations to better anticipate and manage spotted lanternfly infestations.
 - Current spotted lanternfly status:
 - 21 infested counties reported
 - Newly confirmed counties: Lake, LaPorte, Tippecanoe, and Jefferson
 - Discussion on data collection tools and mapping technology
 - IDNR uses Survey123 tool for Tree-of-Heaven mapping.
 - There is interest in the development of a broader, shareable tool for municipalities and CISMAs to:
 - Contribute data
 - Avoid duplication of efforts
 - Integrate with existing datasets (potentially alongside platforms like EDDMapS)
 - Question was asked regarding the use of drone and aerial imagery for detecting Tree-of-Heaven and spotted lanternfly.
 - Challenges with drone usage:
 - Tree-of-Heaven often occurs below canopy, limiting visibility.

- Past interference from dead/dying ash trees reduced detection accuracy.
 - Council discussed opportunities to improve surveillance.
 - Seasonal identification (flowers in summer, seed pods in fall).
 - Potential for improved detection with advancing drone and satellite technologies.
- The Nature Conservancy/Land Trusts (J. Schmees)
 - Strategy review at the end of the year.
- Purdue University College of Agriculture (A. Kelley)
 - Extension consolidation underway. Transition from county-based staffing in all 92 counties to a regional model.
 - Each county will retain a 4-H educator.
 - Other roles will serve multiple adjacent counties.
 - Additional updates on staffing and structure expected following internal meetings.
 - Bug Bowl is on April 18th.
- Indiana Department of Natural Resources, Division Fish and Wildlife (E. Fischer/ A. Szczepanski)
 - Staff preparing for upcoming boat show (mid-February through March 1) with daily outreach presence. Planning for seasonal outreach, including boat landing blitz efforts.
 - Ongoing budget constraints; uncertainty tied to delayed federal funding. Federal shutdown delays (Oct–Nov) pushed grant awards back ~6 months. Programs awaiting finalized grant awards before proceeding with expenditures.
 - Continued work on Invasive Carp management:
 - ~\$800K–\$1M in funding for next 1–1.5 years.
 - Supports commercial harvest incentives and market development.
 - Permitting fully restored (approved by Natural Resources Commission in December).
 - Efforts ongoing to expand carp use as a food product:
 - Exploring partnerships with organizations like Gleaners Food Bank of Indiana.
 - Processing infrastructure and cost per pound is a challenge.
 - Interest in developing business models to support scaling and funding opportunities.
 - Ongoing management efforts of aquatic invasive species such as:
 - Eurasian Watermilfoil
 - Curly-leaf Pondweed
 - Starry Stonewort
 - Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) grants to lake associations forthcoming.
 - Some carryover funds from previous year being used to maintain staffing until new grants arrive.
- State Board of Animal Health (K. Werling)
 - Cattle Health
 - 13 total cases of Theileriosis identified in 15 Indiana counties
 - Asian longhorned tick confirmed in 6 counties and expanding northward

- Cervids / Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD)
 - No cases in farmed deer in Indiana to date
 - In 2025, two new positives in wild deer (Noble and Franklin counties)
 - Previous positives: LaGrange and Posey counties
 - ~500 additional samples pending testing
 - BOAH maintains a proximity dashboard to help producers assess movement restrictions based on distance from positive cases.
- Equine Health
 - In 2025, 36 cases of West Nile Virus and 1 case of Eastern Equine Encephalitis
 - Cases approximately doubled compared to 2024; season extended ~30 days.
 - Majority in northeast Indiana and primarily in unvaccinated horses.
- Avian Influenza (Poultry)
 - Ongoing outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (since Oct 2025).
 - 86 confirmed cases (84 commercial, 2 backyard)
 - Concentrated in Elkhart, LaGrange, and Noble counties
 - Affected operations include ducks, egg layers, broilers, and backyard flocks
 - Response progress:
 - 100% depopulation completed
 - 98% disposal completed
 - 81% cleared for restocking; 38% already restocked
 - Likely driven by local spread in high-density production areas
- Avian Influenza Surveillance in Dairy
 - Indiana is participating in the National Milk Testing Strategy.
 - ~241 milk tankers/month tested
 - Covers ~300 farms (~60% of Indiana bulk tank units)
 - No detections of avian influenza in dairy cattle to date.
- Three foreign animal disease investigations were conducted, all of which were negative:
 - Rabbit Hemorrhagic Disease Virus
 - Vesicular Stomatitis
 - Foot-and-Mouth Disease
- Indiana Department of Transportation (M. Kraushar)
 - INDOT's contractors implemented targeted herbicide applications throughout the year on approximately 59,015 acres of ROW. Approximately, 35,015 acres fell within the first 30' from edge of pavement for the control of noxious and invasive broadleaf weeds. Spot treatments occurred on 8,750 acres of thistle/teasel; 6,000 acres of woody vegetation (both foliar and basal bark applications); 4,250 acres of johnsongrass; and 5,000 acres of Phragmites/cattails.
 - INDOT's in-house staff implemented targeted herbicide applications throughout the year on approximately 11056 acres of ROW. Spot treatments occurred on 2089 acres of thistle/teasel; 1518 acres of woody vegetation (both foliar and basal bark

- applications); 5184 acres of johnsongrass; and 172 acres of Phragmites/cattails and 2093 acres of other invasive species.
 - Planning for 2026 looks similar.
 - Discussion emphasized balancing herbicide use with prevention strategies like biodiversity and early detection.
 - Tree-of-heaven not a primary target but treated opportunistically; coordination with counties is possible.
 - Management priorities are driven by safety and maintenance needs (drainage, access, and line of sight) as well as regulated species, with incompatible and otherwise non-desirable non-regulated species managed as resources allow.
 - Application timing runs from early spring through growing season, with dormant-season treatments also used; timing adjusted to protect sensitive species like white oak.
- Indiana Department of Agriculture (K. Sanders)
 - 2026 CWI grant application information will be coming out soon
- Research (H. Reynolds)
 - Heather attended the Stewardship Network Conference in East Lansing, noting a strong focus on land stewardship, restoration, and invasive species management.
 - Presenters Susan and John Cross (Ohio) promoted “homegrown habitats” to encourage private landowners to remove invasives and restore native plant communities.
 - The Crosses could be invited for future events or conferences due to their outreach value.
 - Heather raised a broader question about how Midwest states structure invasive species programs and noted the differences between states. For example, Michigan has a government-supported program while Ohio uses a nonprofit-based approach.
 - Proposed a comparative review of Midwest invasive species councils as a potential policy and funding talking point.
 - Offered to compile a summary of state-level structures if helpful.
 - Matt noted that relevant information likely already exists through the Division of Entomology and Plant Pathology and the National Plant Board and suggested using existing national-level documentation rather than rebuilding a new dataset.
 - Discussion noted variability across state governments, making direct comparisons challenging due to differing agency structures and reporting systems.
- Forest Industry (M. Warner)
 - See Appendix I for update on Invasives Management Strategy Working Group.
- SICIM (D. Slack)
 - III (Indiana Invasives Initiative)
 - The number of active CISMAs remains steady at approximately 60.
 - All CISMAs remain engaged in invasive species management despite a challenging year and grant-related constraints.
 - Many CISMAs conducting invasive species work, including 100-day seasonal management efforts.

- Activities include weed wrangles (public engagement) and strike team operations on partner lands.
- CISMAs serve as primary outreach and education networks.
- Over \$300,000 in SICIM funding distributed in 2025 for outreach, weed wrangles, and training.
- Landowner surveys and public education remain key functions.
- ~16 workshops conducted last year.
- 8 workshops already scheduled for this year.
- Increasing demand, with CISMAs independently requesting and hosting workshops.
- SICIM strengthening website and communication systems.
- Planning underway for transition as NRCS grant funding winds down.
- Goal is to maintain coordination under SICIM umbrella organization.

8) Review of assigned/previous action items.

- Draft of the IISC informational document will circulate through the council, preferably through a live document. Kelli will coordinate with Megan to collaborate with the Pesticide Review Board on the messaging.
- Alicia will update the box folder with our minutes and meeting recordings.

9) Adjournment

- Motion: Joe
- Second: Matt
- Vote: unanimous

APPENDIX I

Briefing Memo

Subject: Current Funding Landscape, Organizational Shifts, and Strategic Considerations for Invasive Species Management in Indiana from the Invasives Management Strategy Working Group **Date:** January 2026

Overview

Indiana's invasive species management system is entering a period of significant transition. Multiple agencies and partners are experiencing funding constraints, staffing shortages, and structural changes that will affect statewide capacity—particularly on private lands. At the same time, legislative interest in restoring or expanding support for invasive species work is growing, creating an opportunity to align partners, clarify roles, and prepare for potential funding windows in 2027. Primary focus of this Group is Terrestrial Invasives Species relating to forestry, parks, and rights of way on public and private lands.

Key Developments

1. Federal and State Funding Constraints

- **Federal NRCS funding** reductions have sharply limited capacity.
- **SICIM's** current funding expires in 2027, raising concerns about continuity of statewide coordination of the Indiana Invasive Initiative (III).
- **CWI funds are increasingly used for local invasive species projects** in association with Indiana Soil and Water Conservation Districts (SWCD), with fewer resources available for statewide initiatives such as SICIM.
- **Private philanthropic support** has declined as major funders shift priorities.

2. Organizational and Structural Changes

- **Purdue Extension** is transitioning to a **regional pod model**, altering local support structures.
- **CISMAs** continue to expand and innovate:
 - 60 counties now have a CISMA (51,000 acres under engagement).
 - Four additional CISMAs conduct independent landowner surveys.
 - SWCDs apply for grants and then work with CISMAs to execute grant metrics and goals. This partnership benefits the CISMA, the SWCD and local citizens.
- **SICIM** is a great model for success

- **ISDA–DSC and IDNR- Indiana Division of Forestry** remain central players, though invasive species work spans multiple agencies and partners.
- **IASWCD** can serve in a unifying role among all agencies and associations

3. Policy and Legislative Activity

- The **State Forester** may support placing invasive species management authority with **DNR**.
- **IHLA** is developing a comprehensive bill to restore DNR funding, with a focus on overall timber management with private landowners.
 - SWCDs CISMAs and SICIM are viewed as essential grassroots partners.
 - Legislative language is still in development.
 - **2027 presents a potential funding opportunity.**
 - **SB111 passed** to permit the use of funds from the Clean Water Indiana fund to manage invasive plant species. (May expand opportunities for SWCD grants for invasive initiatives)
- HB 1003 in its original form proposed moving the IISC from Purdue to ISDA. That language may be removed, and that concept could be the subject of a summer study committee
- IFB policy references include Sections 9.A, 9.B,10.D, and 11.B
https://www.infarmbureau.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/public-policy/policy-development-resources/2026_infb_state-policy-book.pdf?sfvrsn=a6b2a025_3

4. Capacity and Workforce Challenges

- **Division of Forestry** is significantly understaffed (14 of 21 district foresters filled) and underfunded relative to expectations.
- DNR struggles to manage existing recreational properties, limiting bandwidth for expanded invasive species responsibilities.
- There is a need to cultivate the private workforce(**contractors/consultants**) capacity to handle invasive management workloads at the required scale if federal and state funding materializes.

5. Stakeholder Dynamics

- **ISDA’s alignment with Indiana Farm Bureau (IFB)** could enhance ISDA’s willingness to take on a larger role in invasives.
 - **IFB** is a critical **stakeholder** needed to advance a durable statewide solution.
 - **IISC lacks administrative capacity** to operate a grantmaking board; longstanding challenges in hiring an Executive Director persist.
 - **IASWCD** is a willing participant, but reluctant to take on the leadership role
 - **TNC** would bring credibility and perspective to the conversation
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Strategic Considerations

SWCDs are key delivery partners and work more closely with ISDA/Soil Conservation than with IDNR Forestry.

Consider a Statewide Coordinating Entity

SWCDs cannot run a statewide program independently; they need a **central backbone organization** that provides:

- Program standards
- Technical guidance
- Training
- Data systems
- Contracting frameworks
- Fiscal oversight
- Reporting and accountability

This entity could be housed within:

- The **Indiana State Department of Agriculture (ISDA)**,
- The **IDNR Division of Forestry** or
- A new **state-funded invasive species coordination office**.

Future Funding Oversight

- Any new appropriation must be structured to **avoid triggering reductions** in DNR's base allocation.
- Strengthening the **forestry fund** to accept additional revenue will be essential.

Timing and Alignment

- Legislative engagement should occur **after the current session concludes**.
 - Coordination across DNR, ISDA, IHLA, IASWCD, SICIM, TNC and key partners is needed to present a unified approach.
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Recommended Next Steps

1. Leadership Alignment Meetings

- Schedule meetings with:
 - **Jack Seifert (DNR)**
 - **Don Lamb (ISDA)**
 - **Katie Nelson (IFB)**
- Begin with Jack to test concepts before broader discussions.
- Ray Moistner has offered to coordinate meeting logistics.

2. Subcommittee Preparation

- Participants: **Liz Rice, Mike Warner, Ray Moistner, Dawn Slack**
- Review existing policies and priorities to ensure alignment with agency and legislative directions.

3. Strategic Pauses

- **Defer efforts** to pursue a CWI invasive species earmark.
- **Pause pressure** on IISC for funding or administrative responsibilities until capacity issues are resolved.