

Draft Minutes of the August 2022 Board Meeting

Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges

The meeting was held on Zoom because in recent meetings the slow Refuge internet has made it too difficult for all board members to participate fully.

In attendance: Officers and Directors Ed DeHaan, Denise Feiber, Peg Hall, Joe Hand, Debbie Jordan, Dan Kline, Boyd Kimball, Linda Kimball, Ginessa Mahar, Debbie Meeks, John McPherson, Paul Ramey, John Thalacker, Barbara Woodmansee, and Refuge Manager Andrew Gude.

Absent: Bill Dummitt, Travis Thomas

President Debbie Meeks called the meeting to order at 10:00.

Approval Items:

1. The agenda was accepted as proposed
2. The Minutes of the July Board Meeting were accepted as drafted
3. Treasurer's Report and Financial statements were approved as reviewed and discussed by Linda.

Refuge Update by Andrew and discussion of the projects in response to board member questions:

1. Hydrologic Restoration: The Refuge is applying to NOAA and to the State of Florida for funding to fully implement the hydrologic restoration on the Dixie Mainline and Levy Nature Drive as it was recommended by the recently concluded engineering report.

There was discussion of Friends helping to design interpretive panels to provide information to the public about this project. Such a project would begin when funding is confirmed.

2. Oyster Reef Enhancement: The Refuge has received US Army Corps permits for Corrigan's Reef oyster restoration to protect that land, which serves as shorebird nesting habitat. The project would install jute mat artificial reefs, similar to those already in use in Cedar Key along G Street. Andrew has applied for a FL Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) permit for this project. DEP people are coming on Friday for a site visit at Corrigan's Reef as well as a tour of Shell Mound and the Cedar Key area. He also plans to show them the erosion on Snake Key, where he would like to apply the same devices as on the G Street Living Shoreline. The installation would be held until next spring when oyster spat would build up the artificial reefs.
3. Storage Shed: The shed that the Friends share with the Refuge that houses our collective supplies, is in need of replacement. John Stark hosted a safety audit and the Refuge was told to deal with the rotting wood on the one side. We feel that we just need a new shed. This apparently used to be the Friends Office before the Fire Building was built.

Discussion and Decision Items

1. Vista- John M.

John described the need to modify the grant proposal Friends made to the FL Division of Historical Resources(DHR) for work on Vista. DHR has approved the grant, agreed to modify our request, and provided us with a contract to sign. According to the agreement, the full amount of \$60,000 from DHR and \$15,000 in matching money from Friends would be used for repairs to the Cook House instead of having some of the funds used to repair the houseboat.

Motion: A motion was made, seconded, and approved unanimously to authorize John McPherson, or Friends President Debbie Meeks if so requested by DRH, to sign a contract accepting the DHR grant with the amendment to use the full funding for repairs to the Cook House.

Debbie asked if we could start some fund raising to help us meet the matching requirements. The sale of the boat, given by Richy Smith, will meet \$11,500 of the match but we still need to identify the rest, which could include in-kind contribution such as Belinda's volunteer consulting.

Peg offered to chair a fund-raising committee. She will email board members with some ideas.

2. **Visitor Welcome Station** - Debbie M lead a discussion of the possibility of Friends acquiring a Mobile Welcome Center. She reported that an ad hoc committee met to discuss and research the idea. Ginessa, Debbie M, Bill, and Peg attended the initial meeting. They discussed both trailers and tiny-home style tiny-offices. Bill provided a sketch of a floor plan for how a 20' trailer might be outfitted to meet the need.

The board members questioned how funding might be acquired, assuming this could be a project costing \$30,000 or more. The committee had not taken on the funding question, deciding that it would initially examine the feasibility of the idea and the various issues involved. Debbie mentioned that occasionally funding opportunities arise and if we really want a Mobile Welcome Center, it would be good to be ready with a plan if a grant became available. Also, at Friends Academy she heard enthusiastic support for the idea of Mobile Welcome Centers and the possibility the Friends program might be supportive of funding for them in the future.

Discussion included whether preference would be for a unit big enough for visitors to enter or only a smaller unit where volunteers would distribute information through a window.

Safety issues and the difficulty of pulling a trailer were discussed. We discussed that a van would be easier, and more costly. The Refuge vehicles could be used to pull a trailer, but anyone driving a Refuge vehicle must take a certification course, which might be several days long.

The committee will continue its research and report again.

3. **Butterfly Project** – Barbara reported that she has begun her twice a month surveys of butterflies on the Refuge. The project will continue for a year. She identified 29 species

along the Dixie Mainline on a recent survey day. She has a friend who will help with the next survey day and John M volunteered to help in the future. A colleague from St. Mark's Refuge is helping her with uploading the data to the software the project is using.

4. **Merchandise** – Debbie showed a sketch Dan provided of a concept for a tee shirt with an image of a Refuge-like scene to which he had added some iconic animals. Dan said his first Friends shirt had a scene like the one in the sketch. The sketch appealed to everyone.

Boyd said we also have conceptual designs from Barbara and from Ann Kamzelski. He will send those all out for comment.

The discussion included how many shirt designs to offer and whether they might be print-on-demand. We need some merchandise to offer at festivals. Peg mentioned an earlier discussion of having perhaps only one new design each year.

Friends Academy Report – Debbie M provided a presentation from Friends Academy highlighting what she learned about the thinking of the FWS Friends program leaders, the National Conservation Training Center as a venue, the networking opportunities, and the discussions of merchandise, as well as mentioning there were many other topics discussed that she could discuss at future meetings. She showed various merchandise options from other Friends groups and emphasized the importance those groups give to their stores. One group had a conflict-of-interest issue because they wanted to sell a book authored by a board member. They established a protocol for dealing with the conflict without having to forego selling the book.

The Friends Program leaders envision a more unified approach to Friends across the nation by, for example, having some national programs that each Friends group would participate in giving it their own take. This year's Walk in the Wild is a prototype. They hope each Friends group will hold an event using that name and that it may give people a stronger sense of unity across Refuges and Friends. Friends Program might also establish a national store with Refuge items. Friends groups could include those items in their stores, or use only that store if they do not have a store of their own. Purchasing, sales, and fulfillment would then be eased for individual Friends groups not wanting to take on a store of their own.

Information Items

1. Online communications – Peg reviewed her analysis of the past three years of data on News Brief readership.
2. Outreach Material – Debbie M reviewed the need for reprinting the Atsena Otie brochure and suggested updating it to include additional information about on land activities, since it was designed as a paddling brochure. There was general agreement that the additions would be helpful. Andrew is still hoping to not reprint many brochures and use digital content and interpretive panels. Also, Ginessa and Ken Sassaman will work on providing interpretive material related to the Trail of Tears and the Refuge area.

3. Membership – Debbie M reported that membership renewal was flat in July and is down for the year. We need to recruit a board member who knows how to increase membership and could lead our efforts.
4. Advocacy – Debbie mentioned that Jay sent information about the pause on the Toll Road project.

Open Discussion

Annual Meeting 2023 – John M happened upon a live stream research project exploring fishes and geology in the deep seas. Ken Sulak, the featured speaker for our 2023 Annual Meeting, was highlighted as one of the expert scientists. Small world surprise in a big world arena!

Peg asked for board members sense of whether it is appropriate for us to announce the trip Marc Minno is leading for a Key West nonprofit to the Andes in January. It would require a special News Brief email. The consensus was that it is appropriate. He was our Annual Meeting speaker, accommodated covid-related date changes, and did not request a stipend.

Barbara mentioned that she is going to Panama on a butterfly trip soon and thinks the trip Marc is leading would be an extraordinary, once in a life time type experience.

Debbie J posed the possibility that Friends might sponsor a nature adventure of its own sometime as a branding activity, with fund raising potential. Board members liked the idea, at least as one to consider.

The meeting adjourned at 12:00.