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September 4, 2025, MNICS Task Force Meeting

Task Force: Cory Berg (Chair), William Glesener, Dan Paulson (acting), Kelvin McCuskey, Nick Petrack, Greg Carlson

Board of Directors: Michael Stansberry, Paul Lundgren, Tom Hall (Chair), Cheryl Bright

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

Guests: Justin Obrien, Joe Theisen

DISCUSSION TOPIC	NOTES
MNICS Budget Update	- The task force reviewed the monthly budget expenses and uncommitted funds report. - The report included the updated FDOP Smokechaser funding contributions, training room invoices, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's annual contribution.
MIFC Building Update	- MNCC dispatch area window blinds are being installed. - The MNCC area rooftop air conditioning unit is being serviced. - The next cleaning contract includes a clause to schedule carpet cleaning in high-use areas, and the contract bidding process closes Sept 12. - Training room electrical upgrades are planned and will reduce inputs on the main breaker. - The HVAC and generator maintenance contracts were awarded. - The sprinkler system backflow valve maintenance contract development is in progress. - The Minnesota DNR engineer measured the pump shop redesign area and sent the diagram to the U.S. Forest Service engineer. The DNR engineer determined that the air system doesn't meet code and requires improvements. The project will expand the interior footprint up to the washroom and is expected to be completed in 2027. - The U.S. Forest Service engineer confirmed the elevator contract is on hold. The MIFC building committee recommends adding key readers and automatic, handicap-accessible door openers to the exterior training room entry and the administrative office door, in addition to the elevator work, which is estimated to cost an additional \$60,000. The Forest Service advises against modifying the current contract. - MIFC Cisco phone system will be out of service by June 30, 2026. The DNR plans to meet on-site with the state's MNIT to review the current phone infrastructure and determine whether Microsoft Teams can work for the multiple agencies on-site. MNIT staff have concerns with Verizon's system running solely on a Wi-Fi network. The task force recommends inviting the Forest Service and BIA communication information officers to the on-site meeting. - The NEK cache gate automatic opener is malfunctioning. The cache recommends replacing it with a manual drop bolt or gate pin. - The task force plans to revisit the original MIFC facility site plan vision in November and discuss what is needed to pursue a new facility and will request to discuss the topic with the Board of Directors at the annual meeting.
MNICS Annual Meeting Update	- The Duluth meeting venue is out for bid. - MNICS working team chairs were requested to submit meeting space requirements. - Close the Gap Wellness will fill the guest speaker time during the Wednesday session. - The call for MNICS awards will be sent on September 15 and will close on October 10, 2026. The Task Force will select awardees after the October 14 MNICS planning call.



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MNCC Future Dispatch Plan	- The task force and MNCC are working on short-term fixes to increase dispatching capabilities, including installing a cradle point system to expand capacity among state and federal radio communication systems. - Staffing is another consideration for bringing on additional dispatching areas (Deer River, Hibbing, Tower), as MNCC is unable to take on more service with current staffing levels. - The cradle points are working, and routers allow the federal radios to join the DNR's network; however, the Forest Service stations need to control their base stations. The radio communications staff is investigating how to run copper and the 2.2 network simultaneously without losing local office capability and control. - The radio communications team looked into installing a tower at the Black Duck district office, but the Forest Service would not allow the installation. Forest Supervisor Stansberry will follow up on why the tower was denied at Deer River. - MNCC can take on the Deer River area with the current radio infrastructure and an additional C-Soft license, but bringing on more areas will require adding two more IP 2.24s and hiring additional staffing. - Presently, both the DNR and the Forest Service pay for C-soft licenses separately. DNR's C-soft licenses will cover all consoles that move to the cradle point or a longer-term solution. Long-term plans: communication strategy, locations - The task force discussed the November MNDOT meeting plans, which will focus on a walk-through of MNCC and discussing the high-level operations and equipment, followed by a discussion on the coordination center tiers, then a discussion on the broader picture of the fire service communication system and future roadblocks. - The task force discussed next steps and sees bringing on the northwest area after the northeast as the next logical step. - The MNCC center manager completed a cost analysis of the MNICS financial plan and distributed the findings to the task force members. The Task Force agrees that the ideal number of tier-4 initial attack dispatch centers for Minnesota is three. - The task force will formalize a group of local-area subject matter experts at the task force and fire management officer levels by February to help determine the best strategy to divide the regional locations into three centers that will meet all of the MNICS partners' dispatching requirements. MNCC Organization / Financial Plan - The task force discussed the upcoming MNCC logistics assistant center manager and lead dispatcher retirements and the strategy to backfill the positions. - The DNR has the flexibility to begin double-filling the position as soon as November 1. - The MNCC center manager is planning for the MNCC dispatchers to shadow. - Due to the workload, the Task Force recognizes it may require an additional dispatcher to meet the need. The DNR is in a position to fill the assistant center manager position but would need to further discuss with BIA and review the org chart. - The DNR will proceed with advertising one of the two Logistics positions based on pending retirements and notify the DNR's division management team. - The National Park Service is reviewing options to add a dispatcher to the org chart.



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EACG Update	- The task force reviewed the MNICS type 3 team national availability challenges with three teams from the Eastern region available during a lull in western fire activity, and the timing of the Minnesota DNR's division all-supervisors meeting that limited several team members from rostering. - The EACC continues to discuss how to prioritize these separate entities. Recommendations from the Great Lakes Forest Fire Compact include supporting the current team and establishing set roster dates.
IMT3 Recruitment	- Berg distributed a list that identified MNICS Type 3 incident management team discretionary positions that allows up to five discretionary positions. - While there are some concerns that the additional position will not improve recruitment, others feel it opens a pathway for recruits to fill necessary non-primary command and general staff roles. - The task force will host MNICS Type 3 ICs at the October Task Force meeting.
Agency Updates	- BIA – White Earth and Red Lake reporting drying conditions. A BIA suppression module is out, and one engine is preparing to join a Surge group heading to the northwest. Mille Lacs and Red Lake agencies are getting new fire trucks. Cheryl Bright is the acting fire management officer. BIA is preparing for the next fiscal year and is requesting staff to submit positions to be included. BIA has a new contractor and is updating the medical standards contract terms. BIA plans to hold on contracted aircraft, unless a need arises. - DNR – The helicopter will be back on September 8. Fire danger expert Maxwell will help support the fire danger operating processes in the state. DNR plans to interview 16 candidates for the MIFC front desk position. DNR has also advertised the integrations communications coordinator position to manage the radio fleet inventory and all of the interagency integration systems. DNR will fully fund the position to fill the vacant DNR space in the radio shop. The State Fair fire prevention day was a success. - FWS – A few Fish and Wildlife Service engines are out in California. The agency is having some challenges filling current positions. The new Department of the Interior medical standards apply to FWS. - HSEM – The State Emergency Operations Center will host an open house on September 22. A Type 3 all-hazard course will be offered on December 12, and four of the six instructors are DNR staff. It is similar to an S-420 but with an all-hazard simulation. The agency plans to host a couple of communications exercises, including a COMX cross-border in Pigeon River and Grand Marais. - NPS – The park has a new Type 6 engine. Park fire staff are supporting Dinosaur National Monument, and it is expected to be the last assignment for the season. Apostle Island National Seashore reported a small fire. - USFS – Justin Obrien hired as the Superior NF Assistant fire management officer. The recent round of fire-hire applications has been received. Provided multiple DNR fire assists. Both forests have many planned RX burns. - MNCC – Continue to staff with detailers and support 14-day assignments for MNCC staff.

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