

Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
Board of Directors Virtual Meeting – Wednesday November 15, 2023

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

Also virtually present: Kelcy Boettcher, Jason Buck (WWA member), Mark Pfost (PLE), and Bruce Ross

Unable to Attend: Dennis Fleischer, Shawn Gibbons, and Pat Smith

Agenda:

- **6:33 PM – Meeting Convened by President Urben**

The President asked Board members for agenda repair issues or new business. Dave Elwing asked that the Board discuss the possibility of attending the Wisconsin Sport Show in Wausau (15-17 March 2024). President Urben agreed to add the item to the evening's agenda following the Sandhill Crane (SHC) Update.

- **6:35 PM – October Board of Directors (BoD) Minutes (Secretary Elwing)**

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

- **6:36 PM – Monthly Financials (Executive Director Ross & Director of Administration Boettcher)**

Impacted by the loss of online Class A sales revenue continues to be below budget due. This is compounded by generally lower event intakes and continued impact of battling the online sales issue with the Department of Gaming (DoG). ED Ross reported that ~\$15,000 of restricted funds (PLE Grants) will be converted to unrestricted provided some flexibility, but obviously not increasing the total revenue number. The Association will submit the first R3Grant invoice to recuperate unrestricted funding expending in support of Waterfowlers Academy activities.

President Urben highlighted that on a positive note, WWA is the recipient of a \$5,000 Giving Tuesday (November 28) matching funds donation. The Association has received \$600 worth of donations since the announcement.

ED Ross met with a professional fund raiser to explore potential next steps regarding large donor funding to help diversify WWA's funding streams. An area identified as a "must have" before we can "do the ask" is a strategic plan so donors can see WWA's long term goals.

ED Ross presented a 1st look at the 2024 budget by presenting event goals extrapolated by looking at 5-year averages. 2024 "at risk" events include West Allis' Bash on the Bay and banquet, and the state shoot. Tom Seibert and Scott Williams stepped forward after Ian Bartelmez' s departure, but revenue reductions are likely. George Ermert asked if steps had been taken to remove Ian & his wife from the chapter checkbook. Kelcy Boettcher reported that she removed their names and drew the balance down to \$1,000. Neither she nor Tom Siebert have been successful in getting Ian Bartelmez to return the checkbook. Kelcy Boettcher stated that Tom Siebert is owed roughly \$1,000 for a gun from one of the West Allis events. She could take the balance down to \$50 but without the checkbook, she is not certain if any other checks were outstanding. Kevin Banaszak injected that he remains in frequent contact with Ian Bartelmez and that the only other check recently paid was to Tom Faber for a raffle item. Kelcy Boettcher asked Kevin Banaszak if he could help get the checkbook returned; Kevin said that he would contact Ian Bartelmez. Dave Elwing suggested taking the balance down to \$50 and pay any further expenses out of the state's general fund. President Urben asked if the downward event revenue trend and an anticipated economic decline were considered when determining event goals. ED Ross explained that to-date fluctuations are included because of the 5-year look-back, but adjustments for a potentially future poor economy were not. ED Ross stated that an across the board percentage drop could easily be computed.

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B.J. Grassmann asked if any other events were at risk. ED Ross reported that the newly formed Nicolet Chapter is also at risk due to a significant drop in committee volunteerism. Of late only the chairman, Bo Klescewski, remains engaged.

- **6:58 PM – Public Lands Update (PLE Mark Pfof)**

PLE Mark Pfof provided an overview of work planned for the Navarino Wildlife Area (Waupaca County). This is roughly a 15 acre effort to control water on the property and flood a significant part of the acreage to hip boot depth. This will increase habitat and public hunting opportunities. A permit request was submitted.

PLE Mark Pfof also provided an update on the 275 acre, public lands, Peter Helland Project. As briefed during October's board meeting the desire is to create adjacent two parcels upon which WDNR will be able to regulate water levels and waterfowl habitat. While progress on the eastern 125 acres continues, progress on the western 150 acres remains delayed due to an inability to contact an adjacent landowner whose land will could be impacted.

Kevin Banaszak asked if the PLEs or the Board was aware of a potential Ducks Unlimited land acquisition near Prince's Point Wildlife Area /Whitewater (Jefferson County). Kevin's understanding is that a privately owned vegetable farm is up for sale and that DU is considering buying the land and restoring it to wetlands. He asked if WWA would consider partnering on the project. Nobody knew any specifics. ED Ross explained that, historically, when DU acquires parcels such as this, they team with WDNR and others to raise funding, conduct the restoration, and then turn the restored property over to WDNR, but WWA can indeed offer to help.

Vice President Todd Schaller praised the advances the PLEs are making, but reminded the Board that we need to do a better job of getting such "good news" stories out into the public eye and in front of our members so they realize what is being done on their behalf.

- **7:22 PM – Executive Director's Report (Executive Director Ross)**

ED Bruce Ross provided a written ED Report to board members prior to the meeting. No questions existed, but President Urben requested that ED Ross recap the status of our online class A raffle sales case with the Department of Gaming. A decision from the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) is expected NLT 20 November.

George Ermert asked what the next steps would be if the ALJ ruling was adverse. ED Ross stated that the Association could: 1) Accept the ALJ ruling and cease online Class A and calendar sales; 2) Take our case to a Circuit Court (longer, more costly, and unlikely to turn out in WWA's favor); or 3) seek a legislative approach that would yield a law favorable to WWA.

Dave Elwing asked if, as discussed previously, any statewide Class A raffles were planned to take advantage should the ruling be in the Association's favor. ED Ross responded that none were, however, Waukesha's "Frosty Five" Class A would be put online to generate additional sales. President Urben suggested that due to the timing, should the ruling be on our behalf, that we examine a statewide raffle early in 2024.

- **7:19 PM – Director Vacancies (President Urben)**

A vacancy on the Board exists as a result of Ian Bartelmez's resignation. President Urben asked the Board if an immediate fill was desired as one candidate has been brought to his attention via an existing Director. Additionally, the terms of five sitting Board Members (Dave Elwing, Dennis Fleischer, Joe Gonyo, Todd Schaller, and Bruce Urben) expire on 31 December 2023. At Kevin Banaszak's suggestion, the Board agreed to fill the vacancy as part of the upcoming elections. President Urben, VP Schaller & Secretary Dave Elwing declared their intent to seek reelection.

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- **7:30 PM – Organizational Evaluation, Strategic Planning, and Budget Planning (Executive Director Ross)**

ED Ross asked committees to begin looking forward to 2024 and beyond to determine what they want to achieve. ED Ross acknowledged that a strategic plan should inform committee actions, and that as stated previously, it was lacking. In lieu of that, he encouraged committees to identify 1-2-3- and 4-year goals. President Urben tasked committees to begin to put a plan and budget request together and to deliver it to ED Ross prior to the next Board Meeting.

Regarding the budget, President Urben asked if the staff compensations recommended by the Compensation Subcommittee earlier in the year would be considered when developing the 2024 budget. ED Ross said that it was up to the Board to decide.

Georger Ermert asserted that a strategic plan should be the Board's top priority over committee goals, especially with regards to Class As and identifying alternative enduring funding streams.

- **7:37 PM – Sandhill Crane Update (Executive Director Ross & George Ermert)**

WWA, in conjunction with the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Safari Club International, and Delta Waterfowl, presented a science-based SHC Management presentation to roughly 40 legislators, staffers, and interested parties last month resulting in increased interest and an overall advancement of the topic. Members of Governor Evers' Policy Board received invitations but were unable to attend due to other commitments. However, a presentation to them on 9 November yielded more open lines of communication on this topic. Additionally, WWF's Mark Kakatsch met with International Crane Foundation members and Representative Considine (Assembly District 81) on 10 November. Representative Considine showed great interest in the need for a non-biased, multi-partnered, WDNR-led SHC assessment to ensure thorough representation and examination.

George Ermert informed the Board that SHC management has potential to become a summer Legislative Study Group topic with the goal of advancing the topic by removing partisanship and involving outside participation. Furthermore, should SHC Management become a study topic the topic stays alive and on legislators' radar because nothing will be decided before the legislature ends its session in February 2024. The door is also potentially open for the Natural Resources Board to direct WDNR to create a SHC Management Plan, which will be required prior to passing any legislation that allows SHC hunting.

- **7:50 PM – Wisconsin Sport Show Booth (Dave Elwing)**

The Wisconsin Sport Show will be held in Wausau from 15-17 March 2024. Dave Elwing requested the Board consider allowing funds to be spent for WWA to attend and man a booth. The purpose will be to create better public awareness of WWA's mission, recruit members, and extend WWA's presence to the western side of the state. The estimated cost is \$900 (Booth: \$625 with 20% non-profit discount; \$200 lodging; \$75 miscellaneous). VP Schaller asked if any restrictions prevented us from conducting a Class A raffle to off-set the booth cost. Mike Depies, B.J. Grassmann, and Joe Gonyo volunteered to help Dave Elwing and Rob Monette man the booth.

George Ermert expressed hesitation regarding the return on investment (\$900 and 9-10 man-days) and that he would be more in favor of the event if WWA's investment could become more revenue neutral, whether that would be through selling merchandise or holding a Class A raffle. President Urben asked Kelcy Boettcher what our historic success rate was for previous shows. Kelcy responded that we did well at Milwaukee until the show began to fail. We never achieved much success at either the Madison or Eau Claire shows.

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Jason Buck of The Fowl Drake Outfitters (member attendee) offered to share a booth with WWA to defray booth costs. He would market his business and WWA, while we could focus on recruiting and public awareness for WWA. It was unclear if the show allowed two entities to share a booth.

Dave Elwing volunteered to contact the event organizer to confirm: 1) If there is a registration deadline; 2) Can Class A raffles be conducted in the booth; and 3) Can WWA & The Fowl Drake share a booth. *[Dave Elwing contacted the event organizer on 11/16. Answer 1: There is no specific deadline, but booths usually sell out in January. Answer 2: Class A raffles are permitted. Answer 3: Usually, booth sharing is not allowed. However, the organizer will make an exception because WWA is a first-time participant, but the booth is not eligible for the 20% non-profit discount.]*

- **8:06 PM – Committee Reports (President Urben)**

Education Committee (Todd Schaller): The committee met and minutes will be published within the next seven days. As alluded to during the budget discussion, WWA is submitting the first R3 Grant invoice for reimbursable costs.

Habitat Committee (B. J. Grassmann): Mark Pfof's PLE updates covered the majority of Habitat Committee updates. Ryan Disterhaft (Princeton area) volunteered to be WWA's new Adopt-A-Wildlife (AWA) Program Coordinator.

Development Committee (Dave Elwing): In addition to organizing a Giving Tuesday plea, Russ Olson investigated and applied for WWA to be considered as one of 45 organizations to receive a "Give Big Green Bay" grant. Give Big Green Bay grants will be awarded in February; WWA is one of ~165 organizations that can be expected to submit applications.

Dave Elwing submitted a rudimentary 2024 budget request to Bruce Ross for \$1,050 (WI Sport Show: \$900 and 2 meet & greets at \$75 each). He reviewed 2023 goals and expects to transfer most of them to 2024. Dave Elwing requested that another Board member take over the Development Committee Chair beginning in 2024; he plans to remain on the committee.

Communications Committee: (Bruce Urben) Shawn Gibbons & Connie Markham will assume leads within the committee enhance WWA's social media effort.

Membership Committee: (Bruce Urben) Nothing new to report.

Policy Committee (George Ermert): The SHC Biology and Management briefing to state legislators on October 25th consumed Policy Committee efforts during October.

- **8:11 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 October's Board Minutes.
- 2) Giving Tuesday is November 28th. Directors are asked to give if possible, to take advantage of the matching funds.
- 3) Committees are to provide 2024 plans, goals, and budget requests before the December BoD meeting
- 4) Dave Elwing will contact the Wisconsin Sports Show organizers to get answers to the three questions posed *[Task completed and answers relayed to BoD members via email on 11/16]*.

- **8:13 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

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