



Notes

February 5, 2026, MNICS Task Force Meeting

Task Force: Cory Berg (Chair), Taylor Schenk (acting for DNR), Darrin Franco, Kelvin McCuskey, Jennifer Olson, Nick Petrack, Justin O’Brien and Greg Carlson

Non-Task Force Attendees: RJ Johnson (MNCC), Leanne Langeberg (Notes), Kevin Carlisle

Guest: Mike Hill, MNICS Type 3 Incident Commander

DISCUSSION TOPIC	NOTES
<p>MNICS Budget</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Task Force reviewed the monthly budget expenses and uncommitted funds. - The bobcat brushes have been purchased. - <i>NEK Wi-Fi routers</i> - The MIFC building committee submitted a MNICS coop funding request to add three additional routers to the DNR’s Wi-Fi that will help support the NEK cache staff and ensure that if the Federal or State internet system goes down, they will have a backup internet connection. The cost to install the additional routers using the required State MNIT-approved contractor is estimated to be \$5,000. The Task Force approved the funding request. - <i>MIFC Copier</i> - The MIFC ground support advised that the current large copier in the lower-level admin area has reached its lifespan, and as of June 1, 2026, repair parts and service will no longer be available. The replacement option is to purchase a new large-scale copier, estimated at \$23,705, for an all-in-one color copier, scanner, and fax that can collate, staple, and hole-punch. The recommended copier will be capable for large printing projects, like training materials, and will accommodate incident action plan printing for any local incidents hosted at MIFC. The Task Force requested additional quotes from similar vendors before making a final decision. Carlisle share quotes at the March Task Force meeting. - <i>MNICS website</i> - The State’s MNIT representative, who has managed the WordPress content management system for the MNICS website, is retiring. MNIT doesn’t have any current staff who understand WordPress and can support the MNICS website needs. MNIT has recommended contracting with a state-approved vendor. The proposed contract is \$10,000 annually for 2-3 years. The DNR currently covers \$5,000 annually toward the MNICS website and the WordPress content management system, with about \$1,000 of that funding used for maintenance. The remaining \$4,000 balance could be moved into the project proposal, so the actual amount of MNICS coop funding needed would be closer to \$6,000 annually. This amount is expected to be in place for 2-3 years, then drop back down to maintenance only. The Task Force will invite Perrington to the March meeting. - A quote for the MNCC smartboards is expected by the end of February. - The USDA’s decision to hold agreement funding on all agreements with the State of Minnesota has impacted MNICS and MNCC shared agreement funding. The Regional and Washington Office staff have been briefed, as well as the Minnesota DNR leadership. There is no projected timeframe when funds may be released. The impacted shared agreement funding applies only to the USDA and State of Minnesota agreements. The DOI agencies have not been impacted.
<p>MNICS Weather Operating Plan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Task Force will review the recently released draft of the annual Minnesota Fire Weather Operating Plan and discuss approval at the March Task Force Meeting.



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MIFC Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The elevator project is delayed as the contractor awaits the delivery of the elevator, which is expected to arrive at the end of March. The contractor plans to resume prep work, which is likely to coincide with a heavy training schedule. The upstairs floor will remain intact until the elevator arrives. - MIFC Keycards – The MIFC building committee requests that key cards be returned from those who will be removed from the approved list.
MNICS Annual Meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The committee met on February 3 and divided up the core tasks. - The committee requested that the Task Force approve the meeting dates of Nov 30 – December 4 for the 2026 meeting. The Task Force approved. - Monthly meetings will be held on the first Tuesday of each month, starting at 8 a.m.
Eastern Area Coordination of Type 3 Incident Management Teams for National Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mike Hill, MNICS Type 3 Incident Commander (IC), met with the Task Force to discuss the Eastern Area Coordinating Group’s discussion on the national availability of the Eastern Region’s Type 3 incident management teams (IMT). Paul Lundgren will represent MNICS and the MNICS teams. - The MNICS ICs are concerned about moving to a geographic-area-sponsored team that comprises the 20 northeastern states. - The ICs prefer the option of assigning available teams to specific weeks, much like the Complex IMTs follow, which will prioritize teams for mobilization. - For MNICS, the ideal time to coordinate teams is July 4th through early September. - The MNICS ICs see value in having a GACC point of contact when coordinating incident management team rosters for national mobilization. - Berg will meet with Lundgren on Monday and will tie in with the ICs before then.
MNICS Incident Management Team Rosters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The MNICS IMT rosters were sent out to team members along with the spring team meeting information. Overall, the number of applications was higher this year. - The spring meeting will include an agency administrator roundtable, and the Superior and Chippewa National Forests plan to send representatives. - Hill requested that the Task Force assign the task of building an agency administrator roundtable agenda that provides clearer expectations to the MNICS Type 3 Incident Management Working Team. - The Task Force will revisit the proposed MNICS Incident Commander two-year commitment to the MNICS Type 3 teams during their June or July Task Force meeting.
U.S. Wildland Fire Service Updates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Department of the Interior partners shared they didn’t have much new information regarding the U.S. Wildland Fire Service. The agency has officially hired a new chief. Locally, fire staff are aware of some administrative procedural changes starting to occur, and there is an expectation the fire staff employee supervisors are likely to change. - The DOI employees will attend a Town Hall meeting on February 5, 2026.
Fire Danger Operating Plan Update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Verdegan met with the U.S. Forest Service Region 9 about the current Fire Danger Operating Plan (FDOP) and is working on the final analysis. When the analysis is complete, Verdegan will share the draft with the U.S. Forest Service zone fire management officers. A timeline for completing the final analysis has not been established.
MNICS Mobilization Guide update	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All MNICS Mobilization Guide chapter SMEs have responded to the requests for updates. Langeberg has a final draft ready and will request that contributors do a final review. The tentative plan is to distribute the MNICS Mob Guide in mid-February.



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<p>2026 Minnesota Wildfire Academy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The 2026 Minnesota Wildfire Academy will be held June 1 – 5th, 2026, at Minnesota North, Itasca Campus. - Todd Manley is the Minnesota North College Wildfire Academy representative this year. - Schenk has been clear with the college that the academy's payment structure will move to a student cost-per-day model. - Schenk is working with the college to produce the academy brochure this year. The brochure and announcement will go out in early March. - The course offerings will include FI-110, ICS-300, L-280, RT130, S-130/190, S-131, S-200, S-211, S-212, S-215, S-219, S-230, S-231, S-236, S-261, S-270, and S-290. - The chair of the Training Working Team reported approximately 95% of the lead instructors are confirmed for the 2026 Minnesota Wildfire Academy courses. - The Minnesota DNR may offer a one-day, six-hour peat soil fire suppression course. - DNR plans to have their contracted boot mobile vendor at the academy. The boot mobile allows anyone to try on boots and purchase onsite. The vendor plans to provide more boot options to try on this year. - The Training Working Team is considering alternative academy venues. The deterring factor for most alternative locations is classroom rental rates. - HSEM recommended looking into the Fond du Lac College campus in Cloquet, Minnesota.
<p>MNCC future planning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Task Force is seeking final confirmation from the Minnesota DNR and the National Park Service on whether the Deer River area and Voyageurs National Park will transition to MNCC in 2026. The Task Force set March 15, 2026, as the to confirm by date.
<p>MNCC spring staffing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The BIA is open to offering a 120-day detail for the MNCC assistant center manager position for logistics and has a possible lead on a dispatcher based out of the Arkansas coordination center. As a back-up plan, the Minnesota DNR can support a six-month work-out-of-class opportunity. - The Minnesota DNR is working on reclassifying the aviation and logistics positions to be similar in their hiring requirements. - The MNICS Type 3 Incident Commanders expressed concern about not having a key point of contact to coordinate with this spring. MNCC has identified a person and is working through the final proposal of the plan. MNCC shared that moving forward, all dispatchers will become proficient in dispatching all three functional areas. - With the upcoming retirements and the MNCC center manager's planned leave, MNCC has detailers lined up to cover the assistant center manager's logistics duties.
<p>Minnesota DPS Utilities Meeting at the State EOC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Minnesota DNR sent an email to the Task Force members with information about the Minnesota Department of Public Safety's meeting with state, utility, and emergency management partners, which will focus on preparing for the upcoming fire season and debriefing on the past fire season. - The Task Force approved Lundgren and Glesener to represent MNICS.
<p>March Task Force Meeting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Due an afternoon training conflict with Conference room 3, the Task Force will plan to meet on March 5 at MIFC in conference room 3 until noon. Following, the Task Force meeting, some of the Task Force members with support the S-203 training simulation.



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<p>Agency Updates</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - BIA – The region is unclear whether the regional fire management officer position will be refilled as the agency transitions fire staff to the U.S. Wildland Fire Service. The Tribes are conducting a few S-130 and S-190 fire courses that will incorporate a stronger ecological focus. All resources that were in Oklahoma returned nearly two weeks ago. Efforts are ongoing to finalize the cyclical agreements between the BIA, Tribes, and the State. Red Lake is the only Tribe that completed their agreement. BIA is trying to include the Tribes as signatories on new agreements. During the interim, BIA and the Tribes will work under local-level operating plans tailored to the local protection area. At this level of agreement, the plan can be signed at the DNR Wildfire Section level. - DNR – The radio coordinator will start next week. The DNR fire section will be hosting the fire team leaders meeting in mid-February. The training team has a full schedule of training at the Fire Center throughout the month of March. - FWS – The agency is moving forward with hiring efforts. The 1039 seasonal fire hiring is progressing. Locally, FWS expects ten new hires to on board this spring. FWS staff continue to prepare for the spring prescribed burning season, and several are supporting prescribed fire needs in Texas. - HSEM – Congratulations to Kevlin McCuskey on his retirement. Jennifer Olson will fill in as the acting HSEM representative. - NPS – NPS is working with its fire staff to complete the medical exam process. The Voyageurs National Park has held meetings to discuss transitioning radio communications and local fire dispatching to the Minnesota Interagency Coordination Center. The agency is working to complete management plans for all the parks in the zones. Locally, Voyageurs has a couple of hundred piles to burn and is also prepping to burn cattails. Agency fire staff are awaiting more information on the new fire organization. - USFS – The local forests successfully filled several permanent fire positions. The 1039 temporary fire hiring remains frozen. Region 9 fire leadership changes are occurring with Miller taking on a 120-day Washington Office fire detail and Alyea detailing behind Miller. The Forest Service has an engine supporting Alabama. The regional fire management officer meeting was held last week. The Department of the Interior and the Department of Agriculture will conduct joint inspections, including all firefighting aircraft. The agency is seeing a significant rise in cost for call-when-needed aircraft contracts. The inspector that handles inspections and maintenance for the Beaver aircraft announced plans for retirement. Presently, there is no one to backfill the current inspector role. - MNCC – MNCC plans to bring in a 120-day detailer this spring. The dispatchers are working on operations guides and daily operating guides. The center manager is preparing dispatchers for 7-day staffing.

Next MNICS Task Force Meeting scheduled for March 5, 2026, at MIFC.