

Minutes of the March 16, 2021 meeting of Friends of the Lower Suwannee and Cedar Keys National Wildlife Refuges

The Zoom meeting was called to order by President Peg Hall at 10 AM. Board Members present were: Peg Hall, Ed DeHaan, Linda Kimball, Boyd Kimball, John Thalacker, Bill Dummitt, Joe Hand, Dan Kline, Debbie Meeks, Denise Feiber, Paul Ramey, Barbara Woodmansee, Ginessa Mahar. Friends member Russ Hall was present. Representing the Refuge was Refuge Manager Andrew Gude.

Peg showed the annual meeting animation. It is available on the Friends website. Our newest member Paul Ramey was welcomed. The minutes of the meeting were accepted by voice vote.

There was a discussion of the Zoom annual meeting. Although it was well received and informative, the membership decline shows we miss the in-person annual meeting, which was often where members renewed.

There was a discussion of our exclusion (along with other nonprofits) from the Cedar Key Arts Festival. Apparently nonprofits were excluded to reduce crowding at the festival. There was discussion of a specific idea to set up an informational booth at a private residence on second street. The city if generally opposed to setting up booths outside the park during the festival. A motion was made and passed to shelve the idea of an off-site booth.

Debbie Meeks gave a presentation of alternatives to the Neon database we use to manage membership. 4 products were evaluated in depth. Two finalists were Little Green Light and DonorSnap. Donor Snap appeared to be the best choice because of its user friendly interface and low cost- \$450/yr plus a \$200 setup fee. John Thalacker moved, Bill Dummitt seconded to go forward with DonorSnap. The motion passed by voice vote.

Andrew Gude gave a refuge report:

No big public issues at this time.

Daniel Barrand is at St. Marks working on forestry.

The refuge should have 1-2 interns this summer.

It has been difficult to get a burn crew together. The endangered Eastern Black Rail is present on the refuge, though hard to find. Burns can't be done in wet areas because of its presence.

The refuge's phone bill has been \$800-1400, at one point hitting \$3400. AT&T has not been helpful in explaining the sudden increase- management is exploring options. May get rid of landline.

There was a discussion of eliminating trees from road lanes within the refuge.

An admin has been hired to serve the larger refuge complex. He will use the front desk, since no other office space is available. This presents a conflict regarding visitor contact in the future.

The use of ATVs, UTVs, and golf carts on refuge and state roads within the refuge was discussed. Any vehicle used on the refuge must be street legal, licensed, insured, and driven by a licensed driver.

The estimate of the rebuild of the Fishbone Creek pier was \$440,000. The high cost was in part due to various federal requirements. A local contractor has suggested a price in the \$45k range. Not sure how we will proceed forward. There was a short discussion regarding whether Friends could apply for a grant for this project.

No news on River Trail rebuild. Andrew says if Fishbone Creek is \$450k then River Trail could be \$2 million. John Thalacker suggested replacing part of the boardwalk with a lime rock trail. It would flood periodically, but portions of the current trail flood as well.

The number one building priority right now is the Seahorse Key waterfront rebuild- floating dock, etc.

Andrew suggested developing a historical narrative from Native American times to the post-Cummer period. Very few trees older than 80 years old are present on the refuge- it was once almost all clear cut. The narrative could include Daniel's history of how the tree farms became part of the refuge. John McPherson was unsure of the value of additional historical research.

John McPherson discussed the path forward on Vista. Should we have a zoom charette to discuss? Our in-person charette was not as successful as we had hoped.

John suggested printing 4 hard copies of the Binder report- one for each sister, one for the refuge, and one for Friends. Cost will be \$108 per copy. There is not money specifically allocated, but there are related budget headings with money available. John McPherson moved to print and distribute. The motion passed by acclamation.

There was a discussion of providing volunteers at the visitor center in Cedar Key. Andrew has talked to Sue Colson at the Chamber of Commerce. How do we keep refuge material in stock at the Chamber of Commerce? What other communications products could we provide? There was a discussion of virtual biting insects, turtles, and butterfly trails.

There was a short discussion of maintenance needs on the River Trail. John Thalacker needs one volunteer to do several tasks.

Peg wishes to have a library of photos from the refuge- birds, butterflies, landscapes, etc.

Volunteer forms and Conflict of Interest forms should be brought up to date.

Debbie Jordan gave a report on the Suwannee Arts Festival.

Ed gave an update on spreading a tiny insect called Thrips on Brazilian Peppers for biological control.

Peg is working to reduce the likelihood of accidental deletions on Dropbox.

Andrew has a new map with all ponds and gates shown.

The meeting was adjourned before noon.