

**Friends of Refuges Board Meeting
Refuge Headquarters
September 12, 2011**

Attending: Ron Black, Jay Bushnell, Mark Gluckman, Peg Hall, Russ Hall, Richard Herman, John McPherson, Jerry Salamon, Acting Refuge Manager Dr. Candace Carter, Refuge Ranger Pam Darty

Not attending: Ed DeHaan, Sean Dowie, Bob Hudson, Michelle Pearson, John Thalacker, Marci Wilcox;
Russ Hall agreed to keep the minutes in Bob Hudson's absence

President Peg Hall called the meeting to order at 10 AM, and distributed information items to attendees.

Richard Herman moved that the minutes of the July meeting be approved, and Jay Bushnell seconded the motion. It passed unanimously.

President Peg Hall began by suggesting the attendees think about whether an October board meeting might be cancelled and the time reserved for the many committee meetings that would be needed. She suggested that the question be deferred until later in this meeting, after discussion of the various committee assignments.

Jerry Salamon distributed the treasurer's report for the month of July, and stated that the report for August would be unchanged from the July report. A brief discussion ensued about the cost of the *Ibis*, and it was generally agreed that the topic be considered formally in a later meeting.

President Peg Hall led a wide-ranging discussion on the question of enhancing member involvement for both board members and general members. Issues discussed included the following:

- Pulling in non-board members to take on committee work and other assignments
- Expanding the membership committee to include recruitment and retention components
- Establishing a budget committee; unlike the Financial Review Committee, this one would engage in planning

A call for volunteers for the various committees resulted in the following:

- Budget Committee – Mark Gluckman
- Financial Review Committee – Jay Bushnell, Jerry Salamon
- Membership Committee – Jay Bushnell
- Nominating Committee (Peg reported that Donna Thalacker had volunteered)
- John McPherson is willing to serve on whichever one needs him.

Report on the Advocacy Committee: Jay Bushnell and Mark Gluckman reported on the September 6 meeting. A wide-ranging discussion ensued about the role of the Friends in advocacy, data collection, and related matters.

President Peg Hall said that she would not be available to help with the Friends booth at the Cedar Key Seafood Festival. Some others would not be able to participate, and it was suggested that Bob Hudson or Marci Wilcox might be asked to lead the effort.

Ron Black gave a report on volunteer activities at Shell Mound. It was noted that two of the five people on this team are not Friends members. It was moved by Richard Herman and seconded by John

McPherson that they be made honorary members. The motion was passed unanimously. It was then noted that the courtesy of an honorary membership be offered to the other volunteer. The suggestion was approved by unanimous consent.

Presentations: Jay Bushnell reported on Friends sponsored talks scheduled at the Cedar Key Library.

- Carol Lippincott was scheduled for the September 24 talk cancelled, and instead Jay will give one on bees
- Franklin Percival is scheduled to give a talk on research on the refuges on global climate change on October 27
- Ken Sulak is scheduled to give one on Suwannee sturgeon research on November 3

Richard Herman reported on the 2011 Great Suwannee River Cleanup. Our day will be December 3. He suggested that we brief incoming Refuge Manager Andrew Gude as soon as possible. Jay reminded us that the success of last year's effort was highly dependent on logistical and staff work provided by the refuges.

Mark Gluckman and Russ Hall reported on the Friends' Paddling Project.

Pam Darty reported on status of the Fish and Wildlife Service grant to produce paddling guides. Some discussion ensued, and it was suggested to hold it until a later meeting of the paddling committee.

Jay Bushnell and Ron Black reported on their work to update the kiosk and storyboards. They suggested involving the Cedar Key Arts Center to help with layout and design.

Pam Darty gave a report on happenings at the refuges. Some staff members were doing disaster relief related to hurricane damage in North Carolina. Others were fighting wildfires in Texas. The refuges will be getting a modular environmental education building soon. The expected arrival date of Refuge Manager Gude is September 29. There is an issue concerning whether to hand over management of the LSNWR hunting program to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.

Russ Hall proposed an item of new business for an upcoming meeting. He had forgotten to bring along copies, and will be circulating them with these minutes.

The next meeting was scheduled for Monday, November 7 from 10Am to 11:30 AM.

Proposed *New Business* for our October Meeting (Submitted by Russ Hall)

As was highlighted in a recent post from the NWRA, current federal deficit reduction policies will challenge our National Wildlife Refuges with severe cuts in personnel and operating funds. We have already heard that our refuges may lose the Assistant Refuge Manager position, and other positions may follow. With talk of closing some refuges, we will be fortunate if partial cutbacks prove to be the worst of it for us.

This impending situation poses a challenge and an opportunity for the Friends organization. The challenge will be to find the most effective ways of helping the refuges overcome the likely hardships. The opportunity will be for us to become a more goal-driven and effective organization, thereby finding increased satisfaction in what we are able to accomplish.

I can't see us conducting controlled burns or working with road maintenance crews. And we certainly could not replace lost revenues with the proceeds from our tee shirt sales. But maybe there are things we can do to relieve certain burdens on the staff, perhaps at the same time help build support for the refuges among the citizenry, and maybe even grow membership and participation in our Friends organization.

Suppose, for example, we were able to recruit enough people to staff a visitor contact station, initially at the kiosk near at the River Trail, and ultimately at the Vista facility. This could be building on the great work Ron and his group is doing at Shell Mound and taking it up a notch. Let's say we had enough volunteers* to have two people there from 9 AM to 3:30 PM on weekends and holidays, year round. We could welcome visitors and hand out materials, much as we do at our festival booths. And we could guide visitors on the River Trail and the Loop Road, being a semi-official presence on the refuge at times when the paid staff would be off.

This is only one idea, maybe not the best one, and maybe impractical. It's just an example of where we might go if we keep needs and opportunities in mind as we plan for 2012 and beyond.

I propose that we give Refuge Manager Andrew Gude a bit of time to get his feet on the ground, then plan a special meeting with him, perhaps in December. With him we would explore ways in which the Friends can help ensure a better future for the refuges. Peg will have completed the Friends Academy by then and may come back brimming with ideas. In the meantime the rest of us can engage in our private brainstorming sessions.

Russ

* Given my personal situation, I could imagine volunteering for one whole weekend every third week, with flexibility to adjust for travel and contingencies. To make it work, we would need a minimum of 7 other people willing to make similar commitments. Perhaps others could commit for more frequent but shorter time slots.