

**Wisconsin Waterfowl Association**  
**Board of Directors in Person Meeting – Wednesday September 18, 2024**

**Board Members virtually present:** Mike Depies, Dave Elwing, George Ermert, Jim Freck, Shawn Gibbons, Joe Gonyo, B.J. Grassmann, Makayla Jacobs, Connie Markham, Todd Schaller, Kim Shady, Pat Smith, and Bruce Urben

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

**Unable to Attend:** Russ Olson

**Agenda:**

- **6:36 PM – Meeting Convened by President Urben**
- **6:38 PM – Financials (Director of Administration [DA] Kelcy Boettcher and Executive Director [ED] Ross)**

DA Boettcher posted August financials on the Board's secure website as per SOP. ED Ross summarized WWA's current fiscal status as "Okay." The Association remains in the black and ahead of budget.

- **6:39 PM – Executive Director's Report (ED Ross)**

USFWS Recognition. ED Ross announced that WWA had been honored with a Blue Winged Teal Award from the North American Waterfowl Management Council.

Legislative Council Study. ED Ross provided an update on what has been discussed to date and what is anticipated to be addressed during the upcoming Legislative Council Study session. The 1 October session will focus on hunting, emphasizing the importance of bipartisan support and the involvement of science, farmers, and hunters. President Urben asked when the study is expected to conclude. ED Ross responded that the final session is expected to be during December 2024, but that it could carry over to January 2025, if needed.

Wetland Restoration Updates. ED Ross informed the Board that the Association received a \$804,000, sole-sourced USFWS grant to plug between 8 to 20 miles of major ditches in the LYR area restoring 2,000 and, potentially, as much as 20,000 acres of wetlands. USFWS awarded the contract to WWA based upon demonstrated performance by our Public Lands Ecologists (PLE) and, also largely because PLE Pfof having retired from the USFWS, is a well-known performer. PLE Pfof is heavily engaged in writing statements of work for the Peter Helland restoration project. VBP Schaller noted that both projects are great examples of how WWA is working to bring forgotten public lands back to life for Wisconsin's waterfowlers.

2025 Calendar Update. Director Depies reported that calendars were printed and distributed earlier than ever before. DA Boettcher confirmed that a minimum of 316 calendars have sold to date (146 at the Expo & the balance online); no chapters turned in stubs or funds to date.

- **6:58 PM – Waterfowl Hunters Expo (WHE) Discussion (ED Ross)**

ED Ross presented a historical perspective of how WHE came about, the historical business plan used to grow it, and its partner organizations as a lead-in to discussion about WHE's future, emphasizing the certain need for greater involvement by Board members during planning and execution. The principle focus of the WHE discussion was for the BoD to understand the opportunities, implications, and risks associated with WWA assuming full WHE ownership. WWA's goals have not really changed since WHE's inception: 1) Establish WWA "brand awareness;" 2) Create by-name connections within the sporting industry to aid WWA's organizational growth. ED Ross confirmed the WHE Steering Group's decision to host a 2-day (Friday/Saturday) event in 2025.

**Wisconsin Waterfowl Association**  
**Board of Directors in Person Meeting – Wednesday September 18, 2024**

WHE Growth. ED Ross discussed WHE's significant growth and success achieved to date, noting an increase in attendance from 2,500 in Year #1 to 2024's 6,200 attendees, and a vendor increase 50 to 220. He emphasized that the event's success was due to its appeal to attendees and partner support, rather than financial gains. ED Ross also highlighted the financial success of the Expo, with a balance of \$50,000 and net returns of around \$5,500. He mentioned the hiring of Bast Durban and Swift Waters as a means to manage vendors and increase marketing opportunities. Todd Schaller reinforced that WHE would not enjoy the successes being had without Bast Durbin's and Swift Water's contributions. George Ermert asked what WHE netted in 2024; ED Ross & DA Boettcher stated that WHE grossed \$100,000, but only netted about \$5,500. ED Ross clarified that WHE was never intended to be a WWA money-maker, rather its intent has always been to bring the community of waterfowlers and their families together for a fun-filled day. He went on to highlight that annually WHE partially funds WWA's Public Lands Ecologists (~\$6,500) and provides yearly scholarships (~\$1,500). Kim Shady asked what WWA's booth intake was; DA Boettcher confirmed that the WWA booth brought in around \$1,000 and the duck hunters raffle netted about \$5,000.

Future – What Will WHE Look Like? ED Ross identified several potential WHE options: 1) Maintain status quo; 2) Continue to incrementally professionalize WHE's organizational structure; 3) Sell the Expo to a professional convention management company; 4) WWA assumes full WHE ownership. ED Ross also pointed out potential risks which Board members needed to consider should WWA assume WHE ownership,: 1) Potential loss of partners; 2) Inadequate numbers of volunteers; 3) Inadequate leadership; 4) Leadership / volunteer burn-out; and 5) Attendee stagnation/burnout. George Ermert expressed his opinion that WHE should become a primary WWA revenue stream and suggested it be done by charging vendors and attendees more.

ED Ross discussed the potential of selling the Expo, suggesting that it could be a viable option if the market outlook is favorable. However, B.J. Grassmann pointed out that selling out would likely mean losing the value that WWA invested in the Expo. Dave Elwing proposed a hybrid solution where WWA maintains structural control while outsourcing professionalization. The Board agreed to explore revenue opportunities from a two-day vendor event and potentially raising prices. B.J. Gassman introduced the option of holding a statewide WWA event/state convention in conjunction with WHE. ED Ross suggested using a state banquet model and mentioned successful fundraising at Delta Waterfowl's Expo. Brad Miller (Valley Chapter) expressed a willingness to manage such an event (with necessary support). President Urben stated that such an event would need to be held at a site other than Sunnyview Expo Center due to site limitations. Dave Elwing asked if such a venue was locally available. President Urben stated that there are at least two nearby hotels that can support an event that would draw 300-400 attendees. ED Ross added that within the Delta Waterfowl model, Delta receives a portion of each Expo attendee's hotel fees. President Urben suggested that WWA look into means to become a food vendors (VFW raised \$4,000). The Board also discussed hosting a banquet or food/beer event for vendors WWA's at the upcoming Expo as a way to raise funds, increase membership, and engage vendors. Dave Elwing proposed a vendor event at a hotel, with vendors paying a donation to attend. The Board briefly discussed requiring each attendee to purchase a WWA annual membership as a means to increase event revenues and bolster membership numbers across the state.

An incremental 3-5 year plan was proposed to grow the event's capacity and develop a comprehensive strategy which includes partnering with local hotels and WHE receiving a portion of each hotel reservation's cost.

**Wisconsin Waterfowl Association**  
**Board of Directors in Person Meeting – Wednesday September 18, 2024**

ED Ross asked the Board if the Association might consider moving WHE around the state to increase WWA's brand awareness and membership. ED Ross reiterated the need for a strategy over the next 3 to 5 years to increase financial benefits and manage growth. He also highlighted the need for decisions on the future of the Expo and WWA, and the capacity issues that are limiting their ability to fully exploit relationships and sell the Expo and WWA together. Shawn Gibbons highlighted the need for a near immediate decision regarding a vendor event in 2025 as it is a significant part of Swift Water's 2025 WHE marketing plan, suggesting the decision be made by October. ED Ross and B.J. Grassmann agreed to discuss the feasibility of the banquet with Brad Miller.

- **8:35 PM – President's Recap/Action Items (President Urban)**

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

- 1) ED Ross will develop a plan for moving the WHE forward.
- 2) Directors need to review the WHE discussion points presented and be prepared to greater personal support in the future.
- 3) The Board approved August's Board minutes.

- **8:36 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

**Next BoD meeting will be a virtual meeting at 6:30 PM on November 16<sup>th</sup>.** *(Later postponed until November 23d due to multiple Board member conflicts)*