

**Wisconsin Waterfowl Association**  
**Board of Directors Virtual Meeting – Wednesday, April 16, 2025**

**Board Members present:** Mike Depies, Dave Elwing, George Ermert, Connie Markham, Todd Schaller, Pat Smith, Kim Shady, and Bruce Urben

**Staff Members present:** Kelcy Boettcher, Bruce Ross

**Guests in Attendance:** Shawn Gibbons (Swift Waters) and Anna Rzchowski (PLE)

**Unable to Attend:** Joe Gonyo and BJ Grassmann

**Agenda:**

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

- **6:35 PM – Approve March Board Meeting Minutes (President Urben)**

Director Elwing introduced March's minutes and motioned for approval. Director Shady seconded. March's Board minutes were unanimously approved as written.

- **6:36 PM – Financials (Executive Director [ED] Ross and Director of Administration [DA] Boettcher)**

DA Boettcher reported that the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) payments are coming through and further noted that funds for Little Yellow River project remain delayed. The LYR contractor completed the second test section and submitted an invoice (\$200K) for his services. The contractor is aware that the Association is waiting for federal funding before he receives payment. Director Ermert asked if there were any concerns with the availability of unrestricted funds. ED Ross responded that there is no concern based upon funds received from events and Class A raffles, YTD. ED Ross expressed concerns about the declining number of chapters and events across the Association., citing the Waukesha Chapter. Tom Siebert and Rob Monette (RDs) led the planning and execution of Waukesha's recent banquet. Although well attended, apparently financially successful, and with plenty of volunteers during execution, no local leaders are stepping forward to run the event. President Urben told the Board that the annual Abrahams fundraiser shoot is canceled for 2025.

- **6:40 PM – Habitat Projects Updates (EDS Ross and Public Lands Ecologist [PLE] Rzchowski)**

ED Ross led the update by announcing plans to resume interviews for the NRCS PLE position. PLE Rzchowski presented a PowerPoint presentation that detailed (3) completed (Navarino Wildlife Area [WA], White River Fishery Area, and Peter Helland), (11) ongoing and planned public lands projects. Projects include: LYR in Juneau County, Goose Lake & Brooklyn Was in Dane County, White River Marsh in Green Lake County, Kettle Moraine Southern Unit in Walworth and Waukesha Counties, Big Muskego WA also in Waukesha County, Ertmer WA in Winnebago County, Poygan Marsh WA in Waushara County, and Jackson Marsh WA in Washington County. PLE Rzchowski reported that 154 acres have been restored since July 2024 with an anticipated 3,500 acres either in progress or in the que.

ED Ross injected that efforts within LYR have the potential to impact 600-800 acres. ED Ross informed the Board that WWA is partnering with KCI Technologies to conduct a hydrological study to identify causes for tree die-off within Jackson Marsh. KCI Technologies is a stream mitigation land management company favored by WI DNR. ED Ross informed the Board that he submitted a grant request to the Day Break Fund to pay for the \$100K hydrology study. He also noted that through the Association's frugality, the budget contains a \$60K duck stamp money balance that can be applied to the Jackson Marsh project.

Shawn Gibbons (Owner of Swift Waters, LLC and drafter of WWA's monthly newsletter) praised the work and asked what the benefit to WWA members really is. He asked relative to how to best tell about WWA's wetland restoration efforts and what our newsletter readers and

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members can expect to gain from the Association's efforts. Vice President Schaller suggested that PLEs Rzchowski and Pfof meet with Shawn Gibbons to further discuss the matter. President Urben also praised PLE efforts and noted that in years past the Association struggled to account for (40) acres of wetland restorations, but soon the Association will be able to document thousands of acres restored.

ED Ross pointed out that Dr. Sara Orlofsky (UWSP) submitted for a \$1M grant, and if successful, roughly half of that will come to WWA to buy a PLE drone program.

- **7:21 PM – ED Update (ED Ross)**

Building Chapter Strength. WWA's grassroots presence remains key to the Association's survival. Chapters and local events are attriting while the Association's resources expand significantly through grants, the Expo, and other partnerships. VP Schaller agreed with the statement and added that a metric to measure success is necessary (i.e. engagement, number of volunteers, revenue raised, etc.). Ed Ross briefly touched upon the idea of an ad hoc committee to examine the matter and to make recommendations on how to move forward.

RD Retirement. ED Ross stated that Rob Monette previously expressed a desire to retire but has not identified a solid timeframe to do so. ED Ross introduced the idea that rather than hiring another full-time RD, the Association consider hiring several part-time RDs who could potentially live in different areas to reduce travel and individual time demands (like the Association's PLE concept). ED Ross will finalize the Regional Director job position description.

Sexual Abuse Prevention Policy Discussion. ED Ross informed the Board that the need for the Association to have a sexual abuse prevention policy developed in response to an insurance company inquiry. The policy will primarily affect the Learn-to-Hunt program for youth and mixed-gender groups. VP Schaller asked if having event organizers address the matter to event volunteers and documenting which volunteers were present would suffice. Shawn Gibbons asked if the Association has a policy for one-on-one mentoring, and if WWA looked into how other organizations manage such a requirement. VP Schaller confirmed that he submits WI DNR Mentorship paperwork (which includes a State-run background check) on all Waterfowl Academy mentors. President Urben clarified that WWA LTHs run through the WI DNR LTH Program also fall under WI DNR (state) insurance coverage. Director Shady injected that especially when dealing with youth, the Association should always have a parent involved to avoid the potential of a one-on-one scenario. Director Smith asked if the Association carries any type of umbrella insurance policy. ED Ross confirmed that the Association does not, but that he will investigate the cost of getting such coverage. President Urben opined that it is good that the Board and WWA's staff are looking at these matters; he further stated that the Association needs to ensure that our LTH organizers understand and comply with these needs.

On a similar note, ED Ross mentioned that due to the Waterfowl Hunter Expo's growth, an Expo Safety Plan is required.

2026 Raffle Calendar Planning Update. ED Ross and Director Depies relayed the Calendar Committee's progress. The same number of guns will be offered; the committee is working with Scheels for a gun list and pricing sheet. Director Elwing noted that Eisen Arms of Barton is again willing to provide guns and registration support. Calendar prizes are being finalized with any prizes received that are not needed for the calendar being made available for use at chapter events.

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- **7:52 PM – Director Nomination for Scott Hamele (President Urben)**

Scott Hamele is interested in filling the Director seat vacated by Shawn Gibbons in January. Shawn Gibbons stepped down to avoid conflicts of interest between his role as a Director and his ownership of Swift Waters, LLC which came under contract to provide WWA marketing and newsletter support. Scott Hamele has event organizational experience, is a business owner, and an avid waterfowler. He is interested in filling the role of project manager to examine specific areas and then recommend actions to be taken to implement the desired outcomes. ED Ross emphasized Scott Hamele's willingness to take on challenges and build a team. VP Schaller spoke in favor of Scott Hamele's role as a project officer, which could be beneficial in managing various activities like efforts to rebuild chapters. President Urben highlighted Scott Hamele's inability to meet during scheduled Board meeting times from April through September to the Board. Board members discussed the possibility of changing the day on which the Board meetings occur. ED Ross will poll Board members for their preferences. Adjusting the day could accommodate both Scott Hamele and Justin VandeHey's Wednesday conflicts (Justin VandeHey is also a Director candidate but has conflicts with the Muddy Waters Retrieving Club meetings which he chairs as the organization's president).

VP Schaller motioned that Scott Hamele's nomination to become a Director be approved; Director Elwing seconded the motion. The Board unanimously agreed to bring Scott Hamele on as a Board member starting in May. VP Schaller asked if Scott Hamele's initial (one-year) term would run for 12 months or only until the end of the CY/FY to align his terms with the remainder of the Board. The Board agreed that the term would run until 31 December 2025.

- **8:05 PM – Expo Update (ED Ross and Shawn Gibbons – Swift Waters, LLC)**

Shawn Gibbons reported that the Expo already received over \$72.5K in sponsorships, including (9) Gold-level sponsorships, far ahead of projections. Vendor sales are going well, also. Swift Waters has almost completed the expanded Expo program; one dog slot remains open.

Director Elwing enquired as to the status of the Friday evening banquet. ED Ross stated that progress was slow due to the Valley Chapter's focus upcoming on their upcoming shoot (Valley Chapter agreed to host the Expo banquet). President Urben secured (14) carved decoys for use at the banquet.

- **8:16 PM – Policy Updates (ED Ross & Director Ermert)**

Sandhill Crane (SHC) Hunt. SHC discussions are going well. Upcoming meetings are scheduled with Republicans on the Sporting Heritage Committee and Senator Felzkowski on May 13th. ED Ross noted that, in general, conversation with the Speaker and the Assembly are positive. That said, the Speaker will not bring the proposed Bill to the floor unless there is a minimum of (50) votes in favor of passing the Bill. ED Ross announced that a "call-to-Action" email using Delta Waterfowl's call-to-action software will go to all Association members and parties who follow WWA activities to increase political pressure to create legislation for a SHC hunt.

Secretary Hyun. ED Ross is scheduled to meet with Dr. Karen Hyun, the new WI DNR Secretary next week. Initial impressions from within the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation are positive.

Knowles-Nelson Funding. Director Ermert reported that renewal of Knowles-Nelson funding is going to be a tough fight. It currently only stands about a 20% chance of receiving the support needed to succeed.

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- **8:22 PM – Recap and Action Items (President Urben)**
  - The Board unanimously approved March’s Board minutes.
  - PLEs Rzchowski and Pfof will meet with Shawn Gibbons to better inform him as to the benefits WWA members can expect to gain from completed, ongoing, and future public lands projects.
  - VP Schaller will review the Association’s sexual abuse prevention policy and provide recommendations for implementation within the LTH program.
  - ED Ross will investigate the feasibility and cost of securing an umbrella insurance policy for the Association.
  - The Board unanimously elected Scott Hamele to be a Director and to lead special projects as determined by the Board. President Urben will notify Director Hamele of the Board’s decision.
  - ED Ross will release a Call-to-Action on 17 April to garner public support for a SHC hunt.
  - ED Ross will poll Board members for potential new Board meeting days.
  
- **8:25 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

**Next BoD meeting will be a virtual meeting at 6:30 PM on May 21st**