



Notes

December 2, 2025, MNICS Joint Board of Directors and Task Force Meeting

Board of Directors: Tom Hall (Chair, USFS), Michael Stansberry (Vice Chair), Paul Lundgren – DNR, Cheryl Bright – BIA, Jason Riggins – U.S. FWS, Dan Angelo – NPS, Kevin Reed and Brian Summer – HSEM, Jory Danielson and Mike Kanze – Minnesota State Fire Chiefs Association

Task Force: Darrin Franco (Vice Chair), William Glesener, Kelvin McCuskey, Nick Petrack, Greg Carlson

Non-Task Force Attendees: Leanne Langeberg (Notes), Kevin Carlisle, Shelly Greniger, Ryan Kingsley (NEK), Joel Perrington

DISCUSSION TOPIC	NOTES
MNICS Budget Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The Board of Directors (BOD) and task force reviewed the MNICS coop end-of-year expense report, which reflected a balance of \$31,000 of available funds. It was noted that the spreadsheet included the regular utilities, a couple of pending projects, and some rollover funding from FY 2025.
MIFC Building Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The elevator project started on 12/2/2025 and is expected to be completed by March 15. The redesign will result in the short set of stairs at the Mezzanine be removed and built to code. The redesign will free up space for the cache and serve the entire MIFC staff better.- The Task Force approved using MNICS coop funds to pay for upgrading the lower-level admin door and the exterior training room door to be ADA compliant with automatic door openers. The cost is estimated to be approximately \$20,000.- The radio and pump shop are still at proposed project status. The pump shop's current layout is too small for current needs and ventilation is poor. The Forest Service is working on securing funding that will be used to increase the footprint and provide for a separate office workspace.- The Forest Service is also working on securing funding for a new radio shop.- MIFC phone system runs through the State's MNIT program. The State is moving away from hard lines and transitioning into soft phones through Microsoft Teams.- Training room has been upgraded with smartboard technology, which is the first of three planned phases of upgrades completed.- The MIFC building roof has been leak free since mid-June. The membrane is under warranty and leaks are being repaired as they are discovered.
Potential National Cache Organization Changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Petrack spoke with the U.S. Forest Service fire director last week and there has been a lot of discussion about how the current cache systems works.- Minnesota has the only true interagency cache in the nation that is onsite and coordinated between state and federal partnership.- A committee was tasked with pulling together some cache system subject matter experts, and the NEK Cache manager will represent for Minnesota. The committee is tasked with developing a system that works nation-wide. NEK also brings a complexity with having the National Symbols Program onsite.- There are 15 Type 1 interagency caches in US. We are the only Type 1 interagency in the system that coordinates interagency, there is also a Type 2 interagency in the systems.- There was a national cache review and the report from that review is expected to be released at the end of the year. DNR offered up Glesener and Warnke as additional SMEs.



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MIFC long-term plans	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The current MIFC facility was not originally built for what it is being used for today. The Task Force recognizes that to have any sort of future plan that is purpose built, building a workable process must start now to have any sort of process moving forward.- Housing MNCC, the cache, the training facility and the fire management staff places on a lot of pressure on the outdated facility.- Recent projects like the roof repair was a major project to work through, as well as the elevator project. If there is a need to expand MNCC moving forward, MNICS needs to have a better plan in place. The Task Force recognizes the BOD needs to be involved.- The current parcel is 10 acres, with about 5 acres currently in use. Recent work on a Type 3 dispatch center helped frame current needs and future planning for the dispatch center.- Kingsley shared a copy of the original 1998 site plan, providing historical planning context.- There is interest in exploring whether the Forest Service would allow DNR-led site design work, especially to address inadequate cache space. A MNICS-wide external site review could help develop a compliant site design and outline required steps, storage needs, and shelving requirements.- Facility needs include cache storage (two bins), expanded training facilities due to increased use, and a coordination center, which is considered a critical need. Using in-house facilities and instructors saves money for fire training events.- Berg and Hall agree that long-term needs should be defined before developing site plans.- The Task Force may dedicate a 2–3-day meeting in the near future to address the larger project. Berg proposed targeting the July 2026 Task Force meeting for a deep-dive planning effort.- It was suggested to consult similar organizations that have completed comparable projects and to assess future service and demographic needs.- Hiring a professional facilitator (logistics/facility scoping, not architectural design) was recommended to guide long-term planning. In the interim, planning will move toward a July 2026 deep dive.- HSEM's example was noted: a future-focused design collaboration with UMD centered on emergency management needs.
DOI Unification	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- There is significant uncertainty due to anticipated national-level changes and how it will affect MNICS and it will be best to hold steady under the MNICS agreement until details are clearer, while continuing forward with current work.- MNICS expects a new cooperative agreement. It is acknowledged that the charter and financial plan may change, especially if agencies combine.- The Board governance was discussed and the BOD with the likelihood that representation will continue from all agencies plus the possible addition of wildland fire service representation. Governance may shift to allow greater wildland fire service representation as changes are implemented.- Any updates to the master agreement or charter template are expected to be minor and similar to the current structure.- The Task Force maintains an open monthly Teams meeting (first Thursday), and Board members are always welcome to attend.- With spring fire season coinciding with organizational transitions, frequent and clear communication will be critical to manage risk during the change period.



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DOT Partnership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Task Force is compiling all of the current communication infrastructure each MNICS partner maintains, which will be compiled and sent as one master spreadsheet to MnDOT.
Dispatch Project	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minnesota DNR's Deer River area is lined up to roll into MNCC in 2026. The NPS may also onboard in 2026, and there are a couple other DNR areas on deck. - The ARMAR system, which is VHF, provides more space at MNCC for the technical side, but there may be some additional equipment needs. - Deer river has a low occurrence of fire historically and the current MNCC staff can handle the added workload with current staffing. The NPS could possibly be brought on in 2026, depending on their current infrastructure and low historical fire occurrence. - The additional areas will have more complexity, which will require more discussion about possible infrastructure improvements before moving forward. - The Task Force's long-term plans include figuring out the communication infrastructure and is exploring a potential partnership with MnDOT. From the DOI's perspective, these changes will likely lead to beneficial outcomes.
MNCC Update	<p>MNCC Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The MNCC delegation was completed when the center manager changed. - The MNCC center manager provided an update on staffing changes and vacancies. - The group discussed preparedness for the planned retirements of both logistical dispatchers in spring 2026 and the center manager's planned 12-weeks of paternity leave this spring.
BOD chair rotation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Michael Stansberry, USFS, will fill the next two-year BOD chair rotation.
Incident Management Team availability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Minnesota DNR will be attending the Eastern Area Coordinating Group meeting in Iowa and plans to discuss the growing number of Eastern Area teams and how to better align availability and strategizing how to best schedule these teams and how the support states can provide to one another.
Agency Updates cont.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BIA – Bright is currently acting as the Regional FMO through January 22. The position has been advertised. The agency is trying to figure out the unification piece to the wildland fire service, which is expected to take a three-year transition with the BIA and the tribes. The agency expects to learn more in January. The Bureau has been conducting macro-scale consultations with the Tribes and there has been a lot of discussion around the Office of Tribal Trust. The focus currently is on the agreement side, but the agency is also trying to figure out the operational side. - DNR – The DNR in general is stable. The fire section continues to bring to the table the challenge with emergency fire re-hire, which is still a significant part of the workforce. Forest management is becoming more dynamic and time contributed to wildland fire is becoming less with the increased work load. DNR continues to look at cooperators and MNICS brings support in that aspect. The Type 3 organization is successful. The agency sees benefits from the variety of training delivered like the track vehicle operator course. DNR fire section is a young organization and is taking time to get the agency caught up on successional planning. The DNR acquired a fire BX, but hasn't tested it yet, along with a new flatbed version of a type 6. DNR filling an integrations and communications systems position which will be involved with integrated systems like InFORM, WildCAD, IROC.



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- FWS – The agency had a really good year, due in part to the bipartisan infrastructure bill funding. The agency expects major impacts will occur to the current work force capacity through work force hiring freezes and is working on trying to fill some key fire positions. Locally, we have approval to advertise an apprentice at Minnesota Valley and fill a couple of 18/8 seasonal positions.- HSEM – The agency is in the middle of transition as it fully moves into the new facility that opened in June. HSEM has hired a new director. Riley will be representing on the MNICS BOD. Vice Beauregard's position has been filled. The Governor's emergency management conference is coming up and the three MNICS incident commanders plan to present at the breakout sessions with a focus on what to expect when and Type 3 IMT shows up. The training section has been rolling out a lot of training and the agency is seeing a huge influx in requests for ICS 300/400, largely from MDH.- NPS – The current zone we be reorganizing next year, and Theodor Roosevelt National Park will be moving to Northern Rockies zone. Bob DeGross has retired, and it is expected the Voyageurs National Park will represent on MNIC the BOD again when that position is filled. The agency is experiencing a lot of retirements, especially among park rangers and management.- USFS – The agency is going through a reorganization and currently in an interim period awaiting the next changes. Fire hire has been successful this year. The bigger impacts is in the fuels organization. Jenkins is retiring this year and there is uncertainty in the opportunity to refill that position. The interim operating plan is at the regional level and higher. At the local level with the amount of vacancies the Superior National Forest has implemented an interim operating plan, especially with the Boundary Waters continuing to be a big management focus. The agency is expecting to see a rise in retirements of firefighters that are reaching their maximum retirement age.