

**Wisconsin Waterfowl Association**  
**Board of Directors Virtual Meeting – Wednesday, February 18, 2026**

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

**Staff Members present:** Brad Heidel, Kelcy Boettcher

**Guests present:** Shawn Gibbons/Swift-Waters

**Unable to Attend:** Joe Gonyo

**Agenda:**

- **6:33 PM – Meeting Convened by President Urben**
- **6:34 PM – Approve January Board Meeting Minutes (Secretary Elwing)**

Secretary Elwing introduced January’s minutes, asked for questions/amendments, and after receiving none, motioned that the January BoD minutes be accepted as written. President Urben seconded the motion. February’s Board minutes were unanimously approved as written.
- **6:35 PM – Midland Wings Chapter Internal Grant Request (VP Schaller)**

Midland Wings Chapter submitted an internal grant request to purchase (30) copies of A Sand County Almanac as a gift to the Lomira High School Outdoor Club. The cost of the purchase was \$347.70. The Lomira HS Outdoor Club has supported the chapter’s wood duck program for the past three years. A chapter representative presents an hour-long narrative which explains WWA’s wood duck nesting program and the impacts each of can have on conserving and perpetuating natural resources. Leopold’s A Sand County Almanac is a perfect example of the balance between man, land, and natural resources, The grant’s intent is to provide each club member with his / her personal copy.

The Education Committee recommended the Board support the request. Director Ermert asked if, based upon what the BoD heard relative to the Outdoor Club, if WWA could also provide a shirt or hat for each member. President Urben reminded the BoD that the grant was not to exceed \$1,000. ED Heidel confirmed the total price would be about \$800; however, Director of Administration (DA) Boettcher advised the Board that hat supply is short now and new membership gift hats needed prioritization. The Board approved the grant request and included hats once they became sufficiently available.
- **6:46 PM – Hall of Fame Update (President Urben)**

President Urben reminded the Board that Jim Freck was drafting updates to the Association Hall of Fame and that the Board would receive recommendations at a future board meeting.
- **6:49 PM – January Financials (Executive Director [ED] Heidel and DA Boettcher)**

DA Boettcher reported that the January showed a good return, thanks to an early reconciliation of the Hangover Shoot.

ED Heidel addressed the 2026 budget next, emphasizing that the budget was more of a fiscal execution guide, rather than a hard and fast “only spend funds as indicated” document. As such, the Association has a degree of freedom of execution as opportunities present themselves during the budget year. The Board concurred with that philosophy, after which ED Heidel asked the Board to approve the second budget draft. Director Ermert asked if Draft 2 still included previously proposed staff salary increases. DA Boettcher confirmed that it did. Hearing no further questions VP Schaller motioned (Secretary Elwing seconded) that the 2026 budget draft be accepted, as proposed. The Board unanimously approved the Association’s 2026 budget.

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- **6:55 PM – ED Topics (ED Heidel)**

Call of the Year. ED Heidel introduced a “WWA Call of the Year” promotion to the Board. He successfully utilized this idea in previous capacities. WWA is partnered with Pacific Calls to create fifteen custom calls to raise revenue throughout the year. The 2026 call is red and white with “WWA” etched on the front and the waving UW “W” crest on the reverse side. Each acrylic call will be numbered “1 of 15.” Future themes might be “WWA Orange” or Packers Green and Gold. The calls will be promoted on social media outlets and at Association events.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Meeting. ED Heidel and Regional Director (RD) Rosenkranz met with USFWS representatives on 16 February to discuss continuing / increasing work agreements between the Association and USFWS due to a shortage of USFWS employees. USFWS is down seven employees across the state; the shortage is exacerbated by the in-place federal employee hiring freeze. Discussions included WWA bringing on a new cost-shared employee (WWA pays 25% and USFWS pays 75% of salary). Initial discussions were for one employee to work in the N/NW portion of the state but could expand to multiple employees. USFWS appears willing to provide workspace and even vehicle/equipment access at no additional charge.

Additionally, this trip was planned to include a meeting with Senator Stafsholt and a tour of the Lucky Duck corporate facility in Baldwin. Unfortunately, the Senator cancelled, but the Lucky Duck portion was completed, yielding renewed connections and support for the Association and the Waterfowl Hunters Expo (WHE).

Wood Duck Box App. ED Heidel announced that Habitat Technician Blake Bartels developed a wood duck box nesting Survey 123 app within the ARC GIS framework for Association members and the public to use. Lomira HS Outdoor Club volunteers successfully used the app during Midland Wings Chapter box clean-out on 14 February. They found the app easy to use. Plans include releasing the app for future public recording of box locations and harvest information.

Waterfowl Heritage Day. Dave Norton (Norton Boats) and several other Green Lake County waterfowl enthusiasts approached ED Heidel with the idea of WWA supporting a “Waterfowl Heritage Day to showcase waterfowling techniques and gear from bygone days. The Green Lake County gentlemen selected the date (12 September) and the location (Marquette, WI) but wanted WWA’s assistance in getting the word out. ED Heidel agreed to assist if the event became a WWA-sponsored event. They agreed to WWA’s sponsorship providing that other similarly minded organizations like DU and Delta Waterfowl could also participate. Director Schueller and ED Heidel hold established friendships with the gentlemen and ties to the region. ED Heidel expressed hopes that the event might resurrect the former Lake Puckaway WWA Chapter. WWA’s / ED Heidel’s role will be to assist event organization and promotion.

Migratory Bird Committee Meeting. VP Schaller and Director Hamele represented WWA at the DNR-hosted Migratory Bird Committee meeting held on 16 February. The committee discussed proposed start dates, season splits, lengths (30, 45, and 60 days). and bag limits for the 2026-2030 waterfowl hunting seasons based upon input received from the recently completed waterfowl hunting surveys. The proposals will be released for public review and comment on 20 February. Comments will be accepted through three face-to-face town hall sessions, one virtual session, and through a WDNR survey. Treasurer Shady asked VP Schaller to share the results he and Director Hamele presented on WWA’s behalf to the Board; VP Schaller will do so following conclusion of the Board meeting.

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- **7:34 PM – Habitat Update (Director Schueller)**

Directors Schueller and Hamele joined the Habitat Committee and shared their very positive initial impressions with the Board by highlighting efforts in the Scuppermong and White River Marshes, and along the Little Yellow River (LYR) where roughly six miles of ditch plugging and wetlands restoration has taken place. Phase II of the LYR project will be completed in February. Funding and weather will determine when Phase III can begin.

ED Heidel injected that the Association is beginning to, in consonance with the DNR, look at restoration opportunities in SE Wisconsin, including onboarding and intern to assist Public Lands Ecologist (PLE) Rzechowski.

- **7:45 PM – Event Update (ED Heidel)**

ED Heidel noted the following upcoming events: Valley Bash, spearheaded by former-Director Grassmann on 11 April, the Valley Banquet on 19 February – sold out at 250 attendees, and the Cabin Fever Winter Bash on 24 February – a struggling (low anticipated attendance) event. Based upon RD Rosenkranz's recent meeting with three interested hunting partners, it appears there is a good chance of resurrecting WWA's La Crosse Chapter and their hosting an event during 2026.

- **7:47 PM – Annual Meeting (ED Heidel)**

ED Heidel reported that the Meat Eater store in Brookfield will host WWA's annual meeting on Saturday, 18 April from noon to 3:00 PM. Details need to be worked on, but ED Heidel would like to use the annual meeting as a forum to recognize key 2025 contributors. President Urben offered to discuss annual awards and the nomination/selection process with ED Heidel off-line.

- **7:50 PM – Policy Updates (Director Ermert)**

Knowles-Nelson (K-N) Stewardship Bill. Director Ermert reported that K-N died in the Assembly today (18 February) due to partisan and organizational rivalries and topic politization. His belief is that the Bill would have passed the Assembly had parties been willing to compromise slightly. As a result, K-N funding runs out on 30 June 2026.

Sandhill Crane (SHC) Hunt. The Assembly is expected to vote on the SHC Hunt Bill this week. WWA's hired lobbyist, Joel Klefisch, remains a key asset in overcoming potential shortstops and roadblocks include on which occurred this week when a lawmaker inferred a change of support. Lobbyist Kleefisch contacted Senator Stafsholt resulting in a positive outcome from a meeting between the lawmaker, Senator Stafsholt, Joel Kleefisch, and Director Ermert. (Postscript: The State Assembly passed Assembly Bill 117 – SHC Hunt on 19 February. The Senate must vote in favor and Governor Evers needs to sign it into law before the DNR can establish the framework for a SHC season).

- **8:00 PM – Education Update (VP Schaller)**

VP Schaller reported that the Waterfowlers Academy's Recruit, Retain, and Reactivate (R3) grant ends at the end of April. All payments must be made prior to 30 April; paperwork to close-out the grant must be submitted by 30 June. While not all funds were expended, the Academy did a good job of executing available funding and reporting expenditures.

- **8:07 PM – EXPO Update (ED Heidel)**

To date, close to 75% of sponsorships are filled and ED Heidel anticipates being filled by the first week in March. Sherpers has not responded to calls about coming back. Due to budget restrictions, the DNR will be present, but will not contribute funding to the WHE. DNR will still conduct the wildlife stamp competition during the Expo.

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- **8:09 PM – Annual Conflict of Interest and Code of Ethics Affirmations (Secretary Elwing)**

Secretary reminded the Board that, per the Association By-Laws, all Directors and committee members need to annually complete their Conflict of Interest, Code of Ethics, and Sexual Harassment affirmations. To date, only five members are in compliance for 2026.

- **8:10 PM – Recap and Action Items (President Urben)**

- The Board unanimously approved January's Board minutes.
- The Board approved the Midland Wings Chapter's internal grant request to purchase thirty copies of A Sand County Almanac for members of the Lomira High School Outdoor Club. The request was modified and approved during the Board meeting to additionally provide an accompanying WWA hat to each student (when hats are available).
- The Board unanimously approved the Budget Draft 2 as the Association's 2026 Budget.
- VP Schaller will distribute to share the results he and Director Hamele presented during the 16 February Migratory Bird Committee meeting.
- The annual meeting will be held on Saturday, 18 April, from noon to 3:00 PM at the Meat Eater store in Brookfield.
- Directors and committee members need to complete their 2026 Conflict of Interest, Code of Ethics, and Sexual Harassment affirmations.

- **8:14 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

**The next BoD meeting will be a virtual meeting at 6:30 PM on March 18<sup>th</sup>.**