

## **Friends of the Lower Suwannee & Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges**

### **February 21, 2023, Board Meeting (via Zoom) Minutes**

**Attending:** President Debbie Meeks, President-elect GiNESSA Maher, Treasurer Linda Kimball, Past President Peg Hall, Acting Secretary Paul Ramey, Ed DeHaan, Bill Dummitt, Denise Feiber, Joe Hand, Debbie Jordan, Boyd Kimball, Dan Kline, John McPherson, Jeri Treat.

**Guests:** Ron Kamzelski, Pete Tirrell, Scott Wright

**Representing the Refuge,** Manager Andrew Gude

**Not attending:** John Thalacker, Barbara Woodmansee

President Debbie Meeks called the meeting to order at 10:03 a.m.

1. The meeting agenda was approved with no changes.
2. The Jan. 11, 2023, meeting minutes were approved with no changes.
3. Treasurer's report - Linda Kimball – As of Jan. 31, 2023, the checking account balance is \$3,791.50 with \$205.99 in outstanding checks. The money market account balance is 41,375.81, which includes \$15,000 in the restricted fund set aside for Vista. Including \$110 in petty cash, the Friends' total checking/savings and assets is 45,277.31.  
Linda plans to make some changes to the future profit/loss and actual statements. The treasurer's report was approved by voice vote.
4. Financial review summary – Linda Kimball - The group met Thursday, Feb. 9 to review the financial statement and controls, and continued discussion on how to keep membership dollars vs. donation dollars separate. Currently we are keeping them separate. Peg mentioned the financial summary we receive from Faye and making them easier to understand. The plan is to pilot the new summary with an example shown during the next board meeting. Paul mentioned he has some Thrivent members who have been unsure about where to direct their Choice Dollars, and that if they ask for recommendations, he is recommending they direct them to the Friends, so we may be receiving additional funds this way.
5. Vista Report - John McPherson – Refuge Manager Andrew Gude and John worked on a memorandum of understanding for access to the Vista property, which Andrew approved, but he still has to get approved up the FWS chain. John recommends that we discuss and approve the MOU. John moved and Denise Feiber seconded that we adopt the MOU between FWS and the Friends. It was approved unanimously by voice vote. John will now give it to Andrew for FWS approval.  
Re: insurance, John thinks we need to have it based on everything that we will have going on at Vista. He had hoped to have a quote in time for this meeting but did not receive it. He thinks the cost will be around \$1,200 a year, but will get the quote and send it out to the board. The insurance covers the cost of defense of a frivolous claim or lawsuit against the Friends or board

members. Peg asked how this insurance works with the coverage the Friends has through the state. John stated that coverage may ultimately protect us, but in the meantime, we have to defend ourselves, which requires money to argue our case and pay attorney's fees, which the insurance would cover.

Mark Gluckman – Debbie explained he attended a recent event where Board members wrote notecards to members who had not renewed, and Peg shared information about Vista with him. He was interested and offered to develop a conceptual drawing/rendering of the renovated Vista property to give visitors and potential donors an idea about what we hope to accomplish and help with fundraising efforts. His idea is to come up with a concept and then share it with the board. He's currently reading material on the background and history of the property.

Volunteer form - Debbie will have a volunteer form at the annual meeting for all Board Members to sign.

John will be completing paperwork this week and a timeline, and we should get our first \$15,000 payment from the state soon.

Debbie asked about the needed recognition sign and if it should be permanent. John said the sign is required during the grant period while we're spending money, and that it's probably a good idea to keep it up permanently. He got a quote from Signarama in Gainesville for \$160 and didn't get another quote, but can. Debbie asked about the Print Shop in Chiefland and said they can do signs. Paul asked if the quote included a post for the sign or installation. John said no, it was only for the sign. John will check with the Chiefland Print Shop on a price and if their price is less expensive, he can purchase it there. John made a motion to accept the Signarama quote for \$160 unless the Chiefland Print Shop price is lower, and move forward with purchasing the sign. Dan Kline seconded. The motion was approved unanimously by voice vote.

6. Refuge Update – Manager Andrew Gude - Not much is happening right now, it's just business as usual. Andrew and his staff will clean the shop Thursday in preparation for the annual meeting. The rental chairs and port-a-potty will be delivered Friday.

Andrew mentioned he's planning a volunteer luncheon April 13 for the campground, Shell Mound and Pepper Busters volunteers and asked if the Friends Board should be invited. Debbie said the board should be invited, and typically contributes to it. Andrew explained FWS can cover the cost, but he needs to know how many board members will attend. Andrew's team plans to provide the food in-house, with Jason smoking meat, and no need to hire Ken McCain. Andrew will send an invite to the board.

Andrew plans to attend a motorboat operator training next week in South Florida.

Otherwise it's business as usual, including road maintenance and installing signs for bird nesting season, including Snake Key and Cedar Point.

Peg asked about the number of walk-in visitors at headquarters. Andrew said the center is receiving a lot of visitors, but it's very inconsistent and not a regular flow. For example, there may be six visitors after lunch one day and then another day no one shows up. Debbie asked if we could have Refuge access for Saturdays at the headquarters because of a conflict downtown. Andrew said yes, he would just need to give us access – a key to the gate and building to be able to use the restroom.

Andrew mentioned a tracked wheelchair event that he's working on planning with Boyd, and

said he will work with Debbie on his annual meeting presentation.

7. Visitor Services and Outreach - Debbie feels the Cedar Key Welcome Desk has worked well, but we don't have control over it and don't want to overstay our welcome. Denise agreed it has worked well and that in town, we typically reach more people, and normally it's people who aren't familiar with the Refuge. It was mentioned Friends would like to get back to the Refuge. Ginessa asked for a review and status update about volunteering in Cedar Key and on the Refuge. A lengthy discussion followed. Debbie said in the past the board had not wanted to be on the Refuge alone because of liability and being at the chamber had been great on the porch on Saturday. Bill Dummitt said we've never had visitor contact on weekends at the Refuge and it would be good to try it and evaluate. Ginessa agreed and also mentioned there is high activity at Shell Mound on the weekends. Denise plans to change the Cedar Key welcome desk signup sheet for volunteers to work on Sundays. Debbie mentioned Andrew would like all volunteers to sign the volunteer form.

Donation boxes have been installed at Refuge Headquarters and at the Suwannee Library, with a third box available to use at festivals and visitor contacts.

Debbie reported new signs and guides are being printed, and mentioned she and John Stark are attending the national Friends workshop in April.

Peg and Debbie also worked on a story about how budget cuts have affected the Refuge and presented it during a recent Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates online workshop.

8. EcoRover - Boyd Kimball discussed the EcoRover, which is a brand name for a tracked wheelchair. A previously scheduled event on the Refuge last year on Dec. 9 was canceled, but now EcoRover wants to restart the program. There's been discussion about possibly doing a demonstration event in December, with the idea being to establish the Refuge as a place for people with disabilities to visit. The Friends of EcoRover group now would need \$500 to do a demonstration event. Thomas Griffin with the Friends of EcoRover has offered to solicit money for the demonstration event, and to promote our event, and Boyd asked if the Board is comfortable with the Refuge and Friends being listed on the EcoRover website and with EcoRover soliciting donations. The second question is whether the Board would be in favor of supporting the event if EcoRover doesn't raise \$500? Boyd suggested maybe \$100, or possibly adding it to our wish list. Seminole State Forest has an arrangement with EcoRover, and the wheelchairs are free of charge for those with disabilities. Ed DeHaan asked about the cost, which is about \$9,000. Boyd also mentioned this is a nationwide trend for parks and forests acquiring these and providing access to those with disabilities. Denise said if there is no conflict in the bylaws it sounds like a wonderful event to help encourage those with disabilities to visit the Refuge. Peg asked what a demonstration event looked like? Boyd explained it would be an opportunity for people to see and try the EcoRover at the Refuge. Ron Kamzelski asked how an EcoRover would be used at the Refuge? Boyd's initial thought was on the River Trail and possibly on the Vista property. Peg said it would be great to have one at the annual meeting or a solstice event so everyone could see what they are and how they operate. Boyd added the EcoRover Friends group is a 501(c)3 and he recommended everyone check their website. He will continue exploring the possibility of a demo event on the Refuge.

9. Law enforcement coverage on the Refuge - Andrew again brought up the challenge and issue of law enforcement coverage for Refuge hunts and public safety in general. There will be no full-time law enforcement until April with Officer Sterling Valentine out with knee surgery. Andrew doesn't feel we're meeting the need for law enforcement and public safety and believes we really should have three or four times what we have. He also mentioned possibly canceling hunts if no law enforcement coverage is available. Ed DeHaan believes this is an area where we could have some impact by contacting our congressional leaders. Paul mentioned if we had some type of form letter that board members or other friends could send out to their congressional leaders that would be helpful. Peg reminded the group we aren't allowed as a Friends Group in the partnership agreement to lobby, and Ginessa suggested we double-check the agreement to make sure we aren't overstepping the terms.
10. Annual meeting - Board members' names are listed in red for assigned duties for this Saturday's annual meeting.

Linda said someone with FWC contacted her about a printer in Jacksonville who died and has lots of artists prints and extra printers proofs of wildlife that could be given away free and made available to use as fundraisers. She said Audubon wants to use the birds and would we want the others? Scott asked about possible copyright issues with the artists' images and it was mentioned there shouldn't be an issue because the artist has already been paid a fee for the art. Linda will bring the deer and fox to the annual meeting so everyone can see them and see about possibly selling them if there's interest.

Denise was inviting some friends to the annual meeting but then realized they're vegetarians and asked about vegetarian food options. It would be nice to plan ahead for possible vegetarian options in the future.

Paul asked about the cost for non-members to attend the annual meeting. The cost is \$20, but that's the price of an individual membership, so most people join Friends at the meeting.
11. New board member orientation- Debbie can revise the information from a few years ago. Peg mentioned Cathy Allen's webinar could be a good orientation, and we could add to it if needed. Debbie will send a link to the board after the annual meeting.
12. Doug Sanders, the author who wrote a book on the Cummers, is interested in speaking for a Vista fundraiser. Discussion ensued on whether anyone had heard him speak. It was suggested Peg and Debbie set up a Zoom call with the author to evaluate his speaking ability and determine if he wants to speak generally about Vista or primarily advertise and promote his book.
13. Merchandise - Boyd mentioned we are getting closer to having printed note cards, and the committee is thinking of selling sets of six 4-by-5 ½-inch cards for \$14 or \$15. There is a folder in Dropbox with potential images for everyone to view. The plan is to print maybe 100 initially for a trial run and see how they sell.
14. River Trail maintenance and upkeep - John Thalacker's report is available in Dropbox.

15. Junior Ranger Program - Debbie - the project was officially launched in Dixie County and will launch in Levy County at the annual meeting. Peg reported Sue Colson with the Cedar Key Chamber is interested in running the Junior Ranger program as part of their summer program for children in Cedar Key and would need about 60 books. The cost from the Alachua printer was about \$8 each for the current printing. It was mentioned we had a request on Facebook for one of the Junior Ranger books to be mailed. Debbie mentioned it's also available on the website for download.
  
16. National Environmental Education Foundation Pollinator grant - The group is offering a grant from between 50,000 to \$100,000 for improving pollinator habitat. Pete Terrell looked into it but did not think we would be able to have the proposal ready by the March deadline. Debbie also feels we could not complete the application by the deadline. During the meeting Paul looked at the National Environmental Education Foundation website and found that what is due in March is the letter of intent to apply for the grant. They will then review the letters of intent and invite selected applicants to apply for the grant.  
The date timeline is:  
LOI deadline: March 10, 2023  
Finalists invited to submit Application: April 10, 2023  
Application due: May 10, 2023  
Paul plans to follow up with UF lepidopterist Jaret Daniels and Friends Board member and Refuge butterfly expert Barbara Woodmansee on the possibility of submitting a letter of intent by the March 10 deadline.
  
17. Membership - Debbie – Membership numbers are up and asked for ideas on keeping members engaged. Peg has been helping engage members and Jeri asked if there are other ways we could engage members, like workdays for example. Debbie mentioned the upcoming Vista workday as a possible way to engage more members. Paul mentioned the windshield cards that he and Friend's past president Greg Lang have been distributing on trucks during hunting season in the Refuge. Debbie shared her screen and showed the board the cards. Denise recommended this would be a good time to reevaluate the information on the cards and possibly revise them before reprinting.
  
18. Online communications – Peg - Peg sent the news brief on Valentine's Day, and the talk that Debbie and Denise did was well received. We had 10 new signups and now we're at 590 people receiving the news brief. 600 people opened the last news brief. The most popular items were meet the board, the annual meeting, the wish list, and the Seahorse Key open house. For the website we have updated the home page and had 13 blog post updates. Facebook has been more useful since Debbie and Ginessa have been regularly updating and being more active on the page. Jeri mentioned many of the orders online are from out of state, and most of them are not members.
  
19. Butterfly report/update - Barbara Woodmansee's report is available in Dropbox and she's pleased with the support she's getting.

20. Swallow-tailed kite – We aren't getting updates/reports from our swallow-tailed kite.
21. Pepper Busters update- John Thalacker submitted a report in Dropbox. Scott Wright gave a brief update and said they have also been removing peppers on private property. He also mentioned the UF program using thrips, a small fly, that eats new growth on the peppers to keep them from growing. Peg said she thought a story about what the Pepper Busters do would be well-received.
22. Open discussion – The board was reminded to bring desserts to the annual meeting. Boyd also asked for pictures from the Wakulla event from those willing to share.

President Debbie Meeks adjourned the meeting at 12:10 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by Acting Secretary Paul Ramey