

**Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges
January 11, 2023 Board Meeting**

Members present (all by Zoom): Debbie Meeks, Bill Dummitt, Peg Hall, Boyd Kimball, Linda Kimball, Denise Feiber, John McPherson, Debbie Jordan, Barbara Woodmansee, Paul Ramey, Jeri Treat, Ginessa Mahar, Dan Kline, John Thalacker, Ed DeHaan

Guests: Jay Bushnell, Ron Kamzelski, Pete Tirell
Representing the Refuge: Andrew Gude

The meeting was called to order by President Debbie Meeks at 10 am EST. Minutes of the previous meeting and the agenda circulated before the meeting were approved by voice vote.

Treasurers report

Linda Kimball reported a bank balance of \$4040.94. A \$75 check was outstanding , resulting in a balance of \$3965.94. from which \$107 will soon be deducted for sales tax. The money market balance was \$40,754.09. A donation of \$3400 was received from the Hudsons and a membership upgrade from the Thalackers. The treasurer's report was accepted by voice vote.

Budget

Changes from the budget submitted at the December meeting were:

Including \$400 for invasive control (chain saw purchase), \$400 for Junior Ranger, both from unrestricted funds. It may not be possible to use the chainsaw on the refuge because of training restrictions. A Sawzall was suggested as a possible substitute. The money will be kept in the budget.

The \$7500 payment due for Vista grant matching funds will be paid by \$4000 from money market, \$3400 from the Hudson's donation, and \$100 from the Sulak donation. The total grant match will be \$15,000 over two years, hence \$7500 each year. John McPherson was unsure of whether the architect's fee will all be due in one year or not. They will have to oversee construction so their work will not be complete until the end of the project.

There is \$13000 in the budget as an FWS contribution to the Vista project, but it is understood that any contribution from the refuge is up in the air. The refuge cannot contribute cash to the grant project, but may be able to buy bits and pieces for the project.

John Thalacker voted to accept the budget, Paul Ramey seconded, passed by voice vote.

Refuge report- Andrew Gude

The Freedom Hunt was held in Dixie county.

Sterling is still out for a knee operation, so no LE at this time. Jason also had a knee operation but is back.

Camper volunteers are on the job in both Levy and Dixie counties.

The refuge will be rebuilding the Atsena Otie boardwalks. Barbara Woodmansee will advise on how to spray the area to avoid negative effects on pollinators.

The next hunt will be Jan 28-Feb 12 (wild hogs).

The nominating committee presented the following slate which passed unanimously by voice vote:

Board members Staying On

Bill Dummitt
Linda Kimball
Dan Kline
Jeri Treat
Paul Ramey
Peg Hall
John Thalacker
Debbie Jordan

Board Members Stepping Down

Ed Dehaan
Joe Hand
Travis Thomas

New board members

Pete Tirrell
Ron Kamzelski
Scott Wright

Officers

President- Ginessa Mahar
President-Elect- Denise Feiber
Immediate Past President- Debbie Meeks
Treasurer- Linda Kimball
Secretary- Paul Ramey

Vista

The architect's visit indicated that the roof repair job is worth doing and can likely be done within the budget allowed by the grant. John recommended that we move ahead with accepting the Vista grant and the financial responsibility that comes with it. (The \$15000 match plus the portion of the architect's fee that is not covered by the grant.) John moved, Bill Dummitt seconded a motion to accept the grant and move forward with the project to restore the roof and windows of the cook house at Vista.

The engineering fee of \$3,500 is included in the architect's fee.

A long discussion ensued. John Thalacker asked whether our investment would be protected from vandalism. Andrew Gude responded that there will always be a resident caretaker, probably camper volunteers once the present caretaker moves out and the double wide that he occupies demolished.

Several members, including Ron Kamzelski and Barbara Woodmansee, were unsure what our long term goal was at Vista. John and Debbie explained that, while we would like to see all of Vista preserved, our only goal at this point is to secure funding to restore the cook house, possibly as a visitor contact point. The motion on the floor only covered accepting the grant to restore the roof.

Many members expressed concern that Vista was just too large a project for our small organization. A recent meeting with the St. Marks Friends group gave us insight into how they raised well over a million

dollars to restore the lighthouse there. However, there is a lot more public interest in lighthouses than a recreational camp such as Vista. No estimate has been made for restoring all of Vista but all agreed it would be well over a million dollars. Andrew Gude noted that it was unlikely that FWS money would ever be available to do such a project. Even a complete restoration of the cook house will likely cost hundreds of thousands of dollars because of the requirement that all work be historically accurate. Many members were nervous about taking the first step in what would certainly be an expensive journey. However, the alternative to moving forward is to reject the current grant, which would likely make it very difficult to ever be considered for another one.

Despite the concerns voiced by almost every member, a roll call vote resulted in 15 yes votes, zero no votes.

Cedar Key visitor desk

Denise Feiber set up a volunteer signup system, but there are few volunteers so far. To use the system on Google Sheets, you must have a Google account. If you prefer not to have one, Denise will accept other forms of contact. Denise will keep materials at her home, since we have no storage space at the Chamber of Commerce.

Mobile Information Trailer

Debbie Meeks finally got some feedback from REI and it appears our application will be considered in the summer for a possible award around October. Debbie suggests moving forward with alternative funding to avoid losing another year. Also, the REI grant description is quite different than our proposal.

Advocacy- we need to do something to advocate for increased funding and more staff per Andrew's request. Will talk to CORFA and NWRA.

Events and outings

The solstice celebration was well attended but true to form, no sunset was observed. We bought tea in thermoses from a local restaurant which was discounted to \$50, there was discussion about buying a large thermos and making it ourselves next year.

The Wakulla social and Forest Capital Museum visit were briefly recapped.

Annual Meeting

The following points were discussed:

A discussion on renting chairs vs using the plastic chairs we have showed most members leaning towards renting them.

Bill D will check on audio equipment.

John McPherson will check on porta-potties.

Jeri and Linda will handle membership and check-in.

Bill D, Boyd K, and Barbara will handle merchandise

We will use Square for those who need to use credit cards.

Ginessa and Peg will bring laptops for the presentation.

Kenny will not know what he will charge till he shops. We will give him a dollar cap this year instead of a head count to better control our spending.

Dan, Debbie, and Barbara will bring drinks.

Activities: Vista will be opened. John Thalacker will give a River Trail tour.

Junior Ranger books are ready to be printed but will be over budget if we get 50 books. Since we need to divide the order among 3 locations, less than 50 doesn't make much sense. Peg suggested asking for \$240 for the badges in the upcoming News Brief.

Merchandise- Boyd is working on notecards.

The meeting was adjourned at 12pm.