

Species Assessment Group (SAG) Process

Wisconsin Invasive Species Council

January 2024

DEFINITIONS

Council = [Wisconsin Invasive Species Council](#)

DATCP = [Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection](#)

DNR = [Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources](#)

SAG = Species Assessment Group

REFERENCE

[Overview of Wisconsin's Invasive Species Rule](#)

[Full text of Wisconsin's Invasive Species Rule](#) – Wis. Adm. Code Ch. NR 40

SPECIES ASSESSMENT GROUPS

The [Wisconsin Invasive Species Council](#) is advisory to the Wisconsin DNR. It is responsible for making recommendations to the DNR regarding the classification of invasive species in [Wisconsin's Invasive Species Rule – ch. NR 40](#). To accomplish this, the Council convenes Species Assessment Groups (SAGs), to review and assess species and make recommendations for which species should be included in NR 40. The Council is comprised of individuals representing governmental, commerce, environmental, educational, and scientific organizations who have expertise in invasive species. The SAGs are advisory to the Council and are charged with recommending a regulatory (Prohibited, Restricted), or non-regulated category to the Council for each considered species. The Council considers the recommendations of the SAGs, makes revisions if they choose, and ultimately forwards the recommendations to the DNR. The DNR then uses the Council's recommendations as part of the administrative rule development process for revisions to NR 40. SAGs are convened at intervals determined by the Council.

SAG Group Composition

The Invasive Species Council begins the SAG process by working with the DNR to identify stakeholders and potential members for each SAG. Members are appointed by the Council to serve for one cycle of the SAG process – generally a one to two-year time frame. The Council makes a comprehensive effort to include representatives from stakeholder groups that are impacted by the regulations of invasive species and those impacted or potentially impacted by the presence of the species. SAG members must be knowledgeable about the species being assessed in their group. Additional SAG members may be appointed by the Council Chair even after the SAG process has started, especially if that member will represent a previously un-represented group or bring new knowledge or expertise to the process. This process document will be provided to all SAG members to inform them of their commitments.

The DNR assigns staff to serve as Team Coordinators for each SAG according to taxonomy and uses. During the current revision process, the following SAGs were formed:

- ✚ Agronomic plants – potentially invasive plants that may be used in farming, have escaped from agricultural use, or pose potential threats to the state's agronomic industry.

- ✚ Aquatic invertebrates – potentially invasive aquatic invertebrates (except crayfish) that may negatively impact Wisconsin’s waters.
- ✚ Aquatic plants – potentially invasive aquatic and wetland plants that may negatively impact Wisconsin’s waters.
- ✚ Fish and crayfish – potentially invasive fish and crayfish that may negatively impact Wisconsin’s waters.
- ✚ Fish and wildlife diseases – potentially invasive fungi, bacteria, viruses, or parasites likely to negatively impact native fish and wildlife.
- ✚ Herbaceous ornamental plants – potentially invasive showy or attractive herbaceous plants likely to be in nurseries, garden stores, or used in landscaping.
- ✚ Non-commercial use plants – potentially invasive plants that are not common in trade but may pose threats ecologically, economically, or otherwise if introduced.
- ✚ Terrestrial invertebrates and plant disease-causing organisms – potentially invasive terrestrial invertebrates or plant disease-causing organisms likely to negatively impact native forests or the forestry industry.
- ✚ Terrestrial vertebrates – potentially invasive or otherwise harmful terrestrial vertebrates.
- ✚ Woody plants – potentially invasive trees, shrubs or vines.

Pre-Screening Process

DNR staff compiles lists of species to be pre-screened by each of the SAGs. Pre-screening lists are compiled from a variety of sources, including new records of potentially invasive species in Wisconsin, species occurring in adjacent states or states with similar ecological conditions to Wisconsin, running lists of potentially invasive species kept by DNR staff or other organizations, recommendations from partners, the public, or others. DNR staff and the Council will solicit species to be considered for assessment from stakeholders and the public. A variety of information is compiled by DNR staff for each species on the pre-screening list, including distribution, abundance, habitat(s) invaded, and impacts, including socioeconomic implications.

The pre-screening list and associated information are shared with the Council for their review and input and then distributed to SAG team members at least 30 days before the in-person pre-screening meeting. If SAG members have significant and timely additional information, they can share it with the SAG coordinator to be shared with other SAG members before the in-person meeting.

Each SAG meets in person at a pre-determined location to review its pre-screening list to determine a designation for each species (Figure 1. *The Invasive Species Pre-Screening Process*).

Literature Reviews and Species Assessments

DNR staff develop literature reviews for each species identified by the SAGs as needing a full assessment (see “*Literature Review Template*.” When possible, literature reviews are reviewed by people who know the species well.

DNR staff will send final literature reviews to the SAG members at least 30 days before the SAG meetings when species will be discussed in detail. SAG members will be asked to identify gaps in the literature review and share information with SAG members.

Each SAG member fills out a rating form for each species (See *SAG Rating Form*). All rating forms will be shared with all SAG team members. SAG members may consult with other individuals or groups within their industry/field to help them develop a rating and recommended classification.

Each SAG is assigned a DNR staff Team Coordinator who is responsible for coordinating team meetings, providing materials to team members, and sharing information throughout the process. Teams may use trained facilitators, as needed, to guide the SAG teams through meeting discussions, manage time, maintain focus, ensure all voices are heard, and implement ground rules. If a trained facilitator is not available, the DNR Team Coordinator will serve in this role. The DNR Team Coordinator is not a voting member: they will provide only factual, unbiased information, and will refrain from inserting their own opinions into the process.

Wisconsin Invasive Species Council members may be members of one or more SAG teams to provide technical information and expertise but will not be voting members of the group. Council members will have an opportunity to vote when SAG teams advance their recommendations to the Council for consideration.

Individuals may serve on multiple SAGs as appropriate.

SAG Meeting Process

Each SAG should assign a designated note-taker who is not a member of the SAG to record discussions, recommendations, and minority opinions.

During the SAG meeting, the group discusses its list of species in detail, moving species by species through the list. Each SAG member reports their initial recommendation for classification for each species.

- ✚ If all SAG members agree on a species' classification, that recommendation is recorded.
- ✚ If there is not total agreement about a species' classification, the group discusses the species, and members provide more information. Eventually, the group either agrees on a recommended classification OR members vote on the classification with the majority vote being recorded as the recommended classification. If there is significant disagreement about the classification, a minority opinion will be recorded and will be reported to the Council for their consideration.
- ✚ A SAG may recommend specific exemptions for a species. For example, for some species, the straight species and certain cultivars are known to be invasive, but there may also be non- or less-invasive cultivars. These cultivars could be recommended as “**Exempt**” from regulation under NR 40.
- ✚ Some species may be sufficiently widespread in parts of the state that eradication is not feasible (thereby getting a “**Restricted**” classification), while in another part of the state, they have not yet been found (thereby needing a “**Prohibited**” classification). These species are “**Split-Listed**,” being regulated as “**Restricted**” in part of the state and “**Prohibited**” in the rest of the state.
- ✚ For species that are currently regulated as **Prohibited** or **Restricted** under NR40, the SAGs will review distribution maps and may recommend changes based on updated data and information.
- ✚ The SAGs may re-assess a **Prohibited** or **Restricted** species and its subspecific taxa (e.g. cultivars).

The recommendations of each SAG are then shared with the Council for discussion. Once their recommendations have been forwarded to the Council, the technical work of the SAGs is complete, pending any follow-up questions or requests for clarification by the Council.

The Council meets to discuss the recommendations made by the SAGs. They may determine that they would like to get further stakeholder and public input before finalizing their recommendations. If so, they work with

DNR staff to organize a public input process. Council meetings are open to the public and SAG team members or any other interested party is welcome to attend.

INITIAL PUBLIC INPUT PROCESS

- ✚ The Council releases its recommendations for species classifications and organizes information sessions around the state. DNR staff and Council members attend. Stakeholder groups and the public are encouraged to attend the meetings or provide written comments before the meeting.
- ✚ All comments are compiled, along with responses that include how the comments have been addressed. The Council may adjust its recommendations based on feedback received through the public input process. If additional species are being considered for regulation, a literature review will be developed, like those already conducted, and the appropriate SAGs will be reconvened before a final Council recommendation.

COUNCIL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Council finalizes its recommendations and shares them with the DNR, along with a request to make updates to NR 40 through the formal rule-making process. The SAG members will receive the Council's final recommendations.

RULE-MAKING PROCESS

After receiving the Council's recommendations for species classifications, the DNR determines whether it will begin updating NR 40 through the formal rule-making process. There are many internal steps that the DNR and the Natural Resources Board must go through during the rule-making process. For permanent rules, the entire process generally takes about 31 months from initiation to the rule taking effect.

More detailed information about the rule-making process can be found on the DNR's [website](#).

Rule-Making Process (in brief)

- ✚ DNR drafts a rule recommendation based on Council recommendations, public comments, and the best available information.
- ✚ DNR goes to the public for input on the potential economic impacts of the proposed rule.
- ✚ DNR goes to the public again for formal public hearings and a comment period.
- ✚ DNR compiles all comments, responds to them, and revises the rule accordingly.
- ✚ DNR sends the rule through the formal approval process for DNR administration, the Natural Resources Board, the Department of Administration, the State Legislature, and the Governor's office.
- ✚ If the updated rule makes it through these steps, it becomes law.

Figure 1. The Invasive Species Pre-Screening Process

