

**Wisconsin Waterfowl Association  
Board of Directors Virtual Meeting – Wednesday December 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, and Bruce Urben

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

**Unable to Attend:** Pat Smith

**Agenda:**

- **6:34 PM – Meeting Convened by President Urben**

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

November's board meeting minutes were reviewed and approved without any questions or concerns. Secretary Elwing reminded Board members that annual Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest Policy statements need to be completed for 2025 (same applies to committee members that are not Board members).

- **6:36 PM – Financials & Calendar Sales Update (Director of Administration [DA] Kelcy Boettcher, Executive Director [ED] Ross)**

Financial Report. DA Boettcher emailed and posted the financial report to Board members prior to the meeting. The Association will end the year in the black despite lower chapter revenues than budgeted. Lakeshore Chapter's December event is expected to be lower than budgeted while the Waukesha bash is expected to return near or at budget. Overall, chapter budget revenues are roughly \$20,000 below budget, but Class A raffles place the bottom line above budget. EOY actual revenue is projected to be \$249,559 (versus budget \$236,100).

2026 Budget Plans. ED Ross presented the following schedule for the 2026 budget:

- 13 January: 1<sup>st</sup> draft
- 18 January: 2d draft
- 3 February: 3d draft distributed for electronic vote/approval

Calendar Sales. Mike Depies reported that 2,500 calendars have been sold YTD with 1,166 of them through online sales. He announced that 2026 raffle calendar planning will begin in January and asked for volunteers. Connie Markham, Sean Gibbons, and Dave Elwing volunteered to assist again next year. President Urben asked how we are doing (budget-wise) with regards to calendar incentive items. ED Ross responded that an analysis would be done after sales were complete.

- **6:50 PM – ED Update (ED Ross)**

- Annual Meeting. The WWA annual meeting is scheduled for 18 January at the Beaver Dam Conservation Club. ED Ross suggested that the Association also hold a virtual meeting during February to reach a greater number of members and to help spread the good news about what the association accomplished during 2024. Board members were in favor of that proposal.
- Public Lands Update.
  - Little Yellow River (LYR). USFWS awarded a directed grant of \$814,858 to WWA to complete multiple restoration efforts along the LYR. Three contractors submitted bids ranging from \$525,000 to \$13.3M for identical scopes of work. USFWS estimated the work to be finished required \$733,333. Shortly after receiving the bids, the lowest bidder withdrew his bid due to health reasons leaving no bid within the range of allocated funds. The Board previously

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authorized ED Ross to pursue additional USFWS funding; USFWS added \$180,000, bringing the grant to just under \$1M, which is still below either of the two remaining bids.

With USFWS approval, WWA will release a two-phased set of Statements of Work (SOWs) designed to reduce contractor risk through a smaller requirement with greater definition of services to be performed, thus providing WWA with more consistent and reasonable cost estimates. The Phase I SOW requires restoration of (3) 1-mile stretches, each with (3) plugs. Phase II SOW will be released after analysis of Phase I cost estimates. Phase I bids will be due 6 January 2025 with a decision targeted for 10 January 2025.

- *Peter Helland Project.* WWA received a bid for \$62,000 to perform work on the Peter Helland Project. This was lower than expected; work is expected to begin this winter on approximately 125 acres. Because restoration impacts lands beyond the DNR property, WWA assisted the adjacent private landowner in getting USFWS funding and DNR permitting for restoration efforts on his property also.
- *Lunch Creek Fisheries.* WWA received a bid of roughly \$19,000 to complete work on the 18-19 acre Lunch Creek Fisheries Project. WWA accepted the bid by shifting unused Peter Helland Project funds to address the deficit.
- *PLE Contract Renewal Update.* Ed Ross met with members of WDNR's Wildlife Leadership Team to discuss renewal of WWA's Public Lands Ecologist (PLE) contract. WDNR expects to have a \$15-\$17M deficit in their 2026/2027 biennium budget. WWA's PLE contract expires in January 2025 and has a 1-year extension to carry it through to January 2026. However, funding is only approved through June 2025. Ed Ross met with WDNR leaders last week and demonstrated an 866% return on WDNR's investment in the PLE program while sharing WWA's risks (loss of employees, stillborn projects, grantor disappointment and lost opportunities) in the event funds are not approved. WWA will seek additional grants and funding to address PLE salaries to retaining employees. President Urben asked if ED Ross addressed this with PLE Rzechowski; Ross relayed that he addressed generalities, not specific impacts. VP Schaller clarified that the entire WDNR is forecasting the \$15-17M budget shortfall, not specifically the Bureau of Wildlife to whom WWA is under contract.

• **7:15 PM – Sandhill Crane (SHC) Legislative Study Group (LSG) Update (Director Ermert)**

President Urben recognized Bruce Ross, Todd Schaller, and George Ermert for their arduous work resulting in a proposal bill with Avipel funding for farmers and a SHC hunting season. The study group voted 8:4 in support of the proposed bill with democrats and non-hunting groups voting against the proposed language. Director Ermert explained the process and what lays ahead for WWA. In short, to continue to push this matter through the Legislature and up to the Governor, he recommends hiring a contract lobbyist because the time and commitments will easily exceed his, ED Ross', and VP Schaller's capabilities and time. He further cautioned, that without applying the needed resources, this bill will fail (as the bill four years ago did), and warned that should it fail a second time, it is highly unlikely to pass in the future. WWA's SHC advocate partners (Delta Waterfowl, Wisconsin Wildlife Federation, Safari Club International, and Back Country Hunters & Anglers) need to be formally approached about cost-sharing the

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lobbyist. Should the SHC season go into effect, farmers will be able to access the crop damage fund, but without additional funding, the crop damage fund will be insufficient to cover requests. More than likely hunting license costs will be increased by \$1-2 to add crop damage funding.

- **7:33 PM – Waterfowl Hunter Expo (WHE) Update (ED Ross)**

ED Ross presented the Board with a Waterfowl Hunters EXPO (WHE) support proposal for incremental professionalization of WHE management and administration to pay for his and DA Boettcher's time spent working on WHE. While still rough, the proposal came out to \$16,038 (\$10,800 for ED Ross, \$3,500 for DA Boettcher, and \$1,600 to cover mileage expenses). The Board concurred with the presentation and asked him to present the proposal to the EXPO Steering Committee at their next meeting. President Urben asked how the JEM grant impacts this proposal. ED Ross responded that the Department of Tourism JEM grant really does not affect this at all, and went on to explain that JEM does not "save" the Expo anything, but rather the grant enables additional marketing opportunities to the Expo, which in turn, bring more attendees, sponsors, and revenue.

ED Ross asked the Board to approve the Waterfowl Hunters EXPO support proposal and for the Board's approval for him to sign the JEM grant when presented with it.

President Urben motioned (Kim Shady seconded) to approve ED Ross' request that the Waterfowl Hunters EXPO support proposal be approved. The Board unanimously approved the Waterfowl Hunters EXPO support proposal.

VP Schaller motioned (Jim Freck seconded) that ED Ross be allowed to sign the Department of Tourism JEM Grant when received. The Board unanimously approved allowing ED Ross's signature of the JEM Grant.

- **7:52 PM – Committee Reports (President Urben)**

President Urben asked committees to report by exception based upon their published reports. The Development Committee did not meet. Policy, Education, and Communications Committees had nothing additional to report.

Habitat Committee (B.J. Grassmann) reported that WWA is in possession of 500 wood duck box kits/assembled boxes. Each box is produced at roughly \$4.00 per unit, while WWA sells them for \$35 per kit and \$40 per assembled box. There are enough on hand to offer chapters any boxes they need and to sell to the public. A question was asked if the boxes have the WWA logo on them. They do not. The Habitat Committee will pursue that with McNaughton Correctional Facility later.

- **8:06 PM – Staff Capacity Proposal (ED Ross)**

(Directors Markham & Gibbons signed off the Zoom call due professional conflicts of interest) ED Ross led a discussion regarding outsourcing marketing and management for the WHE and WWA. At ED Ross' request, Swift Waters LLC, owned by Board members Shawn Gibbons and Connie Markham, provided a proposal to assume these responsibilities. Swift Waters LLC's proposal totaled \$34,000 per year (WHE: \$20,000 and WWA: \$14,000 with perceived values of \$30,000 and \$25,000, respectively). An in-depth discussion followed regard Director Markham's and Gibbons's ability to remain as Board members, especially considering the JEM Grant specifications that grant funds cannot go to a WWA employee or Officer. In general, the Board agreed that both would need to step down from the Board, but that, as allowed by Association By-Laws, they could continue to sit in on Board members (as non-voting attendees) to ensure

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they remain up to date with decisions that would affect their contractual performances. President Urben asked ED Ross to insert a budget line to fund the Swift Waters proposal.

- **8:34 PM – Director / Officer Vacancies (President Urben)**
  - WWA’s Treasurer’s Office remains vacant. President Urben asked Directors to consider filling the vacancy.
  - Four Director terms (Makayla Jacobs, Connie Markham, Shawn Gibbons & Jim Freck) expire at the end of December. Each was asked to let President Urben and ED Ross know what their intentions are.
  - ED Ross reported that Justin Van De Hey, who attended November’s BoD meeting, remains interested in becoming a Board member.
- **8:34 PM - Action Items (President Urben)**
  - President Urben tasked each Board member to complete their 2025 Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest policy reviews prior to the Annual Meeting (18 January) and to bring a signed copy to January’s Board Meeting.
  - Persons interested in assisting development of the 2025 raffle calendar should contact Mike Depies (Shawn Gibbons, Connie Markham & Dave Elwing already volunteered).
  - ED Ross will send out a “Save the date” announcement for the Annual Meeting.
  - The Board unanimously approved the Waterfowl Hunters EXPO support proposal.
  - The Board unanimously approved allowing ED Ross’s signature of the JEM Grant.
  - The Board supported the concept of outsourcing marketing and management for the WHE and WWA to Swift Water, LLC; ED Ross was requested to bring forth a budget proposal NLT the next BoD meeting (18 January).
  - Board members whose term of service is expiring were asked to inform the President and ED of their decisions to seek re-election by 21 December.
- **8:37 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

**Next BoD meeting will be an in-person meeting at the Beaver Dam Conservation Club on January 18<sup>th</sup>. (Start time remains TBD)**