

**Minutes of the
Meeting of the Board of Directors
Monday, March 11, 2024**

Members in Attendance

Ms. Laura Russell, Chair; Mr. Kent Shoemaker, Second Vice Chair; Mr. Robert Spottswood Jr., Secretary; Mr. Keenan Baldwin; Mr. John Pope; Mr. Paul Avery; Mr. Ignacio Borbolla; Mrs. Kathy Barco; Mr. Jerry Pate; Mr. Nick Wiley; Mr. Roger Young, FWC Executive Director.

Members not in Attendance

Mr. Joshua Kellam, First Vice Chair; Mrs. Daphne Wood; Mr. Seth McKeel Jr., Treasurer; Mrs. Valerie Boyd; Mr. Richard Corbett, Chair Emeritus; Ms. Katharine MacGregor; Mr. John Phelan.

Guests & Advisors in Attendance

Mr. John Lacy, The Lacy Group/Merrill Lynch/Bank of America; George Warthen, FWC Liaison.

Staff in Attendance

Mr. Andrew Walker; Mr. Will Bradford; Mrs. Erin Smart; Ms. Michelle Ashton; Ms. Rachael Schirmer; Ms. Cindy Fray; Ms. Paula Pack; Ms. Tindl Rainey; Ms. Francesca Klypchak; Ms. Dani Richter; Ms. Anita Forester.

I. Call to order - Chair Laura Russell

The meeting commenced at 11:13 am after quorum was established with Chair Russell extending a warm welcome to all attendees. She introduced and welcomed back Mrs. Kathy Barco and Mr. Nick Wiley to the board.

II. Governance

Board Candidates: Chair Russell presented bios for Ms. Katharine MacGregor and Mr. John Phelan, who were unanimously approved for a three-year term. An updated process, led by Mr. Andrew Walker and Chair Laura Russell, is underway for identifying and vetting new candidates for the Board.

Proposed Board Grants Committee: There was discussion around forming a Board Grants Committee that might evaluate certain grant requests in lieu of the full Board. Staff agreed to draft a proposed purpose and scope for consideration at the June Board meeting.



III. Consent Agenda – Chair Laura Russell

December 5, 2023, Minutes: Motion made by Mr. Jerry Pate to approve the Minutes of the December 5, 2023 meeting as presented; seconded by Mr. Ignacio Borbolla.

Recent Grant Reports: The most recently received reports from Foundation grant recipients, located in the “Conserve Wildlife” tag (CWT) grant applications book, were presented by Ms. Anita Forester. Mr. Jerry Pate moved to accept the reports as submitted; Mr. Ignacio Borbolla seconded. Unanimously approved.

IV. FWC Executive Director’s Report – Mr. Roger Young

Mr. Young began by welcoming everyone. He highlighted changes in senior staffing positions and operational duties and announced he had appointed Rett Boyd as assistant executive director, George Warthen as chief conservation officer, and Ms. Jessica [Crawford] Long will continue as chief of staff. The legislature officially approved Roger’s appointment on March 7th; Rodney Barreto was officially approved for reappointment as FWC Commission Chair on March 8th. The legislative budget contains an approximate \$150 million increase to FWC’s budget and includes 31 new full-time permanent positions, bringing the agency’s workforce to 2,208 individuals.

Mr. Young reported that after thousands of tests on deer, there remains only one confirmed case of chronic wasting disease in Florida. Testing, partially funded by the Foundation, will continue. The October-January 50% discount on sale of Lifetime Sportsman licenses resulted in 75,000 being sold for \$24 million, far above previous years totals, and included a high proportion of first-time license buyers.

Executive Director Young also reported that the FWC Law Enforcement division was re-accredited for another five years with no negative findings. And finally, he noted that FWC is working to launch a new app, Wildlife Management Area Recreation Finder to encourage greater and diverse public use of the WMA’s. Mr. Paul Avery asked if most of the WMA’s for which FWC is lead manager, are wheelchair-accessible and wondered if there is an FWC program for improving their accessibility.

V. CEO Report – Mr. Andrew Walker

Mr. Walker thanked the staff for arranging the meeting and the morning field trip to the 27,000-acre DeLuca Preserve, which the Foundation helped protect via a \$110,000 grant to Ducks Unlimited to endow monitoring of their conservation easement over what is now a UF/IFAS ecological and agricultural research station.

He reported that Lake|Flato Architects and Studio Outside landscape architects have presented their final set of recommendations for creating an overnight youth camp at the Tenoroc Public Use Area in Lakeland, as well as their recommendations for further improvements to the Everglades Youth Camp in Loxahatchee. They are now estimating construction costs, and we should have those numbers before the June Board meeting. There is also a growing possibility that the Easton Foundations (created when the Easton sporting goods company was sold), will build one of the country’s finest competitive archery complexes at Tenoroc, near the three new shooting clays courses.

Mr. Walker also reported on recent conversations with SeaWorld. The company is having internal discussions about building the new propagation center (essentially an expansion of our Florida Coral Rescue Center) on SeaWorld grounds. Were that to happen, it might substantially reduce the amount of money that we and FWC would need to contribute, which has previously been estimated at ~\$4 million. We'll be checking in with them again in a few months.

VI. Finance & Audit – Mr. Will Bradford, Mrs. Erin Smart, Mr. John Lacy

Mrs. Erin Smart presented the second quarter financial report. Through quarter two, the Foundation continued to demonstrate remarkable growth. Total funds under management on 12/31/23 increased 33% year over year to \$81M. This number had increased by 6% to \$86M, as of March 8, 2024. The Foundation achieved a total net surplus of \$12.8M, which is 138% higher than the budgeted \$5.4M. Total revenue through the second quarter reached \$21M, exceeding the budgeted amount by an impressive 42%. Total expenses came in at 15% below budget. The Foundation recorded an operating surplus of \$744,114 versus the budgeted \$398,397. Considering all unrestricted funds, we currently have 21 months of operating expenses on hand.

Mr. Will Bradford is in negotiations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regarding the creation of a new panther conservation fund using private mitigation payments made by the developers and eventual homeowners for the proposed Kingston development north of Corkscrew swamp, east of Ft. Myers. The development needs only one final water quality permit to begin construction, but is presently on hold pending resolution of a suit challenging FDEP's authority to issue permits under the federal Clean Water Act. Tindl and Andy have met with all of the principal parties and other stakeholders to assess the proposed development. We will continue to discuss with USFWS how we would use such a fund if these monies (\$1.5 to \$3M over time) came to the Foundation.

Mr. John Lacy gave the year-to-date investment report. He also reported on the Foundation's impressive rolling 5 year 51% total returns has outperformed the major indices.

The Board then adjourned for lunch.

VII. Strategic Business Plan – Mr. Andrew Walker

Mr. Walker presented the current draft of the Five-Year Strategic Business Plan; a review and discussion centered on the draft was held. Several Board members offered comments and suggestions including the desire for more explicit discussion of hunting and fishing and the desire to see how we define and measure progress against the Plan's broad five-year goals. Mr. Walker asked that Board members provide him with any last comments on the current draft by March 22, 2024. A final fourth draft will be produced and presented to the Board on March 26th for review and approval.



VIII. Conservation Report – Ms. Tindl Rainey

Ms. Tindl Rainey provided a comprehensive update on three land projection projects undertaken at FWC’s request. FWC applied for a Foundation grant awarded last year to collar four additional panthers for tracking, bringing the total to 7.

Payment for Ecosystem Services Program: FWC and the Foundation have raised \$1.9 million to launch this pioneering program, which will compensate south Florida landowners for the quality of their native habitat in exchange for a commitment not to develop the land for a certain number of years. FWC has begun reaching out to several landowners.

Florida Wildlife Corridor: Ms. Rainey also reported on the Foundation’s increasing involvement in conservation of the Florida Wildlife Corridor. The Foundation financially supported the most recent Corridor Summit and has begun negotiations for a key tract of land adjacent to a planned wildlife overpass on I-4.

Mr. Keenan Baldwin and Mr. Robert Spottswood proposed the Foundation seek to create new revenue streams to fund the most important priorities of the Strategic Business Plan, including invasive species control and marine and terrestrial habitat creation and restoration. Ms. Rainey, Mr. Walker, and interested Board members will discuss and develop ideas for the board’s consideration moving forward.

IX. Government Relations – Mr. Andrew Walker

Mr. Walker reported on behalf Mr. Seth McKeel, who was unable to attend. He presented a short overview of the recently ended Florida legislative session. Our effort to update the enabling language for the “Protect Florida Springs” specialty license plate failed to move forward; we will try again next session. Overall, it was another stunning session for conservation and included the following allocations:

- \$529M – Florida Forever Land Conservation Program
- \$100M – Rural and Family Lands Protection Program
- \$75M – Indian River Lagoon Water Quality
- \$20M – Biscayne Bay Water Quality
- \$10M – Harmful Algal Bloom Technology Grants
- \$8.5M – FWC Wildlife Habitat Restoration
- \$5.6M – Artificial Reef Program.

X. Communications Report – Mr. Paul Avery & Ms. Michelle Ashton

Ms. Ashton provided the quarterly update; our social media audience has increased to 8% this year, reaching 29,301 followers while our eblast audience has grown to 45,643 subscribers. Several local, regional, and national media stories are in the pipeline; there is significant interest in FWC’s program to relocate conchs to deeper waters to increase reproduction, which the Foundation is financially supporting. Daphne and Marty Wood as

Foundation legacy donors will be featured in *Tallahassee Magazine*. And our second annual manatee valentine campaign to support seagrass restoration raised \$1,848.17 in online donations.

XI. Fundraising – Ms. Dani Richter

Ms. Richter updated the Board on fundraising for the March 29th Campfire Concert in Jupiter. \$450,000 in sponsorship gifts and pledges have been procured to date, thanks to the hard work of the Concert committee and other Board members. Ms. Richter predicted gross revenues would be in the range of \$700,000 [Note: thanks to last-minute sponsorships and a strong auction, actual gross receipts were \$906,000.].

Major Gifts: Ms. Richter reported the Foundation has received \$850,000 in charitable gifts since the December Board meeting. This includes a new \$400,000 gift from Garner and Connie Koons to provide graduate education scholarships for OPS staff at FWC’s Fish and Wildlife Research Institute. Among our outstanding fundraising “asks” are two to Bass Pro Shops and Cabela’s totaling \$500,000.

XII. Grant Requests – Ms. Anita Forrester

Ms. Anita Forrester presented 13 FWC applications for “Conserve Wildlife” specialty tag funds totaling \$398,000. Chair Russell suggested funding only the first year of the two-year \$50,000 freshwater mussel conservation project, inviting the biologists to return for additional funding in year two. After discussion, the board approved unanimously all CWT requests, adjusting the mussel project to \$25,000 for year one.

There were 4 additional grants requests presented and voted on as follows:

1. Jacksonville Zoo, Conservation Education Programs, \$10,000: Mrs. Kathy Barco said the Barco Family Foundation would fund this request. She will send the grant to us to pass to the Zoo.
2. Conservancy of Southwest Florida, Scout Snakes for Python Control. \$120,000: This grant request follows a previous award from the Foundation to expand the Conservancy’s radiotagging of male pythons. Motion made by Mr. Spottswood and seconded by Mr. Baldwin. It was unanimously approved.
3. Ladies Let’s Go Fishing \$10,000: After discussion, grant was denied.
4. Ducks Unlimited, continuing our Conservation Partnership with the FWFF through SE Wetlands Initiative, \$90,000: This figure represents the remaining balance on the Foundation’s \$200,000 pledge to Ducks Unlimited as it expands its habitat restoration work throughout Florida. Motion made by Mr. Spottswood to approve, seconded by Mr. Baldwin. Unanimously approved.

XIII. Open Session & Closing Remarks – Chair Laura Russell

Chair Russell initiated an open discussion for new business and emerging issues. Important dates for the upcoming year were outlined. The September location meeting is TBD [Note: it will be the Gilchrist Club in Trenton FL]. Mr. Nick Wiley complimented the Foundation on how far it has come since he left FWC six



years ago. Mr. Walker thanked Chair Russell for leading her first meeting as Board Chair. With no further business at hand, Chair Russell adjourned the meeting at 3:25pm.

Mrs. Laura Russell, Board Chair

Date

Mr. Robert Spottswood Jr., Secretary

Date

Mr. Andrew Walker, CEO

Date