

**Wisconsin Waterfowl Association  
Board of Directors Virtual Meeting – Wednesday August 16, 2023**

**Board Members virtually present:** Kevin Banaszak, Ian Bartelmez, Mike Depies, Dave Elwing, George Ermert, Dennis Fleischer, Jim Freck, Shawn Gibbons, B.J. Grassmann, Todd Schaller, Kim Shady, and Bruce Urben

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

**Unable to Attend:** Joe Gonyo, Russ Olson, and Pat Smith

**Agenda:**

- **6:37 PM – Meeting Convened by President Urben**

The President asked Board members for agenda repair issues. Mike Depies asked that a discussion about the 2024 Raffle Calendar be added.

- **6:38 PM – July Board of Directors (BoD) Minutes (Secretary Elwing)**

Todd Schaller motioned (Ian Bartelmez seconded) that July's Board Minutes be accepted as published. The Board unanimously approved July's Board meeting minutes.

- **6:39 PM – Monthly Financials (Executive Director Ross & Director of Administration Boettcher)**

Kelcy Boettcher distributed and posted July's financial spreadsheets and explanatory Word.doc summary on the Association Director's webpage. The Association remains slightly ahead of budget despite the loss of online Class A sales. Incoming revenues are lower than budgeted, but the Association remains ahead of last year's YTD revenue. This is deceiving as it reflects higher than normal grants income for the PLE. A cause for concern is the under-production of chapter events YTD. Bruce Ross noted that the Fox Valley Golf Outing did well, raising nearly \$10K but that was at budget. Many other events are coming in under budgeted revenue. Four events (State Shoot, Midland Wings, Marshland 's Hunter's Eve, and the West Allis banquet) will occur in the next month or so, and there are some concerns about likely production there too. The EXPO is already in the black, but how much in the black depends upon event turnout, which is dependent on weather.

- **6:42 PM – Executive Director's Report (Executive Director Ross)**

**PLE Transitions.** Bruce Ross informed the Board that Public Lands Ecologist (PLE) Anthony Hatcher resigned effective 11 August. He took a position with Pheasants Forever, citing the ability to work within an office space and a slight pay and benefits increase as reasons for leaving. Anthony's replacement, Anna Rzchowski, accepted the position today (August 14<sup>th</sup>); she will start work in mid-September. WWA's part-time PLE, Mark Pfof, and Peter Ziegler will split Anthony's responsibilities, including the Wild Rice Harvest Program, until Anna is on board. BoD member B.J. Grassmann volunteered to coordinate WWA's rice harvesting efforts with the WDNR and the Tribal Rice Chiefs. Wild rice program management is an immediate concern as the rice will be ready for harvest within the next few weeks. Advertisements for the third PLE position will go out shortly after concluding discussion with the NRCS on the scope and timing for that position, likely early winter. There may be benefit to delaying that hire until the NRCS work begins in earnest in late winter, early spring.

**Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Responsibilities.** As presented during the June BoD meeting, WWA was working to enter a NRCS "cooperative agreement" opportunity to provide WRE and CRP compliance as a service for hire. An October start date for the contract is anticipated, but it may not make sense to hire a new ecologist until the spring (TBD); until that time Peter Ziegler, Mark Pfof and Ana Rzchowski will share WWA's NRCS responsibilities.

**Annual Report.** The latest draft of WWA's 2022 Annual Report is ready for an Editor's Review. A few typographical errors were identified and will be corrected prior to going "final." The Annual

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Report should go to the printer by August 28<sup>th</sup>. Hard copy reports will go to WWA's Top 250" and to key legislators.

- **6:50 PM – Waterfowler Academy (WA) Update (Todd Schaller)**

Using R3 grant funds, the Waterfowler Academy Steering Committee (WASC) developed a WA logo to distinguish WWA's academy efforts from more common Learn to Hunts (LTHs) or other organizations' educational efforts. The brand logo, created by Grit, LLC, features a duck call centered on a shield in orange and brown. The shield represents an academic /educational environment while the call links to waterfowling, and the colors are WWA's branded colors thus linking everything to WWA. The brand will represent the WA on social media.

George Ermert mentioned that the National Council of Shooting Sports developed a portfolio of stock photographs that highlight women in the shooting sports, and that these may be useful to reach the R3 demographics.

Bruce Urben asked if the WASC discussed trademarking "Waterfowler Academy" and the logo. Shawn Gibbons informed the other members that Swift Waters (his company that supports WWA and the EXPO) purchased "Waterfowler Academy" in multiple domains (.com, .org, etc.) to protect WWA's presence and rights of use.

Jim Freck enquired as to the total value and length of the R3 grant period. Todd Schaller confirmed the grant's value is \$55,000 over a two-year period. It can be used to purchase equipment, pay for travel, and to fund an R3 Coordinator's salary. Todd Schaller chose to volunteer as WWA's R3 Coordinator which in turn frees up salary money to further WWA's R3 efforts. Bruce Ross stated that the R3 grant ends prior to the 2024/2025 hunting season and the WWA will request an extension to carry the grant through the 2024/2025 hunting season.

- **7:02 PM – Online Class A Raffle Sales Update (Executive Director Ross)**

Bruce Ross informed the Board that the State granted WWA's Article 227 request which allows an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) to review our case. A judge was assigned in early August and an initial administrative meeting between WWA's lawyers and the State will occur on either August 22<sup>d</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup>. That meeting will establish an ALJ hearing date in either late September or early October. A decision could be rendered as early as the end of October. Presuming the ruling is in WWA's favor, online Class A Raffles and 2024 calendar sales should resume immediately thereafter.

Bruce Ross informed the Board that \$20,000 (the initially authorized amount) has been completely expended. The additional \$15,000 authorized during July's Board meeting will be used during the ALJ process. However, because new / exploratory work is not anticipated during the Article 227 phase, the \$15,000 should be sufficient.

Ian Bartelmez asked if a contingency had been discussed in the event the ALJ does not rule in WWA's favor. Bruce Ross explained that WWA has two basic options: 1) Comply with Department of Gaming's original Cease & Desist Order or 2) Take the matter to court. The latter will incur more cost and extend the matter.

- **7:22 PM – EXPO Update (Executive Director Ross)**

Dave Elwing and Todd Schaller reviewed Director tasks and check-in procedures for EXPO 23. Directors were reminded to register online using the "whevol" coupon to gain free entrance if they are volunteering for the EXPO entity. Upon arriving at the EXPO, Directors are to seek out Todd Schaller or Jeff Hintz to get their EXPO 23 shirt, EXPO access pass, and food voucher.

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Bruce Ross relayed that EXPO 23 is close to the forecasted budget and is ahead of YTD last year's numbers with 135 registered vendors, a phenomenal Youth Zone organized by the Wisconsin Youth Conservation Congress including a youth shooting zone for ages 14 – 17, and \$1,000s of dollars' worth of prizes. WDNR's Secretary, Adam Payne, will attend. The EXPO is in the black, regardless of how many attendees show up on the 26<sup>th</sup>. An AMVET organization will sell beer this. Bruce Ross assured the Board that deconfliction rules between beer drinking and shooting are in place. Shawn Gibbons presented an overview of Swift Waters' targeted social media and advertising efforts. Based upon realized pre-sales, the paid advertising is working well. Further, targeting our R3 demographics (women, minorities, and first-time waterfowlers) allows WWA to reimburse their EXPO entrance with a \$10 EXPO voucher if they come to the WWA booth and identify themselves.

Bruce Ross praised Swift Waters' performance and also highlighted Bast Durbin's stellar support in organizing vendors and capturing vendor data through print and online linked data.

Shawn Gibbons told the Board to contact him at the EXPO if anybody identified something that needed to be captured on video.

Ian Bartelmez and Kevin Banaszak will engage vendors as WWA Directors to conduct FB Live interviews to highlight vendors, EXPO activities, etc. Additionally, they will make initial contact with the vendors to solicit future WWA support and thus open the door for the Development Committee to pursue later engagements.

Bruce Ross concluded by reminding the Board that a post-EXPO decision of whether EXPO 24 should continue as a 1-day event or move to a 2-day event.

Todd Schaller suggested that WWA consider approaching the EXPO Steering Group about WWA taking control of the EXPO. Bruce Ross and Bruce Urban expressed concern about continued support from current partners (WWF and Delta, specifically) if WWA chose to pursue that option.

- **7:38 PM – Committee Reports (President Urban)**

**Education Committee (Todd Schaller):** The committee met on August 9th; notes are forthcoming. Todd Schaller made a request for Waterfowl Academy Mentors for the (4) scheduled WA LTHs.

**Development Committee (Dave Elwing):** Bruce Ross and Dave Elwing will support a Prairie du Chien Youth Hunt fundraiser on August 18<sup>th</sup> with the hopes of establishing stronger area connections and re-starting a chapter. Additionally, limited discussions about re-starting with interested parties in Berlin and Fond du Lac continue while Kevin Banaszak, Mike Depies, Jim Freck, and Dave Elwing continue to assist planning for Midland Wings' banquet on August 24<sup>th</sup>.

**Habitat Committee (B.J. Grassmann):** The Habitat Committee did not meet in August. B.J. Grassmann attended a Wild Rice Teams meeting regarding wild rice harvest. With Anthony Hatcher's departure, B.J. Grassmann volunteered to coordinate WWA's wild rice program participation through the WDNR and Rice Tribal Chiefs as they identify locations, dates, and times. Regarding the Wood Duck Box Program, Bruce Ross told the Board that McNaughton Correctional Facility volunteered to identify sawyers and purchase six cords of lumber on WWA's behalf which McNaughton will saw, dry, and turn into wood duck boxes and kits.

**Policy Committee (George Ermert):** The Committee remains focused on engaging WDNR on hunters' behalf regarding WDNR's discontinuance of the Go Wild app in June without providing a replacement service. Additionally, the Committee is preparing materials and talking points for sandhill crane discussions with/briefings to state legislators in the fall.

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**Communications Committee:** (George Ermert) The Committee did not meet this month. Bruce Urben again asked if the committee needed additional help; George Ermert responded that more help, possibly full-time support, is needed.

- **7:51 PM – 2025 Raffle Calendar (Mike Depies)**

Mike Depies asked Directors to offer suggestions for the theme of the 2025 raffle calendar. He raised the possibility of the calendar being focused on Association member's dogs. Bruce Urben suggested that we consider something that could be featured and auctioned each month, similar to the decoys on the 2023 calendar, which are expected to raise between \$3,000-\$4,000 in additional revenue. Ian Bartelmez reminded the Board that he will engage EXPO Vendors on WWA's behalf, and possibly be able to collect items for calendar use / auction.

- **8:05 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 July's Board Minutes.
- 2) Anna Rzchowski accepted WWA's offer to fill the PLE position vacated by Anthony Hatcher's resignation.
- 3) B.J. Grassmann will coordinate WWA's wild rice collection by volunteers. Directors interested in assisting the harvest should contact B.J.
- 4) The Annual Report will be finalized and be distributed during August.
- 5) Pending favorable results of the Article 227 hearing, WWA needs to be prepared to re-engage in end of year online raffles and calendar sales.
- 6) Directors are requested to provide 2024 raffle calendar theme suggestions to Mike Depies for discussion during September's Board meeting.

- **8:06 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

**Next BoD meeting will be a virtual meeting at 6:30 PM on September 20th.**