

Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges

January Board Meeting Minutes

1/16/2024

Recorded by Pete Tirrell

Present:

Ginessa Mahar, Denise Feiber, Debbie Meeks, Boyd Kimball, Linda Kimball, Peg Hall, John Thalacker, Dan Kline, John McPherson, Jeri Treat, Barbara Woodmansee, Debbie Jordan, Bill Dummitt, Scott Wright, Peter Tirrell

Representing the Refuge: Andrew attempted to call in but bad connection

Guests: Chuck Adams

Approval Items

- Accept or modify the agenda
Vote: Motion to approve agenda by Debbie M, seconded by Denise F, approved by all
- Approve Minutes from previous Board Meeting
 - [Link to December board minutes](#)**Vote: Motion to approve minutes by Denise F, seconded by John T, approved by all**
- Treasurer's Report
 - [Link to Dropbox folder for January financials](#)**Checking balance ~ \$4089, Money market balance ~ \$54000**
Denise is disputing overcharge in billing for teabags by Plantations.
Vote: Motion to approve treasurer's report by Debbie M, seconded by Scott W, approved by all

Refuge Update

- Andrew and John are in meetings all day.

Andrew was unable to report due to connection issues.

Discussion Items

- Two-Year Planning Meeting Review (Crystal River, FL)
 - Discuss actionables resulting from retreat discussions, activities, and surveys

[Planning Meeting notes \(Debbie M\)](#)

**GiNESSa and Debbie led discussion on planning meeting retreat in Crystal River
Toured friends of Crystal River visitor center**

Lunch

Tour boat ride

Digital initiatives survey 3 categories derived from Mission statement:

Advocacy, Awareness, and Refuge support

Played game to match initiatives to category

Next morning working meeting

Andrew 6 major actionables/projects for the refuge

- **Develop Vista for resident volunteers**
- **Outreach including Friends website**
- **Signage improvements and updates**
- **Trailer improvements for outreach**
- **Junior Ranger program and citizen science initiatives**
- **Public safety and law enforcement**

Andrew overall priorities ongoing

- **Rebuild, repair damaged or aging facilities improve safety, access**
- **Forestry practices, restoration projects**
- **Plant surveys**
- **Support resident volunteers and refuge volunteers**
- **Road maintenance**
- **Hydrologic restoration**

Scott W discussed with Andrew about successor John S? Consistency and continuation of support. Hope that John Stark will be able to take over as manager. John T what can friends do to influence selection of John S. as manager. Peg: Advocacy group discussion question of what if refuge was destaffed (worst case scenario) what would friends do to prevent that.

SWOT exercise Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats

3 groups Advocacy, Awareness, and Refuge support

Refuge support: Scott W and Debbie M summarized

- **John M recommends board hire executive manager/director, 6 months of salary should provide time to find way to fund themselves. Not necessarily full time.**
- **Debbie M Vista projects**
- **Could friends get grants to fund rebuild of river walk?**
- **Interpretive signage**
- **Volunteer coordinator**
- **Andrew hire another resident volunteer to manage volunteers**

Awareness: Denise F summarized

- **Brochures: identify most important, phase out obsolete seldom used, place best in local businesses**

- Bookshop.org link on website, list of books of interest. Ginessa: books for Senior ranger program
- Improving signage add sign outside welcome center
- Place to park trailer

Advocacy: Peg H and Ginessa summarized

- Why do advocacy? Who cares besides us? Who would be hurt if refuge diminished.
- Aqualcultural interests, chamber of commerce, more local political advocates, native american groups
- Gather data, how many people visit?
- Congressional updates
- Reactive instead of proactive
- Local economy
- Rest rooms: more needed

Actionable items review led by Debbie M

- Cell service, call providers
- Law enforcement Don't want people to think refuge is unsafe
- Citizen refuge watch, incident report
- Expanding nature walks and talks, reach out to organization
- Signup sheet for volunteers at annual meeting
- Solstice events
- 2024 Vista grant
- Native plant landscaping yard/gardens at Vista, volunteer maintained
- Mapping out river trail extension
- Could Friends rebuild the River Trail boardwalks faster and cheaper than FWS with grants and contractors
- Volunteer coordinator
- Involvement with CORFA
- Champion for initiatives, point of contact
- List possible advocates and influencers

What can we do? What are possible? Every actionable should have a champion. Presidential trio to refine list that will be presented to board. Denise F to work on first draft of list.

Individuals can propose themselves as a champion.

Barbara W wants to champion native plant landscaping at Vista

John T River trail champion

Scott W location of parking for trailer

Ginessa curate list of books

John M will continue working on Vista grants and deadlines

Ginessa contact for Native American support

- Adopt budget for this fiscal year (Budget Committee)
 - Is the budget prepped and ready for review by the board, or is more time needed?

Linda reviewed the budget worksheet.

Peg, Ginessa: if we can't fund raise for something we can't do it.

Peg: not set in stone, will adapt and adjust

Vote: Motion to approve budget by Peg H, seconded by Scott W, approved by all

- Annual Meeting Preparation
 - Volunteers needed to help with planning, set up, and take down.
 - Review what is in the works and what needs to happen

[Annual Meeting Planning document \(Debbie M\)](#)

Debbie M walked us through annual meeting planning document

Cynthia Barnett and Brandon Imhoff (Unlimited States of Mobility) to speak

Linda and Jeri registration table

Silent auction or things in shed to sell with volunteer Donna Bushnell

Tables around pond, merch on porch, trailer in area

Boyd 3 tables for merch, volunteers to help, Dan K, Denise, Heather, Square ability

Trailer could be outreach location

3 tents in case of bad weather

Recruit non-board volunteers for initiatives

Events

Boyd: Will board approve \$300 to pay Brandon Imhoff, Kimbals and Dan Kline to pay \$100 for total of \$500 for payment. Possibly raise funds to cover.

Vote: Motion to approve up to \$300 payment by Denise, second by Ginessa, approved by all

Brandon talk after Cynthia Barnett then demonstration of mobility equipment at

Vista

Tour Vista area: nature walk to Vista, tour of main house and cooks house

Full schedule no other formal events

Increase food budget? Vegetarian options? Increase budget to cover veg option

\$100?

ADA toilet and wash station: Debbie

Andrew attempted to call in, not happening, will check later in week

Need more tables and chairs last year 100 chairs.

Get 120 chairs and 5 additional tables for this year,

Bill D will get from PRE Event

In future greener cutlery

Drinks Barbara 2g lemonades, 2g tea, Dan 2 sweet tea, desserts by board and any other members, water by refuge

Other stuff:

Debbie M more new donors than ever 60

Presidential meeting Thurs follow up with board via email

John M will continue as registered agent for Friends, annual registration report

Adjourn 12:13pm

Votes:

Vote: Motion to approve agenda by Debbie M, seconded by Denise F, approved by all

Vote: Motion to approve minutes by Denise F, seconded by John T, approved by all

Vote: Motion to approve treasurer's report by Debbie M, seconded by Scott W, approved by all

Vote: Motion to approve budget by Peg H, seconded by Scott W, approved by all

Vote: Motion to approve up to \$300 payment to Brandon Imhoff by Denise, second by Ginessa, approved by all

Appendix

Debbie Meeks notes from Friends retreat

Friends Retreat- Crystal River

January 11-12, 2024

- Ginessa reviews mission statement and the goals of Friends group.

Mission Buckets exercise

The three prongs of the mission statement, advocacy, awareness, Refuge support are written on the easel paper. Sticky notes with current and wishful initiatives are stuck on the easel around the mission prong each one illustrates. Red indicates a hot Refuge topic.

Advocacy – actionable change

- Law enforcement
- Interns
- Seahorse Visitation
- Open Houses
- Petitions/letter writing

- Member Relations
- Junior/Senior Ranger
- Hunter info

Awareness – education

- Trail Maps/Brochures
- Festival booths
- Talks/Lectures
- Fundraising/Stewardship/Grants
- CK Outreach desk
- Guided walks
- Jr/Sr Ranger
- Merchandise
- Online Communications
- Signage
- Social Media
- Newsletter
- Outreach Trailer
- Solstice Celebrations

Physical Support – improvements to the refuge

- ADA trails
- Trail work
- Partnerships
- Invasive Control (pepper busting)
- Science (pollinator surveys, iNaturalist, swallowtail kite)
- Shell Mound Educational Center
- Vista Cook's House Visitor Center
- Vista Landscape

- Denise introduces the SWOT
- Andrew
 - 6 major actionables/projects for the refuge
 - Develop Vista for resident volunteers (caper pad, sewage, etc), Cook's House
 - Outreach (includes Friends website)
 - Signage – needs improvement and updates
 - Brochures (trying to transition out of, but there is a lack of service for online materials)
 - Interpretive signage
 - Trail of Tears, Andrew wants to work with UF and Debbie Meeks to design, going to NCBS, downtown CK, on Seahorse Key
 - Outreach trailer – outfit for comfort for vols, wants to fund as much as possible to get it going and keep it going

- Junior Ranger – get it on autopilot and make sure it has what it needs to continue.
Also Sr ranger, need to develop this
 - Modules, talking points
- Citizen Science
 - Supporting our partners, pollinator surveys, 220 miles of roads and trails need signage and maintenance
- Overall priorities
 - Public safety and resource protection, law enforcement?
 - Staff development and training, and prep for staff changes, includes vols
 - Support to rebuild aging facilities for public use, those that are closed or otherwise unsafe (inc the river trail boardwalk – have to get that back up and running, our only ADA accessible viewing and river viewing)
 - Forestry practices, biggest restoration project, getting to desired future conditions, plant surveys where work has not been completed (getting that understory under control, proscribed burn, pine ecosystem)
 - Plant survey, how well are we doing? Fire, mechanical clearing, herbicide
 - Advocate for a standard refuge burn, the fire crew is no longer coming to burn, unacceptable
 - Resident volunteers, support all refuge volunteers
 - Continue 200 mile road maintenance
 - Support Friends – Vista, advocacy, Jr ranger, other programming
 - Hydrologic restoration project continuation

SWOT exercise

Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats

Strengths

- Volunteer Expertise
- Large and growing membership
- Robust Communications- newsletter, website, social
- CORFA network and partnerships
- Robust outreach
- Volunteer labor
- **ADA Outreach Initiative**

Weaknesses

- Lack of focus on advocacy
- Poor cell coverage (public safety)
- Lack of law enforcement
- Not tapping into broader membership
- We don't distinguish between seasonal/full-time residents
- Inconsistent contact with hunters

- Getting face time with membership to get buy-in for initiatives
- No trails for ADA

Opportunities

- Subcommittees- pull in membership to serve on them
- Interns? Partner with NCBS? _____ tasks, professionalization
- Outreach to orgs looking for field trips. Provide tours/talks etc.
- More engagement with membership to facilitate buy-in
- Improve signage on loop road to make more engaging. Identify habitats along route.
- CK Welcome Center/ Library to showcase Refuge
- Partners- Native Plant society, UF, NCBS, FLMNH
- Mechanism to report issues or safety issues. Signage for reporting incidents.
- Contact cell provider to improve reception
- Prepare Refuges need for LE over other refuges
- Explore CORFA's org to rest of board
- Butterfly plant garden at Vista. Native garden walk.

Threats

- Defunding law enforcement
- Lack of public safety
- Illegal hunting/shooting, alcohol consumption, digging
- Possible shutdown/closure of refuge due to safety
- Storms, property loss and destruction
- **BURNOUT**

Results of the initiatives survey

- Might have to decrease the focus on some initiatives, increase on others
- Use results to inform break-out group discussions

Break-Out Groups

In small groups, plan 2 year goals for some of the initiatives in each of the mission buckets from the exercise above- advocacy, awareness, and physical support

Advocacy- Discussion members: Jay, Peg, Pete, Ginessa, John S

- Has been more reactive, than proactive, limited to interests active board members
- Trying to influence change-makers
- Have focused more on Washington DC and the FWS
 - Perhaps more focus on the local politicians so that they can then place pressure on the Fed gov't
 - E.g. need good water to support the aquaculture
 - The local impact of the refuge is important to local stakeholders,
 - More one on one with stakeholders, and influencers
 - If the refuge closes, what are the consequences for the local economy? To aquaculture?

- Partner with NCBS to find how the refuge serves the local environment, supports aquaculture, also with Leslie Sturmer to advocate for the refuge with clambers and her network
- Invite local congressperson to the refuge, perhaps during a Jr ranger event – be sure to also hammer home the notion of how critical the refuge is for the economy, how important law enforcement is to keeping the refuge open functioning and safe
- Kat Commack – appears sympathetic to the refuge, and safety and hunting
- CORFA and NWRA as helpful partners in advocacy
- Perhaps tap into the Seminole Tribe and other Tribes, add them to our influencers list in terms of both advocating for the refuge and law enforcement (artifact looting)
- Perhaps getting a [people counter](#) for the refuge entrance, need a place for folks to sign in and where they are from
- Have centered on the Board members as advocates, need to tap into membership more
- Bi-partisan initiatives have been successful – e.g. the toll road
- Must have different messages for different stakeholders
- Need both letter writers and folks to do the one on one communications and influencing
- Letter templates to provide them, there might be people who are interested, CK advocates get together and decide on what to target – we could partner with them
- Law Enforcement, ADA Accessibility, Importance of Refuge to local/state economy
- <https://www.visitflorida.org/resources/education/accessible-florida/>
- Bathrooms – need something at the river trail, also needs up keep and cleaning, about 50K for a self-contained toilet
 - Resistance to porta potties due to folks pushing them over, how to prevent this to be able to have the proper facilities
 - Can we fund raise to get a toilet, can we write a grant?
 - How to get rid of the barrier to getting a toilet at the river trail/vista?
- Congressional updates, a short blurb about our activities and send it out to all who are involved, local, state, fed reps.
- Advocacy Summary
 - Targeting influencers (Tribes, local and fed and, community, agencies)
 - Getting data to use to help with advocacy
 - ADA accessibility, River Trail
 - Law Enforcement
 - Toilets

Awareness- *Discussion members: Heather Evans, Denise, Jeri, Ron*

- Refine brochures- don't print as many
- New Friends brochure with an application for membership
- Get brochures into the restaurants and businesses.
- iGuide map display outside in CK, esp when the welcome center is closed, maybe at the library
- Trackers for the webpages to see where people are accessing information

- Bookshop.org – help selling butterfly books and can help to generate funds
- Book of the month on the website, a reading list on website to learn more
- Contact local news when we do something photogenic

Physical Support- *Discussion members: Debbie M, John M, Scott, Ann Kamzelski, Andrew*

- What will Vista look like in the next 2 years
 - Garden plan, Cook's house- continue renovating, Main house- maintenance but not open to public
- We can work on the river trail as a Friends group, perhaps even make repairs to get it up and running since Fed help with it is several years away
 - E.g. we are replacing a roof much cheaper than the Fed are able to do it
- Interpretive Signage
 - Vista timeline like Seahorse Key, habitat signage,
- Volunteer coordinator- big job for a Friends volunteer. Possibly another resident volunteer opportunity
- Explore getting a part-time executive director, possibly funding with Friends resources at first then they would self-fund through writing grants
 - Cost share with other organizations

Action Items

- Cell Provider campaign- involve membership.
- Law Enforcement campaign- signage to communicate the need, letter writing. Communicate the Refuge's need for LE over other refuges
- Citizen Refuge Watch- hunters policing themselves. Signage listing illegal activities with phone numbers to call. Signs to be sponsored by Friends. Incident Report Mechanism on the website
- Nature walks/talks- expand the program with partners like Native Plant society, UF, NCBS, FLMNH. Reach out to orgs looking for field trips rather than scheduling something and hoping people come.
- Sign-in sheet for member volunteers at annual meeting and explain our needs during presentation.
- Continue to hold Winter Solstice in Cedar Key and Summer Solstice at Shell Mound when we partner with FPAN and FPTA.
- Apply for Div. of Historical Resources Vista grant in 2024
- Bird and Butterfly landscaping at Vista. Demonstration of how a yard can be converted to native plants and habitat. Possible partners: FL Native Plant Society, UF Natural History Museum, UF Landscape Architecture school, Master Gardeners.
- Map out the River Trail extension to Vista as a shovel-ready project.
- Explore whether Friends could rebuild the River Trail boardwalks faster and cheaper than FWS with grants and a contractor.
- Recruit a volunteer coordinator to organize our events and outreach scheduling. Possibly a camper volunteer.
- Explore getting a part-time executive director, possibly funding with Friends resources at first then they would self-fund through writing grants
- Bookshop.org and book-of-the-month on the website
- Get brochures into local businesses- [Ian Maki at the Firefly Inn is a life member]
- Improve signage on Nature Drive to make more engaging. Identify habitats along route.

- CK Welcome Center/ Library to showcase Refuge
- Explore CORFA's org to rest of board
- Find a place to use the trailer for outreach in downtown Cedar Key

Take aways

- Having champions, committees are hard, so one person has a particular initiative in mind and keeps tabs on it – they don't have to do everything, but if we don't have a champion for an initiative then perhaps we don't do it
 - Less diffusion of responsibility, provides more accountability
- Thanks to Andrew and John, Heather and Ann for participating
- We need to do this annually, and also flip it to have the meeting first then the activities after

2024 Friends Annual Meeting Planning

2024 Friends Annual Meeting – Check List Meeting Date: Saturday, February 24, 2024

● Tasks in Advance

- Arrange for a featured speaker- **done, Cynthia Barnett, Brandon Imhoff**
- Put a notice in the News Brief
- Post to Facebook
- Postal mail LYBUNT letters with a handwritten note 2 weeks in advance.
- Inventory the name tags, plates, cups, etc.
- Reserve 100 chairs from PRE Event in Gainesville. \$1.75/chair. Delivery \$115, non-refundable damage fee \$17.50.
- Find out if we still have the large chairs, consider mixing them with the rented chairs since some people complained that the rentals are uncomfortable.
- Reserve 1 ADA portable toilets and 1 wash station from Jones Septic. See if there is a different company we can use because the unit arrived dirty and damaged in 2023. Ask Robin Gallup if she will be the contact for delivery.
- Reserve Kenny McCain for catering. Get a vegetarian option from ABC Pizza (352)-493-1432 in Chiefland or other. A \$1500 cap on food was perfect in 2023 for 110 people.
- Make a large sign to direct people to Check-In

● Setup -8:30 AM Saturday

- Get tables from the Fowlers Bluff fire station.
- Set up chairs in the workshop for the presentation not too close to the screen.
- Set up presentation computer, projector and screen.
- Allow for desserts on the steel shop table, drinks on the tool cabinet next to it.
- Setup eating tables on the concrete apron. Use paper tablecloths (roll of brown paper?) and secure with clips purchased in 2023. Some of the tables to be moved into the shade in the shop for lunch when the presentation is over.

- Set up information tables in a semi-circle in the shade in the butterfly garden
 - **Membership Check-In** -Linda and Jeri *Note: move Check-In near the shop when the presentation is about to start to catch latecomers and also so Linda and Jeri can hear the presentation.*
 - 2 separated tables to form 2 lines
 - long tables so people can fill out membership forms to one side
 - Write the agenda on the portable white board and position near Check-In
 - Stick on name tags with borders
 - New membership forms (print 25)
 - Print 2 copies of the list of all members with expiration date of most their recent membership level . Other columns are: √, Status (“current” if applicable otherwise blank), checkbox for cash, amount and level of last membership. If the person is a new member they will be directed to fill out a membership form to be entered into DonorSnap later.
 - Cash box seeded with small denominations
 - **Merchandise** on porch- Boyd, Dan, Denise, Heather
 - Discounts on t-shirts?
 - Cash box seeded with small denominations
 - Square on phones and logged into Friends account
 - **Junior/Senior Ranger**
 - **Volunteer/ Get Involved**
 - **Refuge**
 - iGuide poster
 - Barbara’s coffee table book
 - Barbara’s butterfly books
 - **Meeting Events** (Vista Tour and River Walk)
 - It wasn’t clear to people where and when the tours started- try sign-up sheets. Convert info tables to meeting places for the tours after the talks
 - Offer something for people who don’t want to walk. Some ideas are marine mammal rescue presentation, prescribed burn presentation or demonstration, butterfly, plant or bird identification workshop.
 - **Silent Auction**- Linda and Jeri handled art prints behind Check-In in 2023 but it might be better to have a separate location.
 - Auction sheet with columns for name, phone number and bid
- **Lunch – plan for 120 people (\$1500 cap in 2023- there were few leftovers)**
 - Move tables and chairs to get ready for lunch
 - Lunch - Kenny McCain– note: Kenny provides meat, beans, coleslaw, potato casserole
 - Drinks – 2 gallons sweet tea, 2 unsweet tea, 2 lemonade

- Ice –Refuge has ice machine
- Desserts –board members provide them
- Dinnerware inventory
 - _____ dinner plates
 - _____ dessert plates
 - _____ bowls
 - _____ forks
 - _____ spoons
 - _____ knives
 - _____ 8 oz Styrofoam cups
 - _____ 16 oz plastic cups
 - _____ 9 oz plastic cups
 - _____ 8 oz paper cups
 - _____ dinner napkins
 - 18 rolls of paper towels
 - _____ boxes of large ziploc bags

● **Post event follow ups**

- Thank you letters to Kenny and Rose McCain, speaker, Robin, others who helped
- Publish a Thank You on the website, Facebook
- Update the contact list with emails, phone numbers for current board and active volunteers
- Pay Kenny
- Pay for rental chairs

● **IT tasks- post-election**

- Update DonorSnap auto-email signature with new president's signature- online form acknowledgement, Email PDF acknowledgment, Automated Task Manager.
- Update email forwarding- include the presidential trio, treasurer, the merchandise and membership teams
- Update Weebly board member page
- Enter the new and renewing members into DonorSnap and generate the acknowledgment letters
- Update the member page on the website
- Update Mailchimp with any new News Brief subscribers
- Update Guidestar with the current president
- Post annual meeting minutes on website and in Dropbox