

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

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

Staff Members present: Brad Heidel, Kelcy Boettcher

Guests present: Shawn Gibbons/Swift-Waters

Unable to Attend: Joe Gonyo, Lou Schueller, and Kim Shady

Agenda:

- **6:35 PM – Meeting Convened by President Urben**
- **6:36 PM – Approve February Board Meeting Minutes (Secretary Elwing)**

Secretary Elwing introduced February’s minutes, asked for questions/amendments, and after receiving none, motioned that the February BoD minutes be accepted as written. President Urben seconded the motion. February’s Board minutes were unanimously approved as written.
- **6:37 PM – February Financials (Executive Director [ED] Heidel and Director of Administration [DA] Boettcher)**

President Urben opened the discussion by commenting on “how good” the financials looked. ED Heidel noted that the variances in grant postings initially caused him some concern, but after speaking with DA Boettcher he had a better grasp on grant-related budget fluctuations. DA Boettcher noted that the Valley and Cabin Fever Bashes would post in April and that early EXPO sponsorships and booth sales allowed the budget to be ahead of projections.
- **6:55 PM – President’s Topics (President Urben)**

President Urben focused his time on preparations for Green Bay’s banquet tomorrow (19 March) evening. The banquet is expected to be the largest WWA banquet to date, drawing 270+ attendees.
- **6:55 PM – ED Topics (ED Heidel)**

Waterfowl Heritage Day. The Inaugural Waterfowl Heritage Day is set for 12 September in Marquette, WI. WWA has limited involvement beyond assisting in advertising and manning a recruitment/public information booth on the day of the event. Potential exists to turn it into some type of a future WWA fundraiser.

Future Farmers of America (FFA) State Wildlife Career Development Events (CDE) Exam. The FFA organization chose “waterfowl” as one of this year’s CDE focus areas. ED Heidel will participate in a half-day session.

United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Shared Employee. The part-time USFWS position discussed last month for northwestern Wisconsin is on hold. While USFWS cannot hire new employees due to a federal government hiring freeze, vacancies can be filled by existing employees doing lateral moves.

Federal Firearms License. Discussion focused on the pros/cons of WWA applying for a FFA license to get better gun pricing. License fees are \$90/year or \$200 for 3-years. Details regarding which guns would be purchased (calendar? Class A? All events? Some events?) needs further discussion. Manpower and administration are major concerns... specifically “who” will be able to process firearms transfers, when will transfers be done (if during a banquet the RD cannot do them without significantly detracting from his other responsibilities), are we sure of what the administrative burden managing transactions and record keeping is, etc. The Board agreed that significant savings and control over WWA guns sounds like a great idea. ED Heidel will investigate this further, including whether there could be insurance policy implications, and report his assessment to the Board.

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- **7:01 PM – Habitat Update (ED Heidel)**

Wood Duck Box App. Ed Heidel asked that any improvement suggestions for the wood duck app be sent to him for consolidation and passing to PLE Bartels.

Jackson County Restoration Project. WWA was asked to consult on a piece of property in Jackson County that Knowles-Nelson funds purchased. It is several hundred acres of flowage and old cranberry bogs. Improvement funds are limited, but the assessment will be longstanding and can be referred to if/when funds become available.

Jackson Marsh. ED Heidel recently met with the contractor, KCI Technologies. Well heads are in place. The study which KCI will perform will be a seasonal (spring through November).

White River Marsh. Restoration work () complete. The job took roughly 1 week.

Little Yellow River (LYR) Phase II. Roughly 9 miles of ditches were plugged, allowing water to flow into historic areas.

North American Wetlands Conservation Act (NAWCA) Grant. Peter Zeigler is writing a \$35M grant to include future LYR phases.

Director Ermert asked if WWA was ready to tout any of these accomplishments to the public. Director Marham responded that she will work with PLE Rzchowski to put stories together and to get more video footage to post (action videos are attention-getters). ED Heidel opened the current Wisconsin Outdoor News and pointed to a large article about LYR accomplishments. Secretary Elwing suggested that we try to access the DNR's social media portal to reach audiences beyond WWA's normal viewership. Director Ermert noted that the DNR's Communications Department is rather challenging to work with.

- **7:14 PM – Event Update (ED Heidel)**

Valley Banquet and the Cabin Fever Winter Bash events will post results during the coming month. Both are expected to exceed budget. RD Rosenkranz has a meeting scheduled with several interested parties about starting an Eau Clair Chapter.

- **7:16 PM – Policy Updates (Director Ermert)**

Sandhill Crane (SHC) Hunt. The SHC Bill did not get brought to the Senate for a vote. A minimum of (17) votes were needed for the Bill to pass. Two Republicans (Senator Nass & Marklein) refused to support the Bill. Without a clear majority Senator Stafsholt would not bring the Bill forward and risk the chance of it being defeated. No Democrats indicated they would vote in favor of the Bill. While dead for 2026, the Bill can be brought back in 2027.

The Board discussed the value of retaining Joel Kleefisch as a lobbyist when his current contract expires on 30 April 2026. The Board favored retaining his services to maintain a WWA presence and topic awareness amongst Legislators. While disappointing, ED Heidel encouraged the Association to remain engaged and to ensure members understood that the Bill failed to pass because of party-line voting, not because of "bad science." He advocated for a fundraising campaign to offset the unbudgeted expense (\$1,000 / month) to retain Joel Kleefisch's services and concurrently encourage constituents to either support or remove opposition during upcoming elections. ED Heidel and Director Ermert volunteered to discuss retention options and purpose with Joel Kleefisch and to report recommendations to the Board.

Assembly Bill (AB) 881/882 and 1032. Director Ermert explained several other proposed bills that should be of interest to the Association and our members. AB 881/882 relates to town authority over the water elevation of an artificial water body created by a dam and recourse due to damage caused by an obstructed waterway by allowing townships to regulate water diversion or elevation projects. It will require DNR projects that raise water levels or divert water to

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receive approval from the local town board via resolution, thus unduly allowing local influence over state planning and execution. Delta Waterfowl and Ducks Unlimited asked the Association to oppose this legislation.

AB 1032 intends to curb the spread of avian flu by increasing the distance between high-population wild bird habitats and commercial egg farms. It authorizes the Natural Resources Board to sell specific DNR lands that are adjacent to or within one mile of a commercial egg farm. Non-domesticated fowl are not a threat to commercial egg farms, but commercial egg farms are a threat to waterfowl. The Association opposes AB1032 because sales of public lands decrease recreational access and opportunities to the public. (Postscript: AB1032 passed on 30 March and went forward for Governor Ever's vote)

- **7:44 PM – Annual Meeting (ED Heidel)**

The Association annual meeting will be held at the Meat Eater store on Saturday, 18 April, from noon to 3:00 PM. Annual awards will be presented, and in-store discounts will be available to all attendees. Annual award nominations will be forwarded to Board members for their vote.

An in-person Board meeting will be held on 18 April from 10:00 – 11:30 at the Brookfield Public Library (1900 N Calhoun Rd, Brookfield, WI 53005) prior to the annual meeting.

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

VP Schaller reported that the Waterfowlers Academy's Recruit, Retain, and Reactivate (R3) grant is being closed out with WDNR – grant ends on 31 April 2026.. The Education Committee reexamined the past years' practices of awarding scholarships and research grants using funds raised by the Waterfowl Hunters Expo (WHE) and concluded that only grants will be continued as there is little to no assurance that scholarship awardees will continue in endeavors related to waterfowl.

- **7:53 PM – EXPO Update (ED Heidel)**

WHE sales, sponsorships, and interest are progressing well; exhibit space is close to being sold-out. Dive Bomb, Garmin, and HeviShot are new sponsors. To date ~\$93,000 in sponsorships have been invoiced.

The Marriott Hotel's ballroom will be undergoing renovations and will ne be available for the Waterfowl Hunters Banquet. An alternative spot closer to Sunnyview Expo Center is being examined.

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

- The Board unanimously approved February's Board minutes.
- The Habitat Committee asked that any tweaks or recommended changes to the Wood Duck Box app be passed onto ED Heidel.
- ED Heidel and Director Ermert will discuss retention options with Joel Kleefisch relative to retaining his lobbying services for SHC hunting and Knowles-Nelson related activities. They will report recommendations to the Board.
- The annual meeting will be held on Saturday, 18 April, from noon to 3:00 PM at the Meat Eater store in Brookfield. An in-person Board meeting will be held at the Brookfield Public Library prior to it.

- **8:14 PM – Meeting Adjourned**

The next BoD meeting will be an in-person meeting at the Brookfield Public Library (1900 N Calhoun Rd, Brookfield, WI 53005) from 10:00 to 11:30 on April 18th.