



# Notes

## June 29, 2026, MNICS Task Force Meeting

**Task Force:** Cory Berg, Greg Carlson, Paul Lundgren, Darrin Franco, Justin O'Brien, Jennifer Olson

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

**Guest:** Taylor Schenk, Ryan Williams

DISCUSSION TOPIC	NOTES
<b>MNICS Budget</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Task Force reviewed the monthly budget expenses and uncommitted funds, both the DNR FY 2026 and FY 2027 were reported.</li> <li>- Request for quotes on the training room are still pending.</li> <li>- The Task Force agree that with the new fiscal year projections, the MNIC cooperative funds appear to be in a favorable state. The Task Force will discuss the 2027 projects and funding during the August meeting.</li> </ul>
<b>MIFC Building</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There are no new updates for the MIFC building and facilities.</li> </ul>
<b>MNICS Annual Meeting</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- A keynote speaker was secured.</li> <li>- The agenda will work around scheduling to end the general session by 14:00.</li> </ul>
<b>Birch Bay Fire review</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Birch Bay Fire team evaluation indicated the assignment went well and the task force recognized Williams's leadership in successfully completing his first team assignment.</li> <li>- Williams emphasized the importance of mobilizing the full team rather than a short team because it supports better outcomes and provides more training opportunities for trainees, especially on lower-complexity fires where they can gain more experience at a slower pace. Budget considerations and the unique nature of peat fires make decisions challenging and full teams offer better preparedness, while short teams reduce costs but risk being under-resourced.</li> <li>- The MNICS MAC group initially felt a short team was sufficient, but after discussions with the incident commander they supported the decision to bring the full team and appreciated the effective right-sizing that occurred once the team was in place.</li> <li>- For future incidents when a short team is requested, Williams recommends MNICS communicate the benefits of mobilizing the full team to the requesting agency, both for readiness if an incident grows and to support trainee development.</li> <li>- The short team rostering concern is that it limits opportunities for rostered personnel that do not mobilize, potentially leading to skill stagnation or complacency when frequently overlooked for an assignment</li> <li>- Feedback from O'Brien indicated the approach was well-received by the Forest Service with no issues noted.</li> <li>- Overall, the Task Force expressed appreciation for the thoughtful decision-making, strong on-the-ground support, and the positive outcomes for both operations and training.</li> </ul>
<b>Flanders Fire Radio Communications</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mortensen, COMT assigned with the team, successfully linked VHF and ARMER radios using a VTAC channel, allowing the 800 MHz tower to pick up and transmit radio traffic onto the ARMER system. The test showed strong performance.</li> <li>- Of MNDOT's 400 towers, approximately 110 currently have this capability. MNDOT may be moving away from maintaining this equipment, and many dispatch centers may not see a need for it or have staff trained to use it.</li> </ul>



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<p><b>Flanders Fire Radio Communications Cont.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The East Zone frequently uses this system on the Gunflint Trail. The Forest Service carries 800 MHz radios and regularly uses VTAC patches. While infrequently needed, the system is highly valuable when activated.</li> <li>- Input should be gathered from any relevant statewide committees on the usefulness of maintaining this capability.</li> <li>- Carlson will draft a task sheet and send it to Berg and the Task Force to ensure alignment before forwarding it on to the Communications Working Team.</li> <li>- Olson will inform the statewide committees and coordinate with Berg to ensure full understanding of the request.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communication Interoperability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- HSEM shared an invitation from the Association of Emergency Managers to have the MNICS Team incident commanders present at their annual meeting on September 20, 2026, from 1200–1600 hours at Breezy Point. The event draws emergency managers from across the state.</li> <li>- The requested presentation would include a recent wildfire case study, lessons learned, and a discussion of ARMER–VHF interoperability, including a possible demo of the interoperability patch.</li> <li>- The Task Force supports the ICs participation and recommends sending both a Task Force representative and a member of the Communications Working Team. Lundgren plans to attend the meeting and will be available to co-present.</li> <li>- Scheduling will consider vacations and fire assignments to ensure the right presenters are available. O’Brien will reach out to Backe.</li> <li>- Berg suggested including Steve Mortenson as a Comms Working Team representative; Lundgren also recommended involving Niesen, the new DNR communications integrations coordinator.</li> <li>- Jennifer will respond to the request, confirming MNICS support and noting that the group is identifying appropriate representatives.</li> </ul>
<p><b>August TF Meeting</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Task Force will prioritize discussions about the future of MIFC, including current conditions, immediate and long-term needs, and the viability of the existing facility. Any major changes will require immediate planning in the hope that progress can be made in the next 10–20 years.</li> <li>- A major priority to determine is the future structure and representation of MNICS as the Department of Interior (DOI) agencies transition firefighting personnel under the Wildland Fire Service. The Task Force and Board of Directors representation will likely change, and alternative structures may be necessary to maintain a balanced participation across agencies and working teams.</li> <li>- The August meeting will be held in Walker at the Chippewa National Forest Walker Ranger Station August 5-6, 2026. The meeting’s focus will be on MNICS representation changes, with building discussions included as time allows. The Board of Directors members are encouraged to attend.</li> <li>- The Wiland Fire Service’s 20-year historical report should be completed by the end of June and will help clarify regional boundaries and future organizational structure.</li> </ul>



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<p><b>Wildland Fire Service Updates</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The agency’s development of a hierarchy organization is progressing. The eastern region has been divided into five management units, with Minnesota and Wisconsin comprising one unit.</li> <li>- The Minnesota Master Cooperative Agreement was not selected among those to remain under the previous format and will be required to follow the new format. DNR is working with HSEM to establish the Department of Public Safety as the signatory for HSEM, similar to how the Department of Natural Resources is the signatory for the Division of Forestry, which will open more access to other public safety divisions. HSEM’s leadership is on board with this change.</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The working team submitted a formal proposal outlining academy changes following the recent academy and asked the Task Force for direction and potential funding support.</li> <li>- Proposed 2027 academy model includes:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>o Primary location: Bemidji, MN over spring break.</li> <li>o Secondary option: Minnesota North, Grand Rapids, MN, starting June 7.</li> </ul> </li> <li>- Task Force approval is needed to lock in dates with hosting colleges. Communications to students will begin in November.</li> <li>- Recommended cost-share model for 2027: MNICS partners split costs based on their percentage of student participation (e.g., DNR covers 85% if 85% of student body is DNR).</li> <li>- Non-MNICS student attendance is small; fire departments may use grant funding—discussion planned with Oland, DNR, before retirement.</li> <li>- A formal project proposal will be submitted; Task Force will decide cost-sharing approach. DNR will manage bid processes.</li> <li>- Under the new model, students will not pay registration fees; agencies will cover their proportional share directly.</li> <li>- If using COOP funds upfront, agencies may need to provide additional contributions. Larger expenses (over \$5K) may require using the training account with bill-backs.</li> <li>- Longer-term funding may stabilize as the WFS funding become less bureau-restricted.</li> <li>- The preferred 2027 academy timing the second week of March (spring break) is a trial run.</li> <li>- Schenk and Lundgren advised a state representative contacted DNR leadership expressing concern about the academy was ending, and Lundgren provided a clarifying statement on the need for the proposed changes.</li> <li>- The Task Force recommends avoiding scheduling conflicts during the February to early March meeting cycles but is comfortable proceeding with the proposed direction.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Agency Updates</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>BIA</b> – Local resources are starting to mobilize out west, with several engine crew modules deployed in the Southwest supporting tribal partners and additional resources becoming available nationally. A small fire occurred at Bois Forte over the weekend. A few personnel mobilized with the WFS/DNR crew. The organization is in an adaptation phase as legacy structures are dismantled, and the new unit-based Geographic Area support model is implemented. Many uncertainties remain as WFS leadership and direction continues to develop.</li> <li>- <b>DNR</b> – The fire section has a handful of resources supporting out of state, and several staff expressing interest in supporting the MNICS teams. The new integrated communications systems coordinator started today, and the duty station will be at MIFC reporting to Glesener.</li> </ul>



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<p><b>Agency Updates Cont.</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>FWS</b> – Several high-level U.S. Fish and Wildlife leadership are meeting with the White Earth Tribe to sign an agreement to co-manage the Tamarac NWR. The WFS advertised a administration fire support position with Detroit Lakes as the duty station and received 14 applications. The 20-person crew mobilized to Colorado prepositioned in Detroit Lakes. The Eastern Area is working to build a task force group that will be made available for national assignment and will be coordinated by NIFC.</li> <li>- <b>HSEM</b> – Advised of significant weather moving through the area and stressed taking necessary precautions.</li> <li>- <b>NPS</b> – A couple of park fire staff are supporting the interagency crew that recently mobilized. The park’s long-term indices continue to rise. The fire staff is under a new supervisor, however, Carlson will remain the fire point of contact for the legacy parks he oversaw before transitioning to the WFS.</li> <li>- <b>USFS</b> – The Superior Helitack went off contract over the weekend. The fire danger is currently low to moderate with the sporadic rain and nuisance fires reported. A new fire start was reported since the last call, the Slim fire on the west zone, approximately 3 acres with heavy mop up.</li> <li>- <b>MNCC</b> – The new forest service dispatcher started this week. Johnson will be taking the remainder of his paternity leave at the end of July, Mackey will cover in August. Johnson will email the Task Force with contact information for those covering the MNCC center manager during his leave.</li> </ul>

*The next Task Force meeting will be held August 5-6, 2026 in person in Walker, Minnesota.*