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August 6-7, 2025, MNICS Task force Meeting

Task force: Cory Berg (Chair), William Glesener, Darrin Franco, Kelvin McCuskey, Nick Petrack, Greg Carlson

Non-Task Force Attendees: Ryan Johnson, Leanne Langeberg (Notes), Ryan Kingsley, Shelly Greniger

Guests: Taylor Schenk, Mike Warnke, Minnesota Department of Health – Chad Ostlund, Andy Klitzke, and JaLeah Strehl, and MNICS Type 3 Incident Management Working Team representative, Dan Paulson

DISCUSSION TOPIC	NOTES
MNICS Budget Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The Task force reviewed the monthly budget expenses and uncommitted funds report.- The MIFC training room upgrades purchase order was \$5,500. The task force approved \$4,800 from the MIFC coop funds for the project. The Minnesota DNR fire training program will cover the additional expense.- The DNR hired a smokechaser subject matter expert to support the Minnesota Fire Danger Operating Plan revisions. BIA is contributing funding to the MNICS coop funds that will be used to support the position's project work. The DNR will follow the established bill-back procedures.- The BIA and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are ready for their MNICS contribution invoices.
MIFC Building Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The MNICS Type 3 incident management team challenge coins were delivered.- The MIFC roof leaks are being repaired as detected, often within a day. Until there is a catastrophic leak, MNICS will continue to report leaks when detected.- The elevator contract remains in modification status.- Soft phone testing is occurring building-wide, and an official transition date has not been set. The paging system will not work with the new soft phone system.
MNICS Financial Operating Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Glesener and Greniger will finalize the draft 2026 MNICS Financial Operating Plan before sending it out to the MNICS task force representatives for signature.
Minnesota Wildfire Academy Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The task force met with the MNICS training working team chair to review the 2025 Minnesota Wildfire Academy and discussed financial cost reductions proposed to Minnesota North College, Itasca campus.- The DNR proposed to the college taking on more coordination responsibility through its fire training team and using MNICS coop funds to reduce the overall per student cost up to 50%. The task force supports both of these proposals, but each agency would need to explore funding options before making a firm commitment.- Because the college's classroom and facility space is more restricted during the fall, winter and spring, the timing of the academy, the first week in June, works best for the college, and they have adapted their summer schedule to accommodate the academy.
Volunteer Fire Department initial attack billing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The task force met with Mike Warnke, MN DNR, and discussed adding language to the MNICS Mobilization Guide addressing Minnesota DNR's initial attack fire response agreement with volunteer fire departments.- Warnke and Glesener will work on adding a billing section, taking into consideration land under the Forest Service shared protection agreement.- The information will incorporate language from the master cooperative agreement and will be added to chapter 20 near the section explaining local purchasing procedures.



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MNICS Annual Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The task force reviewed the agenda and discussed the Thursday schedule. - The morning session will open with updates from the task force and highlight any changes that may result from a potential federal wildland fire organization merger. - The MNICS working team updates will follow the task force updates. - The planning committee is working on a keynote speaker. The two hours ahead of the lunch break is reserved for the keynote speaker. - The afternoon session will include the MNICS award ceremony and a season review from the MNICS Type 3 teams. The general session will conclude by 15:00.
Future of Dispatch planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The task force revisited the discussion on the Tier 4 model they presented in a white paper to the board of directors last year. - As the plans continue to develop, there are a couple of short-term goals MNICS and MNCC are working toward. This year, the communications program has been working on installing cradle points that will allow dispatchers to communicate on federal and state agency radio frequencies. Once in place, the next goal is to bring on one or two more DNR areas, prioritizing the Deer River area this fall. - Currently, MNCC is down two dispatch positions in aviation and operations. The advertised position outreach has not produced qualified candidates. MNCC is hesitant to take on Deer River until all dispatch positions are fully staffed. If an additional DNR area comes on board after Deer River, MNCC will need to hire an additional dispatcher to meet the increased workload. - MNCC center manager provided an update on the current improvements and changes that have occurred over the last year. The Air Desk has changed to a Telex system using an iPad-type computer console that runs on Windows and doesn't require a keyboard and has C-Soft installed. Once the cradle points are installed, MNCC will upgrade C-soft console licenses to ensure the cradle points work. - The task force will discuss the current dispatch infrastructure at the September task force meeting. Glesner and Petrack will invite the DNR and Forest Service radio communications staff, along with Lundgren, Hall, and the MNCC assistant center manager for operations, to the next task force meeting at 10:30. They will request a detailed update on the hardware and licensing timeline. - The task force also discussed long-term steps to utilize the Minnesota Department of Transportation (MN DOT) network. The Minnesota DNR Commissioner's office met with MN DOT and discussed the opportunity. Lundgren plans to meet with the MN DOT services office to discuss the next steps in establishing a service agreement. As the process proceeds, the MNICS board of directors will need to be committed to allowing all federal partners to use the system. Should MN DOT approve the request and establish an agreement, MNICS must be ready to upgrade necessary equipment to tie into the MN DOT network. - The task force discussed setting a goal to establish a Bemidji area dispatch office for Bemidji, Park Rapids, White Earth and possibly Baudette and some of the northwest U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service stations. BIA and DNR were suggested as the possible hiring agencies for the dispatch positions. - The task force requested the MNCC center manager review the current financial plan and revise a rough draft that incorporates the Tier-4 center and adjusts for the service area or statewide, using the northwest as the example.



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Potential Federal Consolidations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- With the potential plan for combining the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI) federal wildland fire workforce into one organization under the USDI, the task force is committed to staying on top of how changes at the federal level may impact the MNICS partners and established agreements.- The task force discussed their concerns for the potential loss of MNICS voting member representation, which will likely consolidate down to one federal voting member, and possible changes for line authority on the ground.- The task force will send a letter to the MNICS board of directors with their concerns about the potential federal wildland fire consolidation to a singular fire organization. The letter will express the task force's desire to start the conversation about possible fundamental MNICS master cooperative agreement changes and how MNICS can maintain interagency continuity throughout Minnesota.
MNCC Succession Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The task force compared the role of past MIFC coordinators, when held by a Minnesota DNR employee, to the current role of the MNCC coordinator. In the past, the MIFC coordinator position took on a bigger role with the task force, served as the executive assistant to the Board of Directors, and handled MNICS agreements.- Recognizing the changes to the interagency coordination center model, Minnesota DNR moved the agreements coordination to the Rural Fire program manager's responsibility.- The strategic plan to incorporate the tier-4 level interagency dispatching will add another level of coordination. As retirements near in the logistics dispatch section, the task force is looking at ways to maintain continuity with the current workload, as well as coordinating the MNICS Type 3 incident management teams (IMT), Type 2 IA crews and providing logistics dispatcher training.- The task force's preference is to have someone shadow the logistics dispatchers that will step into the role as a fulltime dispatcher. Still, with uncertainty in federal service hiring, it is unclear which MNICS agency can fill the role, or which agencies can cost-share and still allow time to hire and shadow the logistics section.
Strategic National Stockpile Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Three representatives from the Minnesota Department of Health (MDH) met with the task force to discuss opportunities for MNICS to continue supporting MDH with Strategic National Stockpile (SNS) deployments.- MDH's agreement with the Minnesota DNR expired, and the agencies are working to re-establish the agreement. In the past, the Minnesota DNR has used the agreement to send MNICS teams to support the SNS - RSS (receive, stage, store) logistical coordination of the warehouse. The most recent support occurred in 2020.- The task force explained to MDH how MNICS resources can be readily shared under the Stafford Act and the MNICS agreements. The MNICS agreement allows MNICS partners to make resources or teams available up to 14 days, a standard for wildland fire assignments.- A MNICS agreement with MDH can also help with establishing a medical director.- MDH is conducting ICS 300 and 400-level training with a public health focus.- The task force highlighted the functional roles the MNICS teams can play in operations, logistics, public information and cooperator coordination. MDH prefers the MNICS teams over local teams because of the variety of national qualifications held by team members.



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Preparedness Level Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The task force reviewed and revised the current preparedness level decision support language found in the Minnesota Interagency Fire Danger Operating Plan and the Minnesota Incident Command System Mobilization Guide. The revised decision support language will be updated in both guides.
Incident Management Team recruitment and future planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The task force acknowledges the ongoing challenge MNICS faces to continue rostering three full Type 3 incident management teams based on past challenges to fill key positions with fully qualified team members. - MNICS has three options: continue recruitment efforts to fill three teams with MNICS personnel, consolidate down to two MNICS teams, or try to form and support a Great Lakes Forest Fire Compact Type 3 IMT. - The task force met with a representative from the MNICS Type 3 incident management working team and discussed the confusion between rostering standards in-state and the national standards for rostering, recruitment and ways to bolster team membership. - National Rostering Standards - The task force agreed to work toward transitioning both in-state and out-of-state rosters to follow the national standard. It recommends including the RADO, MEDL, COML, and ground support as key positions on the roster. - Recruitment - The DNR will consider requiring those who fill a primary or alternate role on the Eastern Area teams to also fill a primary or alternate role on the MNICS teams. - The task force will recommend that the MNICS Type 3 IMT recruitment process start at the beginning of September. The Type 3 incident management working team plans to establish a hard cutoff date for the 2026 team member applications. - Successional Leadership - In the past, the MNICS teams have allowed the division supervisor position to be covered by task force leaders on Minnesota assignments because there are not enough qualified division supervisors. The shortfall is also leading to concerns that there are not enough division supervisors to fill the IC3 training positions. - Team Alternatives - The task force recognizes that any decision to reduce the MNICS teams down to two teams or adding a GLFFC team will alter either rotation schedules or coverage area. - If the MNICS team is reduced to two teams and the rotation schedules remain the same, MNICS will need to consider ordering an out-of-state team for prepositioning. If a GLFFC team is developed and incorporated, the MNICS team's coverage area may expand. - Currently, MNICS has enough IC and operations team members, and the plans section is starting to fill with a few more trainees, but safety is always challenging to fill. - The task force will invite the MNICS Type 3 incident commanders and the MNICS Type 3 incident management working team to the October task force meeting. The task force plans to discuss the 2025 season, 2026 recruitment, and trigger points to help decide whether or not to reduce down to two MNICS teams. - The task force approved the MNICS Type 3 IMT's adoption of the national standards with a list of discretionary positions that will lead to permanent rostered positions.



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Agency Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- BIA – The agency has received the annual budget allocations and working on distributing funding to program areas. Local BIA resources are supporting Montana, the southwest and the Pacific Northwest. Berg will be off duty the week of August 11, and Crawford will be acting. BIA is in the process of rostering a Type 2 IA crew.- DNR – DNR continues to support Manitoba but is short on crew boss-qualified staff. DNR resources are also supporting Washington and Idaho. The priority is to back-fill engines and support dispatch positions. The shared MIFC front desk position with Region 2 has been advertised. The Senior OAS for training position will be advertised soon. DNR is preparing for the Minnesota State Fair at the end of August. The Hibbing Tanker Base facilities upgrade project is moving forward. As funding becomes available, DNR will work on the other tanker bases. The DNR Division of Forestry will host an all-division meeting in November.- FWS – Fire staff are supporting assignments out west. Staff reductions are outweighing hiring agency-wide. Locally, FWS is working to refill the fire management officer position in Fergus Falls and the apprentice position at Minnesota Valley. The agency is working through the eligibility requirements to bring back the firefighting staff who chose the deferred retirement program. Fire staff are working to upgrade the portable RAWS station to a permanent station at Glacial Ridge.- HSEM – The FEMA grant opened late last week and has a limited application period. HSEM is busy with multiple summer storm disasters. The MNICS logistics working team has decided not to host the fall workshop and will try again next year. The Brimson volunteer fire department has asked HSEM to host a wildfire exercise, and McCuskey has talked with Lundgren about the opportunity. The Forest Service advised that St. Louis County is already working on an exercise and will lead the effort. HSEM plans to invite a MNICS incident commander to the October emergency managers meeting. HSEM will ask the IC to present on how MNICS type 3 teams can help and what they can support while responding to a wildfire or all-risk hazard.- NPS – The fire crew has been supporting severity assignments at Dinosaur National Monument and will return soon. The agency is having difficulty red-carding collateral duty staff, as many folks who held collateral qualifications have left. The assistant fire management officer in Medora, ND, is currently vacant, and there is no indication whether it will be refilled. The park plans to burn more than 100 piles after Labor Day.- USFS – Locally, fire staff and engines are taking on national mobilization assignments. The agency received its budget and is working on distributing funding to program areas. The Forest Service chief sent a letter requesting agency staff to support Preparedness Level (PL) 3 this year; traditionally, the letter is sent at a PL 4 or PL5. There are currently 12 fire vacancies between both forests and at the fire center, and the agency is working on filling 10 of these vacancies. The agency will focus the next fire hire on filling only permanent staff positions. The NEK cache has sent staff to Alaska and Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The Forest Service held a community meeting in Brimson and had a lot of good engagement with the main interest focused on strategy. Justin O'Brien will onboard into the Superior National Forest AFMO position on Monday.

Next MNICS Task force Meeting scheduled for October 2, hosted at MIFC.