

Minutes: Noxious Weed Advisory Committee

Date: 03/05/2026

Participants

Members

Andrew Falk (MN Farmers Union), (Ann Messerschmidt (League of MN Cities), Christina Basch (MnDOT), Cody Dock (MNCAs), Debalin Sarangi (U of M Agronomy), Erin Loeffler (MN BWSR), Hunter Pederson (MN Farm Bureau), Jane Youngkrantz (MN Assoc. Townships), Jim Calkins (MNLA), Jen Larson (USDA FS), Laura Irish-Hanson (MN Landscape Arb), Laura Van Riper (DNR), Lee Frelich (UM Forest Resources), Liz Beery (TNC), Mary Jo Youngbauer (MN SWCDs), Raining White (MCT/Leech Lake), Rob Venette (UM MITPPC), and Sasha Lodge (DNR), and Seth Wannemuehler (U of M Horticulture)

Guests

Davis Harmon (Spring Meadows Nursery), Kelsey Taylor (Barr Engineering), and Zach Schumacher (Schumacher's Nursery)

MDA

Brittany Olson, Emilie Justen, Kimberly Thielen Cremers, Monika Chandler, Michael Merriman

Introductions

Approval of Agenda and Past Meeting Minutes

Emilie requested to add two items to the Management and Policy update on today's agenda. These updates include comments from the legal team on last month's discussion on purple loosestrife statue and an update on statute changes and on bylaws. Laura motioned to approve the agenda with Emilie's changes, and Christina seconded. There were no objections and the motion passed.

No comments or discussion on the past meeting minutes. Jane motioned to approve the past meeting minutes, and Laura seconded. There were no objections and the motion passed.

MDA and Member Updates and Old Business

Listing Subcommittee Updates

- The MDA received a petition to evaluate a Japanese barberry cultivar called *Berberis* x 'NCBX1' Sunjoy® Todo® for exemption. This species is legal to sell until January 2029.
- Species have been chosen by NWAC for risk assessment in 2026 and 2027. The Listing Subcommittee is dividing them in the manner listed below. Presentations for the selected 2026 species will occur at the September full NWAC meeting.
 - 2026
 - Yellow archangel, *Lamium galeobdolon*, *Lamiastrum glaeobdolon*
 - Angelica tree, *Aralia elata*
 - Bristly locust, *Robinia hispida*
 - Creeping bellflower, *Campanula rapunculoides*
 - Empress tree, *Paulownia tomentosa*
 - Yellow-flowered teasel, *Dipsacus strigosus*
 - Exemption request: Glossy buckthorn 'Ron Williams' Fine Line *Rhamnus frangula* cultivar 'Ron Williams' Fine Line
 - 2026/2027
 - European highbush cranberry, *Viburnum opulus*
 - Sargent viburnum, *Viburnum sargentii*
 - Tree of heaven, *Ailanthus altissima*
 - 2027
 - Balfour's touch-me-not, *Impatiens balfourii*
 - Big leaf lupine, *Lupinus polyphyllus*
 - Common wormwood, *Artemisia absinthium*
 - Helleborine orchid, *Epipactis helleborine*
 - Mile a minute weed/vine, *Persicaria perfoliata*
 - Sericea lespedeza, *Lespedeza cuneata*
 - Shiny cotoneaster, *Cotoneaster lucidus*
 - Tall buttercup, *Ranunculus acris*
 - Year not yet determined
 - exemption request for Japanese barberry cultivar *Berberis* x 'NCBX1' Sunjoy® Todo®

Management and Policy Subcommittee Updates

- Statute 18.78 requires the DNR to report where they are controlling purple loosestrife and non-native phragmites. At the last NWAC meeting it was asked if NWAC were to change the classification of purple loosestrife to restricted, would 18.78 need to be updated. Emilie brought this question to legal, who advised that changing the classifications of species in 18.78 would not impact the Statute itself, as it has a clause that 18.78 supersedes other provisions of control. So, a co-recommendation would need to be made to the commissioner that purple loosestrife's classification is changed and to remove it from Statute 18.78. Laura clarified that 18.78 mainly requires the DNR commissioner to provide a list of sites treated with herbicide to the MDA. Laura went on to say that the number of these reports is close to

zero as biocontrol is the main method for controlling purple loosestrife. Raining asked if purple loosestrife is currently listed as an aquatic. Laura stated that purple loosestrife is currently listed both by DNR as a prohibited invasive species and by the MDA as a prohibited control noxious weed. In the sense that the DNR regulates aquatic plants and the MDA regulates terrestrial plants, in this case it is regulated under both terrestrial and aquatic regulations. To directly answer Raining's question – yes, purple loosestrife is regulated under DNR's aquatic invasive plant regulations.

- The Management and Policy Subcommittee submitted revisions to the noxious weed statute last August and they are being submitted to the legislature through MDA's policy bill. Main changes are the addition of definitions and making wording consistent. Major change is that there is an exemption statement for cultivars so the commissioner can exempt a cultivar or variety. Additionally, 18.82 subd. 2 regarding the permit to transport noxious weeds; there is a proposed change to add a research and education permit.
 - Rob asked whether these revisions address foraging on public lands. A foraging task force made recommendations to DNR on this topic. Emilie replied that Tony attended task force meetings but was not on the task force. The revisions to noxious weed statute don't have any additions about foraging. Laura followed the task force through their [website](#). She thought the task force pulled changes to weed law from their final recommendations. The task force learned that transporting weeds such as garlic mustard without propagative parts is legal and changes are not needed. Laura suggested inviting a task force member to present at a future meeting.
- Emilie and Tony proposed changing our bylaws. These changes have not been shared with this committee.
- The last management and policy subcommittee meeting discussed the MDA strategic management plan. After discussions with legal counsel, the MDA has an overarching strategic plan that is signed off by the governor. MDA does not require a strategic plan from any of the programs with the department. MDA does have an approved workplan that meets the department goals. Legal counsel reviewed species webpages to see if the management strategies fulfill our duties and concluded that the webpages fulfill the species management plan requirement.
- Noxious weed grant has no more funding in it but there are current grants that are closing out between now and this fall. There are about five left.
- Through the County Agricultural Inspector grant, 47 counties have been awarded funds. This is to help support the County Agricultural Inspector positions in the counties so they can more effectively do their job. There are two contracts that have not been signed, so the list of awardees cannot be shared publicly at this time. The grantees have been attending training that the MDA has put on, there is a list of requirements that awardees must complete before obtaining funding.
- The Office of Legislative Auditors has been busy auditing State grant programs across all agencies. In preparation for that, the MDA has had a compliance person ensuring that grant administrators are following protocols. The noxious weed grant went through an internal audit this year and it passed. All the processes and reimbursements have all the proper checks and balances that are required.
- There is a noxious weed dashboard in development with an outside contractor. It will use past grant data. The contractor is just starting on it, so it might be at least 6 months before there is something to share with the group.
- The 2025 Annual Report was completed and has been posted online. It includes highlights of the work completed by the MDA noxious weed program in 2025.

Seed Program Advisory Committee Updates

Mike said that SPAC completed writing their bylaws and formed two subcommittees – the Technical and Policy and Management subcommittees. The Technical subcommittee will review species to see if they should be listed as noxious weed seeds and will determine a review cycle for species currently listed. The technical subcommittee is also working on a risk assessment process. SPAC's next meeting is in May, and they hope to have a draft of a species listing questionnaire and create a review cycle by that time. SPAC is also working on updating membership and adding representatives that are not currently serving on the committee. Maya Sharkar has helped to move the committee forward.

New Business

Presentation: Overview of Plant Breeding Techniques for Low Fecundity

Seth presented on six ways to alter the fecundity of plant species: through natural occurrence, flower architecture, wide hybridization, ploidy variation, mutagenesis, and biotechnology. Testing these factors over years and through various locations is critical to ensure true low fecundity, as outcomes could be due to environmental stressors or lack of plants around for proper cross pollination. Plants should also be periodically monitored and reevaluated to ensure the plants are staying sterile.

Changing the flower architecture can result in more petals and even lack of stamens, pistils, etc. Wide hybridization is crossing genetics between distantly related organisms as this reduces fertility. Ploidy variation, the number of chromosomes, can change the range of fertility but takes testing to confirm. Mutagenesis is using a chemical or physical mutagen to cause mutations. These mutations can alter the number of chromosomes or create physical changes, such as flower architecture. Lastly, biotechnology can target and disrupt a pathway in the plant to disrupt or inhibit fruit growth. An example of this is CRISPR-Cas9. It is important for the committee to consider these topics when thinking about regulating new cultivars for potentially problematic species.

Presentation: Spring Meadow Nursery's In Check® Plant Breeding Program

Davis presented on Spring Meadows Nursery's plant breeding program. Spring Meadows focuses on woody plants, is a wholesale company, and is in West Haven, Michigan. They export plants to many other countries around the world. They partner with Proven Winners. The In Check® program breeds popular, potentially problematic landscape plants into low fecundity cultivars. These cultivars are then labelled with In Check® designations and even include QR codes that can provide valuable educational materials to potential buyers. Another push is that Spring Meadow Nursery also has a focus on native plants and varieties. On the labels of these plants, they provide text listing them as native and/or describing the species as better alternatives to more problematic plants. Having this clear text and labeling has gotten positive feedback from the public so they can best serve their landscape.

- Raining asked about how the naming conventions for the new cultivars are chosen. Davis said names are usually selected by a committee and there is a lot of brainstorming. There are some styles that marketing likes to use to sell in series, relating names back to already familiar varieties.
- Raining also asked how the nursery keeps up with all the regulations in the industry. Davis said keeping up on ban lists for states is done by staff and consumers reach out to them regarding these changes.

- Monika asked how the plant breeding program testing works, specifically at what point it is known that the plant is a low fecundity plant. Davis answered that formal trials are mostly completed by the academic partners since they have knowledge on trial replication, trial design, and data collection. Seed germination testing is done with germination media in a greenhouse. Germination is probably higher in these ideal conditions than outside in soil. Seth added that University of Minnesota participates in trials at the Horticultural Research Center and Arboretum. People can see cultivars at the Arboretum. Using multiple locations helps to verify whether fecundity rates are the same in different locations.
- There was a question in the chat asking if there is a summary list of peer review plants and if Spring Meadow lists their partnerships. Davis said they have a breeding resources website but there is no formal list of plants that have been peer reviewed. Partnerships aren't in his domain and he doesn't know if they are listed.
- Raining asked if there has been a case of naturally occurring low fecundity that plant breeders utilized? Seth said there are some examples such as some barberry cultivars. Davis added that he thinks Fine Line buckthorn reduced fertility may be associated with the narrow leaf form.
- Debalin said that he works with many weeds with very high fertility (100,000 seeds or more). He asked whether gene drive or CRISPR technology has been used to reduce weed fertility? Davis said they breed plants for low fecundity and expect that they will not spread. It would be a different scenario to expect low fecundity to spread. Seth added that Alan Smith (U of M Horticulture) explored gene drive to reduce common tansy. One of the first applications of gene drive was in mosquitoes. It took 7 generations to achieve distribution through the native population area. It would probably take several generations for plants. There is a lot of work ahead before plant gene drives can be applied.

Screening Tool Draft for Evaluating Low Fecundity Cultivars

NWAC works on making recommendations for species that cannot be sold in the state. There have been cases of cultivars being exempted from these restrictions and allowed for sale. The option to have a cultivar screening tool could help reduce the amount of time it takes to get these cultivars exempted since a new or updated risk assessment would not need to be completed. The Midwest Invasive Plant Network has put together a group to focus on creating a screening tool to allow for consistency among states and to give plant breeders insight as to what state regulators are looking at. We've been meeting for about a year. NWAC members Laura, Jen and Monika are in this group.

The goal of this screening tool is to determine if specific cultivars of invasive plant species are not problematic and consequently can be excluded from state-based regulation. The tool has a series of questions which require verifiable documentation. Depending on the answer to each question, the evaluator is directed to a conclusion. To be exempted from state-based regulation, a cultivar and its offspring must be shown not to revert to expressing the invasive characteristics of the wild-type species. Additionally, seed viability or seedling survival must be less than acceptable thresholds, the cultivar cannot exhibit aggressive vegetative spread, and its pollen should be either inviable or not known to contribute to seed production of locally related problematic species. Laura opened the floor for questions, comments, and input on the tool. There was no discussion.

Membership, Next Meeting Date, and Goals

Membership terms and open seats

- There will be terms ending on 06/30/2026 for the Minnesota Association of Townships, Minnesota Association of Soil and Water Conservation Districts, and the University of Minnesota Invasive Terrestrial Plants and Pests Center.
- There are open seats for the Association of Minnesota Counties, an Environmental Organization and Seed Industry/Minnesota Crop Improvement.

Next meeting date

- Next meeting will be on September 15, 2026. Risk assessments will be presented at this meeting. The meeting format will be hybrid.

Future meeting goals

- Assisted migration - Superior National Forest's plan was recommended by a committee member
- Presentation from a township about weed management
- Presentation about goats and buckthorn control research
- Lee Frelich on the Cover It Up buckthorn initiative
- MITPPC presentation on the online sales of invasive plants
- Invasive species management along right of ways – reach out to MI DOT
- Stiltgrass presentation
- Future update from Raining about use of steam/hot water for invasive plant control

Adjourned at 1:00 pm