



DAKOTAS CHAPTER of ISA NEWSLETTER

Summer 2026 | Volume 6 | Issue 1



PRESIDENT'S Message

Sam DeMarais
Dakotas Chapter President

Greetings, Dakotas ISA members,

It has been a while since our annual conference back in January, but time certainly has flown by as it usually does once the spring planting season is upon us. Since then, a lot of work has been done to hire a new executive director for the chapter.

Clearwater Communications and Scooter Pursley started providing executive director and management services for the Dakotas Chapter on July 1. This was a challenging process that our board worked diligently on to create a fair and proper process, and we feel confident that with Scooter and Clearwater Communications, our chapter will continue to grow and build upon the excellent foundation that John Ball has created.

I want to take this opportunity to thank John for his dedication, leadership and commitment to the South Dakota Arborist Association and the Dakotas Chapter. We have all greatly benefited from his efforts and the Dakotas Chapter would not exist without his vision. Thank you, John.

We will be providing a Tree Risk Assessment Qualification (TRAQ) course in September, alongside our Tree Climbing Competition, both events in Aberdeen, S.D. Please watch your email and continue to read the newsletter for more details on those events.

That is all for now. I hope everyone is having a safe summer and I look forward to seeing you at some of our events this fall and winter.

Sam DeMarais, President



INSIDE This Issue

President's Message	1
Plan to Attend Annual Conference	1
Emerald Ash Borer Detected	2
TRAQ Class	2
Bord of Directors	2
Dakotas ISA's Climbing Competition	3
Advertise	3
DISA Members Survey	4

Plan to Attend Annual Conference Jan. 12-14, 2027

The Dakotas ISA Chapter annual conference will return to the Dakota Event Center in Aberdeen, S.D., January 12-14, 2027. A room block at the two attached hotels, the Hampton Inn and Holiday Inn Express, will be set later this fall.

We have an outstanding group of speakers and topics. Linda Chalker-Scott will return to discuss AI and diagnostics. Jared Abrojena, Academy Training, will discuss rigging and climbing. Kris Rasmussen will

introduce the new pruning qualification, which we will be offering in May.

John Ball and Joe Zeleznik will return to the conference. Ball will conduct the electrical hazard course on Tuesday morning before the conference begins. Ball and Zeleznik will close the conference on Thursday with updates on tree pests and problems.

There will be additional speakers on a wide range of topics so please join us in January!



TRAQ Class Coming to Aberdeen, SD in September

TRAQ – Tree Risk Assessment Qualification – is offered through ISA chapters. This unique opportunity trains candidates in the specialized area of tree risk assessment through a two-day course involving lectures and field exercises. At the completion of the training, candidates take a multiple-choice exam and field exercise. They must pass the exam and a field exercise to receive their qualification.

TRAQ credentials will now be valid for seven years, extended from its previous five-year term. ISA has also eliminated the TRAQ Renewal Program. To earn a new certificate for the ISA TRAQ credential after expiration, credential holders must complete the full ISA TRAQ program, including retraining and retesting.

We expect that this fall's class to be popular, as many arborists in our chapter with TRAQ credentials are within a year of their five-year term. This course will allow them to continue the credential for another seven years. Arborists wanting to obtain their first TRAQ credential are also invited to attend. The criteria to sign up for the course is available at www.isa-arbor.com/Portals/0/Assets/PDF/Certification-Applications/TRAQ-App-Guide.pdf.

We recommend that candidates for TRAQ open a TRAQ application with ISA and check their ISA Credentialing Account for "Approved for Enrollment" prior to registering with the Dakotas chapter. Here's a helpful video on the instructions for the ISA TRAQ Application: www.youtube.com/watch?v=vEJrbTZx2Y.

Skip Kincaid, our popular instructor for this course, has agreed to offer the course again. We will be hosting the course in Aberdeen, S.D., with full days on Wednesday and Thursday, September 16 and 17, and testing on Friday morning. The cost is \$750 for Dakotas ISA members and \$800 for nonmembers. This includes all course materials, a light breakfast for all three days and lunch for two days.

Upon the completion of the instructional portion of the course, 14.25 CEUs will be credited toward the ISA Arborist Certification credential.

The course will be held at the Aberdeen Park, Recreation and Forestry building at 225 Third Street SE in Aberdeen, S.D. The course will be from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Wednesday, September 16 and Thursday, September 17. Testing will be Friday, September 18, from 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. The written exam and performance-based exam will be given Friday morning.

Registration closes at 5 p.m. on August 14, 2026.

DISA Members Encouraged to Take Survey

We invite you and your members to participate in a national survey led by The Morton Arboretum and sponsored by the USDA Forest Service Urban & Community Forestry Program. This survey will guide the development of regionally customized urban and community tree species lists and a centralized, publicly accessible webpage of nursery workforce development information and resources.

The survey takes 15-20 minutes, is voluntary, and all responses are anonymous and confidential. **Please do not share this survey link anywhere publicly accessible**, such as on websites or social media, to avoid AI bot responses. The survey is available in Spanish using the toggle button in the upper

right corner of the first page. Your input will directly impact tree species lists used by practitioners and support nursery workforce development efforts. A final report summarizing findings and resulting tree species lists will be shared.

PLEASE COMPLETE THE SURVEY BY JULY 28.

Take the Survey or copy and paste this URL into your browser: www.surveymonkey.com/r/RR5ZJTC.

If you have any questions, please contact the researchers at The Morton Arboretum:

Andrea Brennan (abrennan@mortonarb.org) and
Olivia Crossman (ocrossman@mortonarb.org).

2026 Board of Directors

PRESIDENT

Sam DeMarais
Fargo Park District
Fargo, N.D.

VICE PRESIDENT

Christy Ames-Davis
Bismarck Forestry
Bismarck, N.D.

PAST PRESIDENT

Scott Liudahl
Fargo Forestry
Fargo, N.D.

DIRECTORS

Rex McDonald
Spearfish Forestry
Spearfish, S.D.

Alec Miller
Fargo Park District
Fargo, N.D.

Katherine Nagel
Bismarck Forestry
Bismarck, N.D.

Bryan Peterson
Sioux Falls Forestry
Sioux Falls, S.D.

Cody Alan Thompson
Glacial Lakes Tree Service
Brookings, S.D.

Joshua Wildeboer
Black Hills Energy
Rapid City, S.D.

Dakotas ISA Chapter Climbing Competition

Calling all climbers and competition volunteers! The Dakotas ISA's third annual climbing competition will be held Sept. 18-20 at Northern State University in Aberdeen, S.D. Housing is available at Wylie Park, but the competition will take place on the NSU campus.

Those interested should contact John Ball (john.ball@sdstate.edu). There is no charge to compete, but registration is required. The competition is friendly and relaxed, and it is an

opportunity to meet with other climbers and share tips on gear and techniques.

Anyone may participate but to advance to the Master's Challenge you must be a member of the Dakotas ISA and have a valid driver's license with either a North Dakota or South Dakota address. There is a \$20 fee for contestants who are members of the Dakotas ISA chapter. The fee is \$40 for non-members.



SCHEDULE of Events

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18

- Noon** TCC event set up and meeting with judges and techs.
- 3-5 p.m.** TCC competitor check-in and gear check.

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 19

- 7 a.m.** Competitor and volunteer check-in.
- 8 a.m.-4 p.m.** Climbing events:
- **Aerial rescue** - The aerial rescue event is a timed event that assesses the competitor's ability to climb to and safely lower a climber (dummy) who is unable to descend without assistance. The event setup is the same for all competitors.
 - **Ascent** - The ascent event assesses the competitor's ability to use their ascent system efficiently and safely. The event assesses the competitor's efficiency in attaching the ascent system to the ascent line(s), ascending to the bell, and transferring into a descent system.
 - **Belayed speed climb** - The speed climb event assesses the competitor's ability to climb a predetermined route from the ground to about 18 m (60 ft) up a tree with a belayed climbing system for safety.
 - **Throwline** - The throwline event is a timed event that assesses the competitor's ability to accurately place a throwline and/or climbing line in a tree.
 - **Work climb** - The work climb event tests the competitor's ability to move throughout the tree using approved tree climbing equipment. The event setup is the same for all competitors.

The competitor with the highest score is the winner of that event. First, second and third place for men and women are awarded for each event. Competitors' total scores for all five events are combined. The three competitors with the highest combined score from the preliminary events move on to the Masters' Challenge Championship.

SUNDAY, SEPT. 10

- 7 a.m.** TCC Masters' Challenge competitor and volunteer check-in.
- 8 a.m.** Masters' Challenge competition.
- * If time allows, the event may finish late Saturday.*

VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED

Volunteers are needed to help with set-up and judging. Please contact John Ball for more information.

ADVERTISE in the Quarterly Newsletter



Are you in an industry that supports the work of the DISA or its partners? If you are, consider advertising your business in the quarterly DISA newsletter. Many businesses cater to organizations receiving the newsletter, many of which are looking for services. [Click here to find out more about advertising options.](#)

Emerald Ash Borer Detected in New Location

Emerald ash borer (EAB) was detected this week by North Dakota Forest Service staff north of Mapleton, N.D. This is the second finding in Cass County, more than 12 miles from the first detection in that county in January. EAB was first found in the state in LaMoure County in August 2024.

EAB is a wood-boring insect originally from Asia, first found in the U.S. in 2002. It has since spread to 37 states and killed hundreds of millions of ash trees. Adults do not fly more than a mile or two on their own; however, they can be moved long distances through the movement of firewood, tree trimmings and ash nursery stock.

“While this detection is unfortunate, it is not unexpected,” Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring said.

“Landowners should be diligent in monitoring ash trees in shelterbelts and other rural areas for indicators of emerald ash borer and report any suspect infestations.”

Signs of infestation include canopy thinning, leafy sprouts shooting from the trunk or main branches, S-shaped galleries under the bark, bark splitting, woodpecker damage and D-shaped exit holes. For more information on what to look for, go to the North Dakota Department of Agriculture’s [Emerald ash borer webpage](#).

The North Dakota Department of Agriculture and partners

will be scouting near the detection to try to determine how it got there and how far it may have spread. Travelers should leave firewood at home and purchase or gather from local sources, if allowed, to prevent further spread.

North Dakota has more than 90 million ash trees in native and rural forests, and ash trees make up between 20% and 80% of the trees along city streets and parks. Unless treated, infested ash trees can be killed in a few years. Treatments are not recommended until EAB is detected within 15 miles.

The state Ag Department maintains a quarantine restricting movement of regulated commodities from infested areas. Cass County is already within the quarantine. Regulated materials include all hardwood firewood, ash logs and branches, nursery stock and wood chips. Moving regulated materials from a quarantined to a non-quarantined area without a permit can result in civil penalties of up to \$5,000.

For more information about emerald ash borer, what to look for in ash trees and possible treatments, visit the [Emerald ash borer webpage](#). To report suspect infestations, use the same link, leave a voicemail at 701-328-5110, option 2, or email reportapest@nd.gov.

Dakota ISA

Scooter Pursley (editor)
1605. E. Capitol Ave.
Bismarck, N.D. 58501

Email: spursley@clearwatercommunications.net

