

Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
Board of Directors Virtual Meeting – Wednesday, June 18, 2025

Board Members present: Mike Depies, Dave Elwing, George Ermert, Joe Gonyo, BJ Grassmann, Connie Markham, Pat Smith, and Bruce Urben

Staff Members present: Kelcy Boettcher, Bruce Ross

Guests in Attendance: Shawn Gibbons

Unable to Attend: Scott Hamele, Todd Schaller, and Kim Shady

Agenda:

- **6:32 PM – Meeting Convened by President Urben**

- **6:33 PM – Approve May Board Meeting Minutes (President Urben)**

Director Elwing introduced May's minutes. Director Grassmann motioned that the minutes be approved as written. Director Depies seconded. May's Board minutes were unanimously approved as written.

- **6:35 PM – Financials (Executive Director [ED] Ross and Director of Administration [DA] Boettcher)**

DA Boettcher forwarded May's budgetary spreadsheets and a summary of budget activities to all Board members prior to the meeting. ED Ross reminded the Board that the approved budget was projected to close the year with a \$37,700 deficit due to bonus payout, salary increases and hiring the SHC lobbyist. Note that this amount was carried over from previous year (FY2024) and allocated for these purposes. Chapter revenues are roughly \$13,000 ahead of the forecast which is, in turn, greatly assisting the budget remaining positive. Director Ermert asked if all Class A raffles, specifically the recently completed \$1,000 Scheels gift card raffle, were included in the budget. DA Boettcher responded that it was not included in the budget because the raffle came to be after the budget was approved, but that the results would be incorporated once it was reconciled. Director Grassmann applauded Green Bay, Appleton, and Waukesha Chapter's ongoing fiscal successes. Director Ermert inquired to the status of memberships following the recent social media renewal and recruitment campaign. DA Boettcher responded that the push resulted in (70) membership renewals and three or four new memberships, but overall, and increase over previous years.

- **6:47 PM – Habitat Update (ED Ross & Ecologist Ziegler)**

Fund for Lake Michigan (FFLM) Grant. ED Ross announced the receipt of a \$106,000 Cedar Creek-Jackson Marsh grant from Fund for Lake Michigan (FFLM) and noted that the majority (\$99,000) will fund hydrodynamic analysis by KCI Technologies, with a contract pending board approval. The balance (\$7,000) can be applied to WWA's project management and administrative actions related to the task. ED Ross requested Board approval for him to sign the FFLM grant contract when received. Secretary Elwing motioned (Director Grassmann seconded) a motion to allow the ED to approve/sign the FFLM grant upon receipt. The Board unanimously approved the motion. The overall project (which includes Phase 1 analysis, Phase 2 design, and Phase 3 construction/implementation) is expected to span several years, with initial analysis taking place over a year, followed by detailed design and implementation phases.

USFWS Horicon National Wildlife Refuge Grant. ED Ross reported that USFWS at Horicon National Wildlife Refuge reached out to the Association regarding our willingness to manage an invasive species grant worth \$48,600 (with potential to grow to \$200,000). The effort seeks to limit invasive species growth on USFWS waterfowl production areas (WPAs). WWA's role will be contract management and fiscal reporting, similar to what DA Boettcher already does on the USFWS Partners Program. In addition to direct effort reimbursement, indirect charges due WWA would account for about \$7500 into WWA coffers.

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USFWS Partners Program. ED Ross also reported that another \$48,500 grant for WWA to continue contract and fiscal management of the USFWS Partners Program is expected. This grant will also yield roughly \$7,500 for this administrative management. President Urben asked DA Boettcher if she can manage / track the increasing number of grants being received. DA Boettcher confirmed that she can but stated some type of software management tool should be considered if the number of grants continues to increase.

ED Ross and DA Boettcher reminded the Board that the Little Yellow River (LYR) grant was written to allow \$20,000 to be used for grant management and audit support. WWA successfully submitted a \$5,000 administrative fees invoice after the federal government pause on grants was lifted. The funds can be applied to understanding explicit requirements and implementation for managing grants should WWA cross the federal audit threshold of \$1,000,000 in any given year.

DA Boettcher informed the Board that WWA's free non-profit Microsoft software subscription ends next year (MS is discontinuing the entire offering) meaning additional admin expense next year when that program ceases and WWA must buy necessary software.

Director Ermert asked about how grant administrative fees are categorized within the budget, (i.e. as restricted or unrestricted). DA Boettcher replied that generally the funds are considered unrestricted since they are intended to offset organizational overhead (unless they are a line item within the grant, like LYR audit allocation is). ED Ross indicated that WWA can now apply a 15% administration fee to services supporting the grant, given a recent federal OMB ruling.

With grant funds being federally released, the Association retained the audit consultant for services to be performed. As a related matter, PLE Pfof completed the LYR Phase II statement of work which should go out to prospective bidders this summer for the fall and winter construction season.

- **7:02 PM – Habitat Update (Peter Ziegler)**

Private Lands. Peter Ziegler presented a summary of WWA's private lands projects which identified each effort by county, landowner, project cost sharing, and project cost per acre. ED Ross stated that the reporting format was relatively new, but that WDNR is very pleased with the report and the physical results WWA has delivered, He went on to state that the report helped the Association secure state and federal duck stamp money increases. Director Ermert asked if Swift Waters, LLC has access to the report so they could use a redacted version (no landowner names) on social media platforms to highlight Association work. Secretary Elwing suggested that an overview of how landowners can apply for WWA assistance should be included with the social media stories.

Public Lands. ED Ross informed the BoD that WWA's WNDR Public Lands program is currently unfunded by the DNR (i.e., all funds expended on current purchase order) as of 30 May, However ED Ross expects to receive a new Work Order soon for the next DNR PO in July-Dec We will re- negotiate the basic agreement for additional funding in the fall with that contract to be implemented in the new calendar year. To account for the dry up of DNR funds in June, we shifted PLE work to other funded projects. ED Ross also informed the Board that WWA's newest PLE, Blake Bartels, is onboard as of this month as the NRCS biologist. Anna Rzchowski will mentor him.

Wisconsin Waterfowl Association
Board of Directors Virtual Meeting – Wednesday, June 18, 2025

- **7:21 PM – ED Update (ED Ross)**

ED Ross reported that he kicked off the process to hire a new Regional Director (RD) to backfill RD Monette's position when he retires later in the year. The final decision to hire a single full-time or several part-time RDs has yet to be made and will most likely be determined after reviewing resumes. Only 2 or 3 resumes have been received to date, but ED Ross noted that the process is just beginning. Swift Waters, LLC will post the opening on social media outlets.

- **7:22 PM – ED Transition Discussion (President Urben)**

President Urben identified the timeline to have a new ED in place by 1 October 2025. He extended his thanks to the Executive Committee members (VP Schaller, Secretary Elwing) and DA Boettcher who volunteered to assist him during the screening process. An updated position description, salary band (\$70 - \$75K with annual increases planned through 2028) and an interview scoring sheet have been developed. The position announcement is set to be 23 June; closing will be 28 July. Resume screening is planned for 29 July to 1 September, with an offer letter being anticipated to be extended on / about 1 October. ED Ross volunteered to stay on (without pay) for a month or two in September and August to help balance the budget and help the new ED transition into the job. ED Ross expressed his interest to remain onboard to continue SHC Policy work and to assist with habitat grants, depending on Board and new ED wishes.

ED Ross suggested that the Association needs an ED who can identify and capture large donors, while at the same time can still focus on rebuilding grassroots chapters. Throughout his tenure ED Ross focused on building "what" WWA delivers (EXPO, habitat impact, the waterfowler's voice in Madison, education program, etc.), and he's proud of what we have collectively accomplished in those critical areas and Ross doesn't want to see any fall back in the transition. We have something really good to "sell" (i.e., to donors, grassroots). Now we need to focus on selling them. President Urben highlighted that the incoming ED must continue ED Ross' financial diversification efforts.

Director Ermert asked to be included in the selection process; President Urben acknowledged to request and explained the timelines and requirements to all BoD members. No one expressed an immediate interest in being further involved. Director Ermert also expressed concerns that the application window might be too small.

- **7:48 PM – EXPO Update (ED Ross / Shawn Gibbons)**

ED Ross reminded the Board that we are approximately two months away from WWA's first 2-day Waterfowl Hunter Expo (WHE). Director Scott Hamele volunteered to manage WHE admissions, while Treasurer Shady volunteered to be the WHE Safety Manager. Secretary Elwing is organizing the manning, layout and merchandise for the WWA Expo booth.

Shawn Gibbons reported that the Father's Day social media push was successful, selling 233 tickets (up 34% from 2024). Marketing-wise, WHE's break into the Northern Illinois market was also successful; marketing within eastern Minnesota was not as successful. WHE social media recorded 2,000 new viewers within a 250-mile radius of the EXPO. ED Ross stated that WHE has \$106,000 already raised, with roughly another \$25,000 already committed from vendors and sponsors.

Admissions staffing may be outsourced to the Oshkosh Kiwanis Club or other local non-profit. Shawn Gibbons suggested contacting the Appleton Civil Air Patrol to see if they would be interested (and be cheaper) than the Kiwanis Club.

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- **8:03 PM – Policy Updates (Director Ermert & ED Ross)**

Knowles-Nelson (K-N) Funding. Funding discussion have progressed as far as possible within the current Senate session. K-N will need to be revisited during the Senate’s Fall Session. Director Ermert emphasized that the Bill is not dead, and the support provided by hunting organizations and the Hunting Coalition have been key to advancing K-N to its current status.

Sandhill Crane (SHC) Season. Director Ermert told the Board that the Association and its partners are still very much in an “education mode” with Madison lawmakers. WWA’s lobbyist, Joel Kleefisch, continues to work to find wording changes related to conservation and safety issues that Speaker Stafsholt will support. The Bill may go into Hearing in September or October, thus allowing October, November, December, and January for a vote. WWA is clearly recognized as the leader of this effort and Director Ermert strongly expressed his opinion that the Association needs to take advantage of this through some type of mailer / fundraising campaign. Further, he expressed the need to reach beyond WWA’s “normal” email and social media contacts and suggested contacting a clearing house to identify new addressees and to create a professional-looking mailer. This is a cost that is not in the budget, but it is one that the Association can afford. The Board engaged in an extended discussion resulting in agreement that ED Ross should explore SHC fundraising / awareness options and present them to the Board for a decision.

ED Ross relayed the Safari Club International (SCI) lawyers contacted him and expressed that if Governor Evers vetoed a SHC hunting Bill, SCI would be willing to bring a lawsuit forward based upon a “right to hunt” denial.

- **8:38 PM – Recap and Action Items (President Urben)**

- The Board unanimously approved May’s Board minutes.
- The Board Received updates on the FFLM \$106, 000 grant that will fund a hydrology study of the Cedar Creek area and sanctioned the ED to approve the FFLM grant when it is received.
- The Board discussed and agreed that ED Ross should proceed with actions to effect (2) USFWS grants (Horicon Marsh Invasive Species and the Partners in Fish & Wildlife).
- The Board discussed the way ahead relative to hiring and transitioning to a new ED.
- ED Ross will explore SHC fundraising / awareness options and present them to the Board.

- **8:41 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

Next BoD meeting will be a virtual meeting at 6:30 PM on July 16th.