

**Minutes of the
Meeting of the Board of Directors
Tuesday, June 4, 2024**

Board Members in Attendance

Mrs. Laura Russell, Chair; Mr. Roger Young, FWC Executive Director; Mrs. Daphne Wood; Mr. Nick Wiley; Mr. Seth McKeel; Mr. Keenan Baldwin; Mr. Ignacio Borbolla; Mr. Richard Corbett; Mr. Robert Spottswood; Mr. Joshua Kellam; Mrs. Kate MacGregor; Mr. Kent Shoemaker; Mrs. Kathy Barco; Mrs. Valeria Boyd; Mr. John Pope

Board Members not in Attendance

Mr. John Phelan; Mr. Paul Avery; Mr. Jerry Pate

Staff in Attendance

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

Guests & Advisors in Attendance

Mr. John Lacy, Mr. George Warthen

I. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Mrs. Laura Russell at 2 pm after a quorum was established. Mrs. Russell welcomed all members and expressed gratitude for their participation and preparation. She noted the ongoing efforts and contributions of the Board and staff.

II. Consent Agenda

Mr. Andrew Walker requested the approval of the March 11th meeting minutes. Mrs. Daphne Wood moved to approve the minutes, praising their accuracy and quality. Mr. Seth McKeel seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Mr. Walker introduced the grant reports, with Ms. Anita Forester providing an overview. Mrs. Wood raised points about manatee harassment, citizen science initiatives, and nitrate levels in water wells. Ms. Forester responded with detailed explanations, emphasizing the measures of disturbance to manatees and improvements in water quality. Mr. McKeel moved to accept the grant reports and Mrs. Wood seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.



III. FWC Director's Remarks

Mr. Roger Young remarked on his one-year anniversary as Executive Director of FWC, expressing gratitude for the Board's support and collaboration. He highlighted several key initiatives and successes over the past year, including legislative session outcomes where FWC secured a budget close to \$600 million, pending the governor's approval, which will support many priority conservation and employee development initiatives. He also discussed the recent Python Challenge season and noted the Challenges have led to the removal of more than 900 pythons from the Everglades so far.

Mr. Young spoke about the agency's ongoing coral conservation efforts, and said FWC will closely monitor water temperatures this summer in case we have another marine heat event. He also spoke about the apparent problem being experienced by sawfish and FWC's efforts to determine the cause of the jump in their mortality. Mr. Young also highlighted FWC efforts to prepare for an anticipated active hurricane season.

The 103-day Gulf Recreation Red Snapper season is the longest since state management began, Mr. Young said, which speaks to FWC's successful management of the species. He also discussed the recent land swap at the Split Oak wildlife management area; FWC will receive 1,550 acres and \$40 million for further conservation work in exchange for 60 acres that will be used to improve roadway infrastructure near Orlando. He also reminded the Board that June 6th marks the one-year anniversary of CWD being discovered in Florida. The state still has only one positive case despite thousands of tests. FWC continues to monitor and is prepared to respond if there is another positive test.

Finally, Mr. Young mentioned the focus on career development within FWC to prevent loss of skilled personnel to other agencies, and he acknowledged the contributions of his executive team, including Assistant Executive Director Rhett Boyd, Chief Conservation Officer George Warthen, and Chief of Staff Jessica Long.

IV. Foundation CEO's Remarks

Mr. Andrew Walker provided updates on the Foundation's financial health, strategic planning, and significant conservation projects. He emphasized the Foundation's financial resilience, noting that significant discretionary revenues are now available for critical investments, with about \$4 million in unrestricted funds. He highlighted the Foundation's growing reputation in mitigation, managing 20 habitat conservation plans in Florida, which contributes to our financial health and the conservation of key species and natural areas.

Mr. Walker also discussed the potential acquisition of the *SS United States* as an artificial reef; we have \$3 million to put toward the estimated \$9 million cost of towing, cleaning and reefing this ship, the largest ever built in the country. Mr. Robert Spottswood noted that although such high-profile, capital-intensive projects have their place, the creation of new reef habitat can be accomplished for far less money using alternative

materials. He suggested there may need to be a statewide strategy for creating such habitat, particularly with the death of much of the Florida coral reef and resultant crumbling of reef structure.

Mr. Walker again thanked the Board for its participation in the recently completed five-year strategic business plan and said the staff would report on our progress annually at the Board's fall meeting, much as it did under the previous plan. The final draft of the strategic plan for 2024-2028 was presented for approval.

Mrs. Russell opened the floor for comments. Mrs. Wood suggested including the number of bird species in Florida and removing TikTok from the plan. Ms. Valerie Boyd moved to approve the strategic plan with the suggested changes. Mr. Spottswood seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Mr. Walker discussed potential legislative initiatives to secure additional funding for key conservation projects. Mr. Spottswood emphasized the importance of collaboration with Tallahassee and potential federal funding opportunities.

The proposed principal goals for FY25 were discussed, with suggestions to include specific dollar amounts and program details. Ms. Valerie Boyd moved to approve the final draft, seconded by Mrs. Wood, and the motion was approved unanimously. The values statement was reviewed, with suggestions to align it more closely with the strategic plan. The revised statement will be presented at the next meeting for approval. [Note: Staff will bring a revised statement forward for review at the *December* meeting.]

V. Governance

Mrs. Russell reviewed the governance committee description and recruitment process. Once the new procedures are finalized, the Foundation's Bylaws will need to be updated. The information sheet for prospective Board members was presented for approval. The proposed grants committee and process were discussed. The proposed Board committee assignments were presented and approved.

Mrs. Russell announced Mr. Rodney Barreto and Mr. Preston Fariior had rejoined the Board following FWC's opinion that Commissioners serving concurrently on the Foundation Board would no longer be discouraged. A proposed two-year board calendar was discussed, and dates for CY2025 Board meetings and calls will be confirmed at the September meeting.

VI. Conservation

Mrs. Tindl Rainey shared that the conservation program is developing nicely. She noted that funding has been secured to add a new submersed aquatic vegetation project site and to expand two existing project sites. Mrs. Rainey indicated she and Ms. Dani Richter are collaborating with FWC's Aquatic Habitat Section on these projects. Ms. Rainey reported two of the key organizations driving protection of the Florida Wildlife Corridor have asked the Foundation to become a key collaborator in future planning. We have also continued meeting



with other potential conservation partners, including the Florida Conservation Group, which helps ranchers sign up for the Rural and Family Lands conservation easement program.

Mr. Will Bradford said the Foundation was also close to signing an agreement with the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service creating a new Florida Panther conservation fund. FWC has already offered input on the agreement. The Foundation would have principal say in the use of these funds.

VII. Communications & Events

Ms. Michelle Ashton reported on the success of the Campfire Concert and preliminary plans for the 2025 Gala. She noted growth in social media and email subscribers, provided updates on media coverage, and discussed the development of a communications toolkit. The Crisis Communications Plan was adopted, with feedback and training options discussed.

VIII. Fund Raising

Mrs. Dani Richter reported on major gifts and revenue, highlighting the procurement of 50 gifts above \$5,000 and upcoming fundraising opportunities. She discussed the fundraising calendar, flagging specific event and sponsorship details. Finally, she shared that the Python Challenge has two title sponsors this year, with more joining at lower levels.

IX. Finance & Accounting

Foundation Treasurer Mr. Seth McKeel introduced Mrs. Erin Smart, who presented the FY24 third quarter financial report. Foundation assets grew 9% in the most recent quarter and 37% year over year to \$88 million. The Foundation posted a net surplus of \$20.3 million for the year to date compared to a budgeted surplus of \$12.6 million. Operating surplus year to date is \$1,427,692. The Board discussed the potential for reallocating surplus funds to support high dollar additional conservation initiatives and strategic projects.

Mr. John Lacy shared the year-to-date investment report, highlighting the performance of the Foundation's various portfolios. On a rolling five-year basis all portfolios are outperforming their respective indexes. Mr. Lacy announced that due to the increasing growth in funds under active management, his firm is reducing the asset management fee from 60 basis points to 50, with a possible future reduction down to 30 or 25 basis points. Mr. Lacy commended the work of the Finance & Audit Committee.

Mr. Will Bradford was introduced and presented the proposed FY25 preliminary budget for approval. Mr. Bradford outlined the key components of the budget, including projected revenues, significant planned expenditures, and strategic investments in priority areas. The proposed FY25 preliminary budget was approved following a motion by Mr. Joshua Kellam, seconded by Mr. Spottswood. The motion was carried unanimously.

X. Grant Requests

Support for the Passage of Amendment 2: Mr. Kellam introduced the \$250,000 grant request, emphasizing the importance of preserving the right to fish and hunt in Florida through the proposed constitutional amendment. He outlined the bipartisan support the amendment received in the Florida legislature and the need for a statewide campaign to ensure its passage. Ms. Daphne Wood moved to approve the grant request. Mr. Nick Wiley seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously with Board members Russell, Kellam, Barco, and Spottswood, who are involved in the campaign abstaining.

INVERSA Python Biodiversity Credit Development: Mr. Walker shared that the \$100,000 grant aims to explore the feasibility of developing a voluntary biodiversity credit program for python removal, to increase the financial incentives for capturing and killing pythons. After discussion it was sent to the new Board Grant Committee for further review.

Bonefish & Tarpon Trust Bonefish Spawning Study: Mr. Walker said the \$35,000 grant will support research on bonefish spawning, essential for conservation efforts. Mr. Robert Spottswood moved to approve the grant. Mr. Ignacio Borbolla seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Clearwater Marine Aquarium Manatee Care Facility: Mr. Walker stated the proposed \$100,000 grant would help complete fundraising for the expansion of the manatee care facility at Clearwater Marine Aquarium. After discussion it was sent to the Grant Committee for further review.

Tampa Bay Watch Invasive Species Education: Mr. Walker said the proposed \$10,000 grant would support educational programs on invasive species in Tampa Bay, aimed at increasing public awareness and engagement. Mrs. Wood moved to approve the grant. Mr. Joshua Kellam seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

UF/IFAS DeLuca Tractor: Mr. Walker reported that the \$147,000 grant will fund the purchase of a tractor for the UF/IFAS DeLuca Preserve, enhancing their capacity for land management and conservation research. Mrs. Wood and Mr. Kellam pledged to ask other dealers for competing tractor prices. After discussion it was sent to the Grant Committee for further review.



Protect Florida Springs Grant Applications: Ms. Forester walked the Board through the Protect Florida Springs grant applications, which focused on protecting Florida’s springs through various conservation and educational initiatives. Mrs. Wood moved to approve the below 10 applications, in the amounts specified. Mr. Robert Spottswood seconded the motion. The motion was carried unanimously.

Grant ID	Project Title	Organization Name	Funded
PFS25-02	<i>Effects of Hurricane Idalia Storm Surge on Submersed Vegetation and Fish Communities in a Spring-fed River in Florida (Crystal River)</i>	Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission	\$39,015.00
PFS25-08	<i>Quantifying the Economic Benefits of Springs in the Lower Suwannee and Santa Fe River Basins of North-Central Florida</i>	Alachua County	\$25,000.00
PFS25-09	<i>From the Swamp to the Springs: A Campaign to Educate the University of Florida Community about Florida’s Important and Imperiled Freshwater Resources.</i>	Florida Museum of Natural History	\$10,000.00
PFS25-12	<i>Characterizing and Monitoring Manatee Winter Use of the Springs along the Rivers of North Central Florida</i>	Clearwater Marine Aquarium Research Institute	\$17,629.00
PFS25-13	<i>Current Problems - Florida Springsheds Cleanup</i>	Current Problems	\$10,000.00
PFS25-14	<i>Critical Habitat: Mapping Eel Grass within the Wekiva Wild and Scenic River System</i>	Friends of the Wekiva River, Inc.	\$50,000.00
PFS25-15	<i>Interactive “Florida Springs Map” Exhibit for the Florida Springs Welcome Center in High Springs, Florida</i>	Howard T. Odum Florida Springs Institute	\$5,874.31
PFS25-20	<i>The Crystal River Bull Shark Project: a tool for establishment of top predator nursery and thermal refuge habitat, and augmented springs system health and quality monitoring</i>	Minorities in Shark Science	\$25,830.00
PFS25-21	<i>Quantifying Differences in Primary Productivity and Herbivory Control Among Native versus Non-native Water Lettuce (Pistia stratiotes) in Spring Runs of the St. Johns River</i>	Stetson University Institute for Water and Environmental Resilience	\$49,890.00
PFS25-22	<i>Business in the Springs Heartland: Collaboration with Recreational Outfitters and Vacation Rentals for Responsible Recreation and Manatee Protection</i>	Alachua County	\$9,185.00
		Total	\$242,423.31

XI. Open Session

No additional topics were raised during the open session.

XII. Closing Remarks

Mrs. Russell thanked everyone for their participation and contributions, emphasizing the Board’s ongoing commitment to conservation and strategic growth.

XIII. Executive Session

Not required.

Next Meeting: The next meeting of the Board of Directors will be at the Gilchrist Club in Trenton, FL, on Sunday & Monday, September 15 - 16, 2024.

Mrs. Laura Russell, Board Chair

Date

Mr. Robert Spottswood Jr., Secretary

Date

Mr. Andrew Walker, CEO

Date