**Board Members virtually present:** Kevin Banaszak, Mike Depies, Dave Elwing, Jim Freck, Shawn Gibbons, Joe Gonyo, B.J. Grassmann, Russ Olson, Todd Schaller, Kim Shady, and Bruce Urben

**Also virtually present:** Bruce Ross and Kelcy Boettcher

**Unable to Attend:** Ian Bartelmez, George Ermert, Dennis Fleischer, and Pat Smith

**Agenda:**

* **6:32 PM – Meeting Convened by President Urben**
* **6:33 PM – April Board of Directors (BoD) Minutes (Secretary Elwing)**

Dave Elwing motioned (B.J. Grassmann seconded) that April’s Board Minutes be accepted as published. The Board unanimously approved April’s Board meeting minutes.

* **6:34 PM – February Financials (Executive Director Ross & Director of Administration Boettcher)**

As per SOP, Kelcy Boettcher distributed and posted April’s financial spreadsheets, accompanied by an explanatory Word.doc summary. The Association remains slightly ahead of budget despite the loss of online Class A sales. Bruce Ross noted that the Association is spending money faster than anticipated but noted that is due to paying lawyer fees. Directors asked no questions and accepted the April financial statement as delivered.

Bruce Urben asked that the Association consider buying new pop-up canopies used to support outdoor events as the five we have are pretty beat up (one already failed). He suggested the possibility of using some of the R3 grant money to make purchases as the pop-ups will also be used to support R3 activities. The cost of pop-ups cost between $100 and $175 each.

* **6:39 PM – Executive Director’s Report (Executive Director Ross)**

Bruce Ross published and provided an ED Report to Board Members via email prior to the meeting. It highlighted the Department of Gaming’s (DoG’s) lack of response to our online Class A sales, the progress being made by the Association’s two new Public Lands Ecologists (PLEs), efforts to seek and additional $30,000 for PLE funding via the Fund for Lake Michigan, efforts to develop and submit a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) grant proposal, as well as advocacy and education (R3) updates.

* **6:43 PM – Office of Charitable Gaming’s (OCG) Challenge to WWA’s Online Raffle Ticket Sales Process (Executive Director Ross)**

As highlighted in the Executive Director’s Report, DoG went silent regarding the Association’s attempt to reach mutually agreeable ground regarding our continuation of online Class A ticket sales. Bruce Ross explained that based upon DoG’s unresponsiveness and ongoing conversations with WWA’s lawyers (Godfrey & Khan), WWA should push the matter forward by bringing the matter forward to DoG’s Administrator, Mr. John Dillett and then force DoG’s hand to allow a hearing by an administrative judge as one of the options that DoG originally suggested.

Bruce Urben encouraged seeking a non-DoG decision in light of the fact that the Association abided by the online sales cease and desist order, took action to amend procedures to conform to DoG’s identified parameters, and now the Association is left with a “no decision” quandary.

In light of DoG’s apparent lack of interest, Russ Olson asked the Board’s thoughts on resuming online Class A ticket sales. The Board agreed that doing so could jeopardize the Association’s gaming license and significantly impact funding raining capabilities.

The Board agreed that the Executive Director should seek action through an administrative law review by elevating the matter to DoG’s Administrator.

* **6:58 PM – Public Lands Update (Executive Director Ross)**

Bruce Ross reported that the PLEs are doing a great job. To date they introduced 56 properties through the 15-step review process. 22 properties will move onto the site visit stage. Most of the properties are in the eastern half of the state and most are in the 5 – 20 acre size with at least one notable exception in the range of 200 acres. WDNR’s Jason Fleener is very pleased with the PLE’s efforts. Bruce Ross noted (Kelcy Boettcher confirmed) that the WDNR promptly our first invoice and that a second invoice was just submitted. Bruce Ross further noted that WWA has potential to receive $500,000 for habitat restoration in FY23 (more than we currently have projects for).

When asked, B.J. Grassmann provided a brief update on the Pines Project, the Habitat Committee’s efforts to create a wild rice strategy and announced the committee’s recent review of three more private land projects.

President Urben urged both Bruce Ross and B.J. Grassmann to get these “good news stories” out to our membership and readers.

* **7:06 PM – Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Grant (Executive Director Ross)**

Bruce Ross reported that he and Peter Zeigler met with WDNR representatives about six to eight weeks ago to discuss ways to tap available NCRS grant monies ($7M-$8M) that would benefit WDNR and WWA, especially in light of the fact that some NRCS grants will cover 100% for the proposed activity, thus not requiring and Association or WDNR matching funds. One suggestion discussed with WDNR was a “Wisconsin Wetlands” program (modeled on the existing Wisconsin Woodlands program” which provided information to landowners and the public about how to better maintain woodlands, the benefits of woodlands and steps that should be taken to safeguard them. Another possibility discussed includes hiring a WWA employee that can support WDNR’s wetland easement program; WDNR manages over 300 wetland easements and WWA could share the load by managing roughly 200 of these.

A second NRCS “cooperative agreement” opportunity which would require 25% matching funds also exists. Initial thoughts for these funds could include partial funding of the Pines Project video previously discussed by the Board or purchasing advertising in the WWA newsletter.

Executive Director Ross asked the Board’s support for his actions and authority to continue pursuing these funds. B.J. Grassmann stated his support, but also his concerns that ED Ross might be over-extending himself. ED Ross responded that, although hiring another person would increase near-term workload, based upon experiences with the PLEs and Director of Administration Kelcy Boettcher’s ongoing support, the PLE workload has been lighter than anticipated. Further, should a new position become a reality, ED Ross already has a candidate in mind that was identified during the PLE interview process.

Todd Schaller asked what the NRCS timeline looked like. Bruce Ross responded that applications need to be submitted during mid-May and that awards are anticipated in mid-September to coincide with the Federal FY. As such, WWA would expect a NRCS contract to be in place in August/September, if they like WWA’s proposal. The period of performance suggested in WWA’s application is for 3 years with the option to extend to five years, as well as to increase to manpower from one to three ecologists at a cost level of $80,000/year.

Based upon the responses, Todd Schaller motioned (Shawn Gibbons seconded) that WWA move forward in pursuing the proposed NRCS application. The Board unanimously voted to approve the motion.

* **7:21 PM – R3 Grant Update (Vice President Schaller)**

The Waterfowler’s Academy has been initiated. Although the grant allows WWA to hire a paid manager, Todd Schaller reported that he believes he can manage the academy as a volunteer, thus allowing budgeted funds to be used elsewhere within the initiate. The R3 Steering Committee is also functioning and providing oversight of the two programs currently being organized: Green Bay LTH (needs to re-focus on women and diversity), and a “For Women By Women” event in October at the Trempealeau Refuge. The Steering Group is also working on a multi-media “Roadmap to Waterfowling” and will meet with a Texas-based firm and the International Hunter Education Instructor non-profit which both have existing products that might be able to be incorporated into the Waterfowler’s Academy. Todd Schaller also reported that R3 Grant funds might also be used to pay R3 participant entrance fees to the Waterfowler’s EXPO.

* **7:30 PM – Hall of Fame (HoF) Criteria Review (President Urben)**

Following 2022’s HoF nomination process President Urben and Executive Director Ross encouraged the HoF Committee to consider reassessing the primarily fund raising-focused HoF nomination criteria to also consider candidate’s actions supporting WWA’s more recent shifts towards emphasizing our mission areas. No action was taken at the time, but President Urben reserved to option to review the matter at a later date. President Urben asked the Board members in attendance for their help reviewing the process and to also develop better means of communicating between the HoF Committee and the Board. HoF candidates need to be submitted by October, which only leaves a few months to address nomination criteria changes. To this end, President Urben asked Directors to support this review; no Director initially stepped forward.

Bruce Ross suggested that the topic be addressed with Directors not able to attend to seek their input. President Urben accepted this suggestion but stated that additional Board meetings (or subcommittee meeting) may be required to address this in the near future. Jim Freck asked where he can find the HoF criteria so he could review it. Kelcy Boettcher confirmed the criteria is listed on the BoD-protected webpage. Links on the board’s secure webpage allow a download of current HoF criteria and procedures.

* **7:39 PM – Committee Reports (President Urben)**

**Habitat Committee (B.J. Grassmann):** The Habitat Committee had nothing to add beyond the points discussed during the PLE update addressed earlier in the meeting. Bruce Urben mentioned that he recently worked with the Pulaski school and assembled ten wood duck box kits. In doing so he noted that one bottom was too large and had to be cut to size, and also that the wood was moldy because the kits were wrapped when the wood was still wet. Dave Elwing accepted the comments regarding the boxes cut in February and informed the Board that McNaughton Correctional Facility volunteered their services and equipment to properly saw and kiln dry the wood is we get trees/boards to them. B.J. Grassmann said that he and the Habitat Committee will look into the McNaughton offer.

**Development Committee (Dave Elwing):** In addition to the Fund for Lake Michigan, NRCS grant, and DoG actions already addressed progress is being made on the 2024 WWA Raffle Calendar. A new prize in 2024 will be a $50 gift box of Wisconsin-roasted Terre Verde coffee offered by through a WWA Life Member’s business in Chilton. The boxes will feature two WWA-branded coffee roasts and four one-pot Terre Verde sampler packs. A possibility exists to expand WWA-labelled coffees to separate year-round fund raisers as Terre Verde does with the regional BSA Council and several other outdoor sports/conservation-focused non-profits. Mike Depies if Terre Verde could make a WWA 40th Anniversary blend for next year.

**Communications Committee:** No committee members were able to attend, hence no report was delivered.

**Policy Committee (Bruce Ross):** Regarding the Pelican River Conservation Initiative discussed last month when the legislature’s Joint Finance Committee voted along party lines to not fund it through Knowles-Nelson funds, Bruce Ross reported attending an Oneida County Board Meeting which also voted against supporting the initiative despite 1.5 hours of attendees stating their support and no opposing views. Todd Schaller reported that he and Bruce Ross attended a Ducks Unlimited/WWA-sponsored Legislative Shoot which provided a good opportunity to engage legislators and their staffers outside of the Capital. Todd Schaller also reported there was some interest expressed at the shoot to reinstate the Sportsmen’s Caucus amongst legislators, which stopped during Covid.

**Education Committee (Todd Schaller):** Nothing to add to already posted minutes.

* **7:56 PM – President’s Recap/Action Items (President Urben)**

President Urben’s recap of the Board’s agenda, action items, and decisions included:

1. The Board approved April’s Board Minutes.
2. The Board approved the Executive Director’s actions to move forward with the NRCS grant.
3. President Urben tasked Directors to review the Association Hall of Fame selection criteria located on the Board’s protected webpage prior to June’s Board Meeting and asked Directors to voluntarily form a subcommittee to provide recommendations to the Board.
4. The Habitat committee will investigate ways to get wood duck box wood from the sawyer(s) to McNaughton Correctional Facility to be sawn and kiln dried prior to being cut into kits/boxes to minimize mold, warping, and checking.
* **7:58 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

**Next BoD meeting will be a virtual meeting at 6:30 PM on June 21st.**