

Minutes
Board Meeting
Friends of the Lower Suwannee & Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges
Thursday, July 16, 2015

Present:

Board Members: Greg Lang, Bob Hudson, Peg Hall, Maria Sgambati, Kit Lane, Carmelo Echevarria, Bill Dummitt, Debbie Meeks, Jaime Jarrels, John McPherson.

Refuge Staff: Larry Woodward.

Guests: Earl Starnes; Cathy Allen, President of Ottawa (Ohio) NWR Association.

1. The meeting was convened at 10:00 a.m. by Greg Lang, President.
2. Cathy Allen, President of Ottawa NWR Association was welcomed. Ms. Allen made comments about her background and work with the Ottawa Association. Dr. Earl Starnes was welcomed and made comments about his background in land acquisition and preservation.
3. Approval of Minutes. **Motion** by Bob Hudson to approve the minutes of the regular meeting on June 18, 2015 as presented. **Second** by Carmelo Echevarria. Passed by unanimous vote.
4. Refuge update. Refuge Deputy Manager Larry Woodward reported as follows:
 - a. Seahorse Key Bird Issue: Really become a big, international issue. Many different theories have been suggested, but none verified as the cause. Vic Doig taking the lead with interviews and such. Larry believes it was human disturbance, but nothing can be proved.
 - b. Staffing Issues: Down to 6 full time not counting Andrew. Got permission to advertise for one position, but this is really an upgrade for one existing staff. George's position is to be refilled so that the staff level will be 7, but still having to fight for Pam's position which is really needed. Larry will do his best to keep the educational program going.
 - c. Burning: Will probably be doing some next week which will be possible due to rain bringing down fire index.

5. Committee Reports:

- a. Treasurer's Report. Libby Cagle on vacation, so no report. Maria Sgambati reported that there is a bank balance of \$27,705.26.
- b. Communications. Peg Hall provided and went over a written report, attached. Debbie Meeks has started working on powerpoint to take to civic groups, etc.
- c. Invasive Species. Roger McDaniels is on vacation. Veto of invasive species funding in state budget was discussed. This was a IFAS lab in South Florida that got vetoed so should not affect us. Debbie Meeks reported that beekeepers are in favor of Brazilian Pepper because it provides forage for the off season, so there is some opposition to pepper removal.
- d. Inventory. Carmelo Echevarria gave a brief report on how sales and inventory are going. There was a suggestion to order women's hats next time hats are ordered.
- e. Membership. Greg Lang expressed thanks to Marci Wilcox for writing thank-you notes to latest life members: Gary and Whiskey (a dog!) Crom.

6. Initiatives update:

- a. Salt Creek Trail: Debbie Meeks reported that the proposed name for the new Salt Creek trail be: Salt Creek Scenic Loop Trail. Board agreed and suggested putting the distance on the sign. Debbie reported that the trail has been mowed which has reduced the ticks.
- b. Tram Trail: Debbie Meeks reported on sign issues, directional and interpretive, and that she and Larry will working on the signs.

7. Old business and updates:

- a. Promotional video concept/budget: Nothing has been done on this since last meeting. Bill Dummitt noted that Ann Lindgren put together a lot of video footage when she was artist in residence, and offered to assist with the project.
- b. Letter from Friends to David Viker, Chief of SE Region. **Motion** by Bob Hudson to send letter to Mr. Viker with suggested changes: Professional letter format, signed by president, copies to legislative delegation, and suggest meeting with Viker. **Second** by Bill Dummitt. Passed by unanimous vote.

8. Other business/reminders:

- a. No August Friends meeting.
- b. November meeting to be held in Dixie County.
- c. Greg Lang presented information about the settlement between BP and Florida, with \$3.2 billion to Florida. Greg suggested this would be a way to get the conservation easements on 46,000 acres north of the Refuge.
- d. Maria reported that UF is purchasing the Gulfside Motel in Cedar Key for use as part of the Seahorse Key marine lab activities. Plan is to use the existing buildings and replace the dock, and there will be a need to work out possible roles for Refuge and Friends.
- e. Peg Hall: Conflict of Interest statement is needed in our bylaws. Peg prepared a draft which was handed out so Board members could review for action later.

Adjourned at 11:25 a.m.

Communications Team Report Covering Activities since the April Board Meeting

May 9 News Brief

Received by 492, opened by 41%

Topics were –

- Announcement of Pam's retirement party in Suwannee
- Invitation to the Board Meeting
- Overview of the revised Friends website
- New trail coming on Dixie County side
- New trail coming on Levy County side
- Volunteer lunch held on Seahorse Key
- Wounded Warriors visit the Refuge
- Advocacy and information links

The links opened most often were to the Friends website and the new trails stories

June 26 News Brief

Received by 492, opened by 43%

Topics were –

- Three staff members leaving (Pam, Jaclyn, George)
- Invitation to June Board Meeting
- Redesign of the official Refuges webpages
- Improvements to the Dixie Mainline
- Prescribed burns and lightning-caused fires
- Follow about the abandonment of the Seahorse Key rookery
- Coming changes in hunting regulations
- Coastal science high school camp
- Visit to former refuge manager
- Advocacy and information links

The links opened most often were to the hunting regulations and the science camp

Facebook Page

99 new fans = 354

We got a big boost in fans when Greg talked about us to Trip Lancaster who is the mayor of Fanning Springs. He recommended to the Friends of the Suwannee River that they like our page.

34 Posts – by Maria, Bob, Peg, Debbie, Kit, and Roger

Posts that reached more than 250 people were about visiting the Okefenokee Swamp NWR, the Master Naturalist class at Seahorse Key Marine Lab, wading birds surveys on the refuge, Refuge in the rain video, national media attention to the rookery abandonment, and Open House at Seahorse Key this weekend

Friends Website

13 posts - by Peg, Bob, Maria, Kit, Donna T, Jaime, Greg

Other Updates

- Financial reports and all minutes are posted
- Added Turkey Foot Trail brochure
- Made all brochures printable
- Added a Refuge Update Section to Website
- Added current Ibis and News Brief

Contact with National Wildlife Refuge Association

Peg contacted Joan Patterson to provide information about the media attention to the abandonment of Seahorse Key rookery and share our talking points --

- The abandonment highlights the importance of redundancy in our conservation efforts so that when one area is lost the wildlife have someplace to go that meets their needs
- The event highlights the value of monitoring and collecting data on the wildlife, so policy and management after an event can be based on facts
- The recent cuts to staffing at the Lower Suwannee & Cedar Keys NWRs is in stark contrast to the leadership role they play in the economic and environmental stability of our communities and region