

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

Board Members present: Mike Depies, Dave Elwing, George Ermert, Joe Gonyo, BJ Grassmann, Scott Hamеле, Connie Markham, Kim Shady, and Bruce Urben

Staff Members present: Kelcy Boettcher, Bruce Ross

Guests in Attendance: Shawn Gibbons

Unable to Attend: Todd Schaller, and Pat Smith

Agenda:

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

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

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

- **6:34 PM – Financials (President Urben and Director of Administration [DA] Boettcher)**

DA Boettcher forwarded June's budgetary spreadsheets and a summary of budget activities to all Board members prior to the meeting. The budget remains in the red, but ahead of budget projections. Reminder that even our projected budget, approved by the board in January, was to end in the red as we spend some of last year's proceeds to support our mission efforts and bringing staff compensation on par with other WI non-profits. Chapter revenue is down because the South Suburban event has not reconciled, yet and the golf tournament was postponed to October due to inclement weather. Inventory costs are higher than normal due to purchasing 2026 calendar guns and several event guns in advance to ensure availability when they are needed.

- **6:38 PM – Bohnenkamp Bequest (ED Ross)**

WWA is a secondary beneficiary of in a bequest from deceased Mary Bohnenkamp of Prairie du Chien. Ms. Bohnenkamp identified the Craig Martin Legacy Youth Duck Hunt as the primary beneficiary, however, at the time of her death, the legacy youth hunt was not a legal entity, but rather an event carried on by Mr. Martin's son, Matt and friends, under the WWA umbrella. The Prairie du Chien Chapter (also known as the Southwest Chapter) re-chartered within WWA four years ago and has since the bequest's surfacing, created the Craig Martin Legacy Youth Duck Hunt Fund (CMLYDHF) as a legal entity to receive funds. There is some uncertainty as to whether the primary named beneficiary, CMLYDHF, has "clear title" to receive the grant. Matt Martin proposes that WWA accept a percentage of the bequest to release any claim the Association might be able to make. The Association may receive up to \$50,000 should Matt Martin's offer be accepted. WWA does not have a clear claim to the full amount of the bequest (~\$1.1M) and stands to lose significant standing should the Association challenge the CMLYDHF claim.

After a lengthy discussion, Secretary Elwing motioned (Director Grassmann seconded) a motion that "ED Ross be authorized to proceed with developing an agreement with the Craig Martin Legacy Youth Duck Hunt Fund to receive 10% of any bequest received in exchange for WWA forswearing any claims to the Bohnenkamp estate, and as part of the agreement ED Ross is expected to negotiate that the CMLYDF provide the Association with an annual report that details learn to hunt (LTH) activities funded by monies received from the estate." The Board unanimously agreed with the motion.

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- **7:17 PM – Cedar Creek / Jackson Marsh Statement of Work (ED Ross)**

ED Ross electronically distributed the draft statement of work (SOW) prepared by PLE Anna Rzchowski to board members for review prior to this meeting. The SOW was provided to WWA's subcontractor, KCI Tech for review / acceptance. The SOW will be returned to the Board for final approval.

- **7:18 PM – Little Yellow River SOW (Phase II) (ED Ross)**

ED Ross informed the board that similar PLE Pfof prepared and submitted the LYR (Phase II) SOW to the Phase I contractor for review / response. This SOW will also return to the BoD for final approval before a Phase II contract is let.

- **7:20 PM – USFWS "Small Grant Agreement" Status (ED Ross)**

Both USFWS "small grants" discussed during June's Board meeting were approved. As their amount (~\$48,500) exceeds ED Ross' signatory authority, he will seek EXCOM or BoD approval before proceeding.

- **7:22 PM – Employee and Hiring Updates (President Urben & ED Ross)**

Executive Director. Five ED applications have been received to date. The application period closes on July 25th. The hiring committee will conduct a zoom call on July 31st to review applicant resumes. Several Board members sent interview questions to VP Schaller; others are encouraged to follow suit. Zoom interviews are scheduled between August 4th and 7th; final interviews are being done face to face. President Urben plans to present the Board with the hiring recommendation during the August Board meeting. He anticipates having a new ED on board in early September.

Regional Director (RD). Ed Ross reported that he started the process of hiring a new RD. Determination of full-time (FT) or part-time (PT) status remains undetermined. Five applications have been received to date and several others expressed interest in the position. A few of the applicants are acceptable, but ED Ross indicated that the RD hiring model is still in draft. The basic premise under which RDs will work is that banquet style events are tough to sustain due to a need to have strong leadership in place & without that leadership chapters die. A more attractive & effective business model might be to focus on fun events conducted by a circle of friends which can bring in new revenue through multiple small events with a key focus being to avoid one-man shows... *"focus on getting people together 1st and fundraising second."* ED Ross suggested hiring multiple part-time RDs who can focus attention on a radius of one or 1.5 hours from their homes and within which they can cultivate the "circle of friends" to conduct Class A raffles, calendar sales, possible shoots, or bashes, etc. A 0.25-FTE RD can theoretically manage 3 to 4 chapters and if need be, assume the chairman's responsibility until a natural leader steps forward.

Secretary Elwing identified the need for somebody within the organization (currently the full time RD) to identify, purchase, and maintain merchandise and banquet support items. ED Ross acknowledged this and suggested that a full time RD retain those responsibilities and that the FT RD hold oversight responsibility of several satellite RDs. ED Ross asked the board for guidance to move forward with the proposed hiring model of a FT RD with satellite PT RDs.

The Board engaged in a lengthy discussion as to the RD structure, number of PT / Satellite RDs, etc. ED Ross acknowledged that metrics are needed and that a delineation of responsibilities is also needed. The ED's supervisory responsibilities are stretched under the current structure, but formalizing an RD structure in which a senior / FT RD oversees and guides satellite RDs could significantly alleviate ED strain. Director Ermert expressed hesitation because of ED Ross's pending retirement. President Urben reminded the Board that ED Ross has already volunteered

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to stay on without pay to assist hiring RD Monette's replacement(s). Directors Markham, Elwing, and Hamele voiced support to move forward.

Director Markham took the opportunity to raise the option of having a virtual RD that could operate similar to the "By Women For Women" Learn to Hunt sessions and discussions. One of the PT RDs could fulfill a role with virtual chapters, further increasing the Association's footprint.

The Board directed ED Ross to proceed with an RD model of a senior and PT / Satellite RDs.

Director Shady suggested hiring a Senior RD and one PT /Satellite RD to test the model for a 6-month period. The Board agreed.

On a related personnel note, ED Ross notified the Board that he recently advanced pile Anna Rzechowski to a supervisory position over recently hired PLE, Blake Bartels based upon her extra efforts to create an on boarding program and her role as mentor and supervisor. ED Ross authorized a \$4000 pay increase and a new title.

- **8:02 PM – Policy Update (ED Ross)**

During June's Board meeting the Board directed ED Ross to further examine the feasibility of engaging a mailing house to create and distribute a professionally generated sandhill crane (SHC) mailer. ED Ross provided the Board with a memo indicating several pricing and mailing options. The proposed mailing list would merge lists held by the DNR, the Association's constant contact list, and last year's calendar buyers list. Hiring a mail house to generate and message WWA's SHC theme allows creation of a mailer that offers a professional-looking marketing view and allows the three mailing lists to be consolidated and harmonized (WWA's database cannot merge the lists).

Secretary Elwing voice concerns over the responsiveness of creating a mailer prior to legislative actions. ED Ross responded that SHC legislation could come into hearing as early as late September or early October. He assured the Board that the mailing house can return a product within several days of going under contract.

President Urben asked what the mailer's point / message would be. Would it be to encourage recipients to contact legislators? Raise funds to offset WWA's sandhill crane efforts? Further WWA brand awareness? ED Ross responded, "primarily brand awareness." Shawn Gibbons summarized and asked for confirmation that, to date, no theme existed; he also asked what the anticipated return on investment (ROI) is.

Director Shady, based upon years of experience in business development and commercial marketing opposed creating a mailer, stating his belief that a single mailer will be a failure because marketing techniques require repeated contacts to be effective. Director Markham and Shawn Gibbons agreed that a single mailer would not deliver a positive ROI. Director Grassmann recommended discontinuing efforts to create a sandhill crane mailer.

Director Depies asked if a SHC effort could be part of the Waterfowl Hunter Expo (WHE). President Urben agreed that an awareness push of WWA's efforts to achieve a sustainable SHC legislation is needed at the WHE. Secretary Elwing recommended WWA create a stand-alone SHC booth at the Expo which could be used to "sell" the idea of a sustainable crane hunt, highlight WWA efforts for WHE attendees, and solicit monetary support through looped video media, eye-catching banners, fliers, donation requests, and sign-ups. Director Grassmann recommended Secretary Elwing assume responsibility for the booth. Secretary Elwing agreed and suggested that he and Director Ermert man the booth. ED Ross and Secretary Elwing will work off-line to create a booth theme and layout which attracts WHE attendees.

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- **8:29 PM – EXPO Update (ED Ross / Shawn Gibbons)**

Expo sponsorships continue to rise. Less than 20 vendor booths remain. Planning for Friday evening's Hunter's Banquet continues to progress. Shawn Gibbons reported that Drake came in as a Gold-level Sponsor and bought 3-consecutive booth spaces to market their merchandise. \$68,500 of \$79,500 in vendor fees have already been received. Shawn Gibbons reported that GFORCE Arms backed down to a \$2,000-level sponsorship due to lagging YTD sales. Shawn Gibbons provided a marketing methods overview that will be used to enhance public awareness. Efforts include print ads donated by Wisconsin Outdoor N (totaling roughly \$2000), digital ads (\$7,750), Over the Top Television streaming service (98% view through rate), and four digital billboards that will display WHE for 8-second blocks every minute over a 24/7 timeframe. The Wisconsin Department of Tourism Grant is being used to address these costs.

Secretary Elwing asked for confirmation of Director manpower requirements during the WHE since it appears staffing will be needed for the previously acknowledged WWA booth, the new SHC booth, and an outdoor pop-up at Stevenson Hall's main entrance. ED Ross confirmed those locations and manning requirements. Secretary Elwing will adjust staffing plans and distribute the updated assignments to Board members via separate correspondence. Director Depies volunteered to set up and manage the WWA booth allowing Secretary Elwing and Director Erment to staff the SHC booth.

- **8:47 PM – 2026 Raffle Calendar Update (Director Depies)**

Calendars were picked up from the printer and are ready for distribution and sale. President Urben asked to have calendars available for the July 23d golf outing. ED Ross expressed his thanks to Directors Depies and Markham and Shawn Gibbons for their efforts in producing "the best WWA calendar ever."

- **8:48 PM – Recap and Action Items (President Urben)**

- The Board unanimously approved June's Board minutes.
- The Board authorized ED Ross to proceed with developing an agreement with the Craig Martin Legacy Youth Duck Hunt Fund to receive 10% of any bequest received in exchange for WWA forswearing any claims to the Bohnenkamp estate, and as part of the agreement and asked ED Ross to negotiate that the WWA be provided an annual report detailing learn to hunt (LTH) activities funded by monies received from the estate.
- The Board gave ED Ross authorization to move forward with the FT and Satellite / PT RD model.
- The Board received WHE updates.
- The Board agreed not to proceed with the previously proposed SHC mailing campaign, but rather to broadcast WWA's lobbying efforts and seek support from WHE attendees.
- 2026 raffle calendars are available.

- **8:51 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

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