

**Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
Board of Directors in Person Meeting – Wednesday February 21, 2024**

Board Members virtually present: Kevin Banaszak, Mike Depies, Dave Elwing, Jim Freck, Shawn Gibbons, Joe Gonyo, B.J. Grassmann, Makayla Jacobs, Connie Markham, Russ Olson, Todd Schaller, Pat Smith, and Bruce Urben

Also virtually present: Kelcy Boettcher, and Bruce Ross

Unable to Attend: George Ermert and Kim Shady

Agenda:

- **6:31 PM – Meeting Convened by President Urben**

- **6:32 PM – January Board of Directors (BoD) Minutes (Secretary Elwing)**

Secretary Elwing noted that the date of February’s BoD meeting was wrong in that the date was listed as February 20th instead of the 21st and asked the Board to approve the minutes as modified. B.J. Grassman motioned (Mike Depies seconded) that January’s Board Minutes be accepted as corrected. The Board unanimously approved January’s Board meeting minutes.

Secretary Elwing reminded Directors to complete their annual Conflict of Interest (Col) and Code of Ethics (CoE) paperwork if they had not already done so. Committee chairs were asked to ensure all non-Director committee members also renewed their Col and CoE requirements.

- **6:33 PM – Financials (Director of Administration [DA] Boettcher & Executive Director [ED] Ross)**

January financials are posted on the Board’s secure website as per SOP. The posted budget reflects all changes approved during the January BoD meeting. DA Boettcher noted that financial spreadsheets are posted as Excel files and that comments regarding entries can be viewed by hovering one’s cursor over the red triangle beside a figure. ED Ross informed new Board members that, while it may need some updates to address “public” vs “private” vs “other” grants, a WWA Financial Tutorial is available on the Association’s secure web page to help Directors better understand how to read and comprehend the budget. ED Ross informed the Board that the budget does not reflect the potential impact of hiring a Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) ecologist, and that the budget will need modifications when/if hiring occurs. Hiring will only occur following BoD approval. Lastly, ED Ross also noted that the approved budget (Budget 1.4) reflects both a little less revenue and greater anticipated expenses than the FY23 budget, but that the budget remains in the black. ED Ross confirmed that staff members received their bonuses in their mid-February pay checks and that salary increases began with the 1 February pay period and that the staff is very appreciative of both.

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

NRCS Contract Update. ED Ross met with NRCS officials on February 12th to discuss implementation of WWA’s NRCS contract relating to Wetland Reserve Easement Program (WRP) and Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) monitoring. The contract has a 3.5-year period of performance and is valued at up to \$100K per year based upon services provided. The contract’s scope remains unclear, hence why the Association is not yet moving forward to hire another ecologist.

Russ Olson asked about the number and locations of the easements that WWA will monitor. NRCS is being very flexible and will allow the Association to select 20 to 25 WRP easements and as such, the easements being selected are adjacent to or in close proximity to ongoing PLE work or within 75 miles of their residence. PLE Anna Rzechowski will coordinate monitoring efforts, but all WWA ecologists will perform monitoring activities, thus allowing NRCS funds to be used to offset their salaries.

Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
Board of Directors in Person Meeting – Wednesday February 21, 2024

VP Schaller asked that in cases where a management plan doesn't exist, how will WWA's ecologists calculate what needs to be done. President Urben responded by stating all easements required an initial management plan to be approved and for work to be done. WWA's focus will be to review those plans and make recommendations to make repairs/perform maintenance to the properties.

Russ Olson enquired if WWA Board members or volunteers could assist and potentially help spread ecologist workloads. ED Ross explained that initially WWA's ecologists really need to develop a better understanding of what the work really entails, however, having volunteers accompany ecologists is a good idea.

VP Schaller highlighted that in the near future WWA will be able to legitimately state that WWA is helping to maintain "X-thousands" of Wisconsin wetlands. This effort, along with the public lands impacted by our PLE support of the WDNR, is a "good news story" which WWA needs to tell.

NRCS Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP). Note: EQIP provides technical and financial assistance to agricultural producers and forest landowners to address natural resource concerns, such as: Improved water and air quality; Conserved ground and surface water; Increased soil health; Reduced soil erosion and sedimentation; Improved or created wildlife habitat; and Mitigation against drought and increasing weather volatility.

WWA is a recent recipient of an EQIP contract for the Abrams property. This contract is between NRCS as a service provider/funder, and WWA (Green Bay Chapter) as a landowner. NRCS will pay between \$20K-\$23K through 2026 for specific restoration practices that will be implemented on Abrams. Further, ED Ross expects the first expenditure/reimbursement will be for a Forestry Management Plan (~\$3K) which will be completely paid for by the NRCS agreements. The contract provides quick reimbursements, thus enabling expenditures without drawn-out reimbursement.

Department of Gaming (DoG) Update. ED Ross informed the Board that the Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) that ruled in WWA's favor to continue online Class A raffles and calendar sales, ruled against reimbursement of court costs. Consequently, the Association's legal representatives, Godfrey & Kahn, agreed to absorb \$27K of the final invoice. Dave Elwing asked how much the Association actually spent fighting DoG; ED Ross confirmed that roughly \$35K was approved by the Board and spent during the legal battle. WWA historically raises between \$20K - \$25K annually through online Class A and calendar sales. Presuming this trend continues, WWA's legal fees will be recuperated in roughly 1 ½ years.

EXPO Update. The EXPO Steering Committee (SC) met recently and agreed to increase vendor and sponsor fees to support EXPO growth and marketing abilities and to expand the EXPO to a 2-day event in 2025. The SC believes that more extensive paid marketing and management plans will help achieve this goal. Swift Waters, LLC. submitted a marketing proposal to increase their support. The proposed contract's value exceeds ED Ross's authority; thus, Board approval is needed. Swift Waters will provide responses to questions asked by several Board members after which, as per Association By-Laws, electronic votes will be sought. ED Ross informed the Board that Banded is a first-time vendor in 2024, and that 2-year sponsor Sherper's will not return due to internal corporate restructuring.

Other changes include creation of a "Women's Zone" to capitalize on the "By Women / For Women" theme used to introduce more females to waterfowling and a nominal fee of \$5.00 per vehicle will be charged for parking at EXPO 24. Dave Elwing asked if the SC would consider increasing admission fees instead of charging for parking to alleviate parking line back-ups

Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
Board of Directors in Person Meeting – Wednesday February 21, 2024

caused by collecting at the parking lot entry point. President Urben answered that the matter was discussed, but to limit impact of a price increase, the SC chose to charge \$5.00 per vehicle versus \$5.00 per attendee. Russ Olson asked if the SC would consider using another non-profit to manage parking and collect fees in turn for a 50/50 parking revenue split with the non-profit. Doing so helps the EXPO still receive parking revenue, while also needing less volunteers, and it “shares the wealth” with a local non-profit. President Urben suggested that the SC would consider the possibility; VP Schaller asked Board members to contact him if they knew of a non-profit that might be interested.

2024 Committee Assignments & Goals. ED Ross provided an updated member list and annual goals for each of the state-level committees (Habitat, Education, Policy, Development, and Communication/Membership). ED Ross asked Directors to review committee membership for accuracy, but more importantly, to review and provide updates/corrections to their committee’s 2024 goals. Responses are due to ED Ross NLT 29 Feb.

- **7:16 PM – Strategic Vision / KPIs / Planning (ED Ross)**

During January’s BoD meeting the Board agreed there is a need for a longer term view to assist committee planning, to aid staff members, and to inform potential investors in the benefits of supporting WWA’s vision and missions. ED Ross drafted an outline for Directors to review and provide feedback on. ED Ross emphasized that, as currently drafted, the document represents his view for the Association, but that to be effective, it must reflect the Board’s view.

ED Ross explained that the gray highlights speak to WWA’s missions and that the document should provide focus for efforts being performed by the Association and if WWA is doing something that does not support our mission, the Board must ask, “Why.” Doing so will help decide what initiatives should be supported.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are metrics by which the Association can determine if it’s Vision is being accomplished. (I.e. “How” & “Why” we are doing something and “Are we doing something in sufficient quantity to be effective / recognized?”) For example, within Education, are the Learn to Hunts WWA conducted helping to progress waterfowlers along the “Waterfowler’s Arc?”

ED Ross again emphasized that the document reflects his initial cut, but that as Directors, it is our individual responsibility to provide feedback to fulfill our responsibility to help direct the Association along its course.

President Urben praised ED Ross’s efforts and agreed that KPIs get at the heart of the matter and that Directors and Committee members / Chairs need to look at the document, evaluate it, and add to it where needed. He reemphasized that to be effective, strategic planning needs each Director’s investment because this is “how” committees will determine what needs to be done.

ED Ross injected that this document is not an action plan, but rather an outline from which we begin to figure out the “how.” It needs Director-level input. VP Schaller asked what the next step in the timeline was. ED Ross and President Urben asked committees to review the outline and to provide written feedback to ED Ross NLT March 1st. Having feedback by the 1st will also allow ED Ross to draft a Strategic Plan for the Board’s review in March and with approval during April’s Board meeting. Per VP Schaller’s request, ED Ross agreed to send out a MS Word version to make commenting easier.

Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
Board of Directors in Person Meeting – Wednesday February 21, 2024

- **7:36 PM – Calendar Planning (Mike Depies)**

The Calendar Committee met twice and discussed how Wisconsin Ducks Unlimited (DU) and the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation (WWF) manage their calendar production and sales, both of which print and sell significantly more calendars than WWA. The quality of WWA prizes offered has dropped due to lower buying power. To increase the perceived value of daily prizes, the committee recommends increasing the 2025 calendar sale prices from \$20 to \$30. Based on the idea that “first impressions are lasting perceptions” and “calendar covers sell the calendar,” the committee will create a better eye grabbing cover. The price increase will enable going after bigger merchandise names and higher value prizes. Behind the scenes, all agree that a better means to enter data is essential. The committee will reach out to Swift Waters and sponsors to increase the quality of photos on calendar pages and will, if possible, to showcase sponsor merchandise being used.

ED Ross added that the committee expects that a \$30 price tag may result in fewer sales. Selling 3,500 (versus ~4,500 as currently done) will allow the Association to spend \$18,000 on prizes while still matching the approximate net revenue of the 2023 and 2024 calendar sales. Lucky Duck and Vortex already expressed a desire to play a bigger role in the 40th Anniversary calendar.

President Urben asked if, since buying a calendar gains the buyer WWA membership, could a \$25 voucher that can be redeemed at a WWA event also be included within the calendar as an incentive to increase the number of “butts in seats.” Mike Depies said the committee had not considered such a proposal to date, but that it would discuss it during an upcoming meeting.

The Calendar Committee plans to convene on Monday February 26th.

- **7:16 PM – Committee Reports (President Urben)**

Education Committee (Todd Schaller). The Education Committee met during the week of 12 – 16 February; minutes are forthcoming.

Policy Committee (Bruce Ross). The Policy Committee two goals for 2024 are to establish a sandhill crane hunt in Wisconsin and to support the continuation of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program. Knowles-Nelson runs out of funding in 2025. Regarding the SHC hunt, coalition partners met last week to push for a Legislative Council Study. Representative Titl submitted a request for the study.

The #2 goal, continuation of the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, is just kicking off, but it is not expected to be addressed until fall session (post-elections).

Habitat (B.J. Grassman). Wood duck box sales are doing well, and the committee is reviewing on-hand inventory to ensure that all chapters that need boxes can get them. President Urben asked if Ryan Disterhaft, WWA’s AWA Coordinator) is looking at better ways to consolidate box locations and production rates.

Membership/Communications. No report. Shawn Gibbons & Connie Marham needed to leave the meeting a few minutes prior, and George Ermert had a work conflict that prevented his participation.

Development Committee (Bruce Ross). Committee Chairmanship is transitioning from Dave Elwing to Bruce Ross. The Action Plan discussed earlier looks at means to increase Association funding streams. The committee is also looking into incorporating a new database that is more user friendly and that can integrate stand-alone repositories (budget, charitable giving, grants, membership, etc.). A budget adjustment will be necessary should a solution be determined.

**Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
Board of Directors in Person Meeting – Wednesday February 21, 2024**

- **7:53 PM – President’s Recap/Action Items (President Urban)**

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

- 1) The Board unanimously approved January’s Board minutes.
- 2) Directors and committee members who have not completed their 2024 Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics paperwork were asked to tend to the matter ASAP.
- 3) Committee members were tasked to review committee assignments and 2024 goals, providing written feedback to ED Ross NLT February 29th.
- 4) Directors were tasked to review the draft Strategic Vision and KPIs, providing written feedback to ED Ross NLT March 1st.

- **7:57 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

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