



Notes

November 6, 2025, MNICS Task Force Meeting

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)

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 budget spreadsheet distributed to the Task Force reflected Maxwell’s salary and the radio communications cradle points.
MIFC Building Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The MIFC air compressor went down, and replacement parts have been ordered. - - The Forest Service engineer is researching funding opportunities to repair the building’s exterior siding damaged by wildlife. - The Minnesota DNR training staff is considering installing electrical floor outlets (estimated cost of \$10,000) in the training room before the carpet replacement. - The NEK cache distributed the MIFC winter parking notice email. - The new MIFC cleaning contract started on November 1. - Security code update project to issue codes to individuals, MIFC staff vs. one code per group unit, is almost complete. - The elevator contractors have completed their final beam measurements. MIFC has submitted an estimate of \$10,000 to the DNR contracting for upgrading the exterior training room door and the interior administrative office entry door for ADA compliance and adding automatic door openers. - NEK cache has recently experienced some internal security concerns, with some inventory reported missing. The NEK cache manager proposed limiting key-card access to the cache to only cache employees. The proposal would also require relocating non-cache items, like the DNR’s helitack items, to an alternate location. The card readers can isolate access to individual zone areas. The NEK cache manager will draft a memo from the Task Force to send out to all key card holders explaining the changes to NEK cache access. The Task Force Chair will review and approve the final draft before distributing it. Carlisle will share an email list of all the key cardholders to include in the memo.
MnDOT communications infrastructure meeting notes and review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - On November 5, 2025, the MNICS Board of Directors, Task Force and agency radio communication specialists met with the Minnesota Department of Transportation to discuss a potential proposal for MNICS wildland fire agencies to move radio communications onto MnDOT communication towers. - In attendance included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o BIA - Cheryl Bright, Kevin Burant and Cory Berg, o U.S. Forest Service - Tom Hall, Michael Stansberry, Nick Petrack, Ryan Johnson, Justin Obrien and Dave Jalonen o Minnesota DNR – William Glesener, Joe Theisen, NPS – Dan Angelo and Greg Carlson o HSEM – Kelvin McCuskey o U.S. FWS – Jason Riggins and Darrin Franco o MnDOT – Shane Chatleain and David Klema



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<p>MnDOT communications infrastructure meeting notes and review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MNICS provided a summary of the white paper explaining the need for strategic planning to expand wildland fire dispatching into three regional tier-4 dispatch centers and the radio communications infrastructure required to allow all agencies to communicate simultaneously via radio. - MNICS provided MnDOT with a brief tour of MIFC, focusing on the MNCC dispatch floor and the network server system in the building. - MNICS plans to improve and consolidate wildfire dispatch and radio communications across Minnesota, working with DNR, MNDOT, federal, and tribal partners. <p>Dispatch & Facilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - MNICS proposes splitting MNCC operations into three Tier-4 dispatch locations, potentially including a new interagency center in Bemidji, consolidating individual agency dispatch centers to improve efficiency and reduce confusion caused by firefighters interacting with multiple centers. - The Tier-4 facilities must remain separate from the radio backbone project so neither is dependent on the other. <p>Radio & Network Infrastructure</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Task Force acknowledges that MIFC's at capacity for additional radio communications. - MNICS is exploring using MNDOT's statewide network infrastructure to support a UHF-based system, potentially leveraging spare bandwidth and VLANs rather than relying on ARMOR LMR. - Ideally, the system will operate on a single C-Soft license with centralized control of base stations and consoles - similar to Wisconsin's ACOM model. - Current infrastructure includes approximately 60 DNR repeaters, 16 Forest Service repeaters, and seven to ten BIA sites, totaling approximately 90 repeaters. - Base stations don't require tower-top placement and can be located up to ten miles away. <p>Governance & Licensing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DNR is considering becoming the sole C-Soft license holder, thereby bringing all MNICS partners under a single license. - Existing MNICS agreements already allow interagency and cross-network communications, including federal and international (Canadian) partners. - ARMOR governance is acknowledged but not yet a major concern. <p>Engineering, Scope, and Timeline</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A high-level scope of work is needed, including tower locations, connectivity, dispatch centers, and repeater relationships. - Engineering analysis will determine bandwidth requirements, base station needs, and ARMOR implications. - MnDOT estimates the engineering effort will take approximately six months, but could go more quickly with dedicated staff. - DNR plans to submit the initial formal request to MnDOT and can reimburse MnDOT for engineering time via standard or special project billing. <p>Operational Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Counties will connect to VLANs for paging, and local interoperability (800 MHz vs VHF) remains a challenge. - Transition toward centralized dispatch may occur gradually through attrition. A successful transition will help to clarify agency roles and may reduce the need for complex patching between systems.



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<p>MnDOT communications infrastructure meeting notes and review</p>	<p>Next Steps</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The continued collaboration with MnDOT and MNICS emphasizes the value of both wildfire response and the protection of tower infrastructure. - MNICS will draft a high-level scope of work with locations and connectivity. - MNDOT will review the feasibility and staffing capacity and provide feedback. <p>MNICS Follow-up Discussion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - With Boise Forte, Grand Portage, and Two Harbors integrated into MNCC, MNICS is considering adding Tower, Hibbing, and Voyageurs. - Voyageurs National Park has two repeaters (one at each end of the park) linked to a single base station via CUVA. A key question is whether existing equipment (“boxes”) can support a dedicated fire radio or if new infrastructure is required. - Near-term, the question raised is whether wildfire dispatching for Voyageurs can be handled through the MNCC Grand Rapids coordination center location using existing infrastructure. - Long-term, MNICS needs to explore whether Voyageurs can be served by neighboring partners’ communication systems or if additional infrastructure is needed. The park will share locations to support MNDOT’s feasibility review and also research NPS policy to determine what allows or restricts MNCC-based dispatching. - The Task Force will look into potentially hosting an NPS position at MNCC. - Timing aligns well with the move toward a single unified wildland fire agency, which could simplify funding and governance. - Firefighters emphasized that a single dispatch point would reduce confusion, especially for aircraft currently split between CUVA and other centers. - Glesener will coordinate with McGuire and Josiah; integration remains feasible by spring 2026, including communications. - Overall, the Task Force felt the meeting went over well and felt positive that MNDOT was open to exploring the proposal despite a larger project than they had taken on before. - The Task Force will develop a scope of work that includes a list and location of all the base stations, and each agency will collect its own radio infrastructure data and compile it all into one location. - The Task Force will revisit the topic at the annual MNICS meeting and go over where we are with the scope of work.
<p>NEK Cache Inventory</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The NEK Cache is looking to reduce outdated or infrequently used equipment from the inventory supply list and possibly remove it from the cache, freeing up vital space. Specifically, there is an inventory of hoses, sprinkler packs, adapters and peat nozzles. DNR also has a booster reel, hose and brush coats with some of the equipment specifically labeled DNR only. - Kingsly will collect the equipment and remove it from the available inventory list, and the Task Force will decide how the remaining inventory is distributed among agencies. - The Task Force discussed the excess hose packs, which include approximately 25 complete packs, 57 orange sprinkler packs, 32 red packs, plus adapters and peat nozzles. The cache can store them, but they will not remain on the inventory list. - The Task Force will use Ryan’s list to divide items among agencies by December 15. A one-time order is recommended, after which agencies will divide the remaining items. Tower and Superior have already requested all remaining inventory.



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<p>NEK Cache Inventory Cont.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Items originally purchased by specific agencies should be returned to them. After lists are finalized on December 15, remaining items can be made available on a free-to-take basis. - The older Mark 3 pumps were traded in through Watson’s program, which offered up to a \$1,000 credit per pump toward new Watson Mark 3 pumps. - The cache has ordered toolkits for pump repairs, which have arrived and are now in inventory. The quick-connects have also been ordered. - The NEK cache requested tighter security measures that include limiting key card access to only cache employees due the amount of inventory they are accountable for. The Task Force will work with the NEK to notify all MIFC key card holder of the changes with a memo that will be distributed by the Task Force chair.
<p>MNICS Annual Meeting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Due to the lingering Federal Government Shutdown and the possibility that federal employees may not be able to attend, the Task Force decided to meet on November 17 to make a final decision on whether to cancel the in-person meeting and move it to a virtual format. The final decision was made to continue with current plans to meet in person. - The Task Force approved the 2025 MNICS award nominations.
<p>MNICS Meeting Working Team Assignments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Task Force will continue to stress the importance of establishing a subcommittee to update the Minnesota Fire Danger Operating plan between the Operations Working Team and the Prescribed Fire and Fuels Working Team.
<p>MNCC Tech Update Request</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Because the magnetic maps displayed in the MNCC dispatch area are already 15 years old, the MNCC center manager requested approval to purchase a couple of smart screens that can display real-time WildCAD maps. - The requested screen size would be similar to the large screen in the training room. - The estimated cost will be around \$4,500 for an 86” Screen (\$2700) and a smaller screen (\$1700). The Dispatch supply budget through the DNR has \$ 5,000 still available; the remaining \$ 3,000 would come from the MNICS coop funds. - The Task Force approved the requested MNICS coop funding.
<p>MNICS Type 3 IMT Prep Level Rostering request</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The MNICS Type 3 teams proposed tying rostering to preparedness levels. - The request was based on their desire to know at least two weeks in advance so they could properly build their rosters. - The Task Force agreed that the dates MNICS follows are working best for Minnesota’s unpredictable fall fire seasons and feels that two weeks' pre-notice for Minnesota is too unpredictable and agreed to leave the rotations based on the calendar date rather than moving to planning levels.
<p>Agency Updates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - DNR – DNR – DNR has hired a new front desk admin for MIFC and will begin onboarding the new staff member on November 24. Interviews for the Communications and Integrated Systems coordinator position are underway. The position will be tied to the radio shop and will require the hired candidate to become a COML. The position will handle all web-based coordination tools. The DNR is still evaluating PANO AI as a wildfire detection option. The Hibbing Tanker Base improvement project has begun and is proceeding well. The DNR fire leads will be laid off next week.



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<p>Agency Updates cont.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - FWS – The federal shutdown is impacting staff, but the agency has exempted all fire-funded positions. All prescribed fire projects are on hold, but the agency is still conducting prep work for prescribed burns, ready to resume when the shutdown concludes. If the shutdown continues, collateral-duty staff may be called back to support wildfire needs. Locally, FWS is seeing an increase in initial attacks in the Crookston area. - HSEM – No new updates to report. - NPS –NPS fire staff are exempt while funding is available and may transition to excepted. The use of ADs is allowed. Travel and training for fire is approved. The park staff is closing out the year-end. The fire crew is traveling back from North Dakota. Locally, Voyageurs National Park is dry. The NPS plans to burn piles when the shutdown concludes. Next year, Mt. Rushmore will host a Fourth of July celebration, and the region's preparations may involve local staff to support as needed. - USFS –Fire and fuels staff are exempt during the federal government shutdown. The agency plans to continue limited fuels work, but no prescribed fire. Training and travel are authorized. The Superior completed 1,500 acres of prescribed fire, and all ignitions stopped on Friday. Prescribed fire projects are on hold. The Chippewa National Forest is dry. Most resources have returned from out-of-state assignments. - MNCC –MNCC staff have not been impacted by the federal government shutdown; all staff are reporting. MNCC is staffing for increased aircraft in the state due to dry conditions.

Next MNICS Task force Meeting scheduled for December 2, hosted at the MNICS Meeting in Duluth.