

**Minutes of the
Meeting of the Board of Directors
September 16, 2024**

Board Members in Attendance

Mrs. Laura Russell, Chair; Mr. Joshua Kellam, Vice Chair; Mr. Kent Shoemaker, Second Vice Chair; Mr. Seth McKeel, Treasurer; Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr., Secretary; Mr. Roger Young, FWC Executive Director; Mrs. Daphne Wood; Mr. Nick Wiley; Mr. Keenan Baldwin; Mr. Ignacio Borbolla; Mrs. Kate MacGregor; Mrs. Kathy Barco; Mrs. Valerie Boyd; Mr. John Pope; Mr. Jerry Pate; Mr. Preston Farrior; Mr. Rodney Barreto

Board Members Not in Attendance

Mr. Paul Avery; Mr. Richard Corbett; Mr. John Phelan

Staff in Attendance

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

Guests in Attendance

Mr. Rett Boyd, FWC Assistant Executive Director; Mr. John Lacy, The Lacy Group/Merrill Lynch; Mr. Eric Weather, Fish & Wildlife Research Institute, FWC.

I. Call to Order – Mrs. Laura Russell

Mrs. Laura Russell, Chair, called the meeting to order at 8:35am and welcomed all attendees, expressing her appreciation for their commitment and ongoing contributions to the Foundation. Mrs. Russell also thanked the recently formed Grants Committee for its thoughtful work.

II. Consent Agenda – Mrs. Laura Russell

Chair Russell then introduced the consent agenda items, which included the June 4, 2024, meeting minutes, the final Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) budget, the final principal goals for FY25, and the Grants Committee's recommendations on the current round of under-\$50,000 grant requests. Vice-Chair Josh Kellam made a motion to approve, and Mr. Ignacio Borbolla seconded. Mr. Seth McKeel declared a potential conflict of interest with the Florida Conservation Group and abstained from voting on the grant requests. The motion to approve the Consent Agenda passed unanimously with Mr. McKeel's abstention. The approved grants are attached to these Minutes as Attachment A.

III. FWC Director's Remarks – Mr. Roger Young

Mr. Young expressed gratitude to the Foundation for its continued support of FWC's programs and partnerships. He reported Florida's record-breaking tourism milestone with 34.2 million visitors, noting a 1.7% increase, which underscores the importance of conservation efforts amid rising pressures on natural resources.



Mr. Young provided updates on FWC's 2024 Python Challenge, an event with 857 participants this year, which has led to the cumulative removal of nearly 900 pythons from Florida ecosystems. All winners will be announced at the September FWC Commissioners meeting. He thanked the Foundation for its contributions to this initiative and help building public engagement.

Mr. Young announced the creation of FWC's Office of Conservation Engagement and Education, under the direction of Sarah Barrett, the former FWC Deputy Chief of Staff. He noted Sarah's 20 plus years' experience as a conservation leader and said she will excel in running these programs. The Office will incorporate the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network. During discussion, Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr. suggested increasing the use of social media to attract younger audiences to conservation and outdoor programs, a proposal Mr. Young agreed to consider as part of FWC's expanding interactive media efforts.

Mr. Young then spoke about FWC's 25th Anniversary Homecoming event. Mr. Young invited board members to Tenoroc on November 2nd to celebrate FYCCN's 25th anniversary with activities, food, and sports. He encouraged all to attend as a gesture of support for conservation education's past, present, and future.

Mr. Young reported that FWC's latest budget request, which includes funding for 123 additional staff members, has been submitted to the Governor's Office, with results pending. He then introduced Mr. Rett Boyd, FWC Assistant Executive Director.

Mr. Boyd discussed FWC's FY25 budget, which is the largest the agency has ever received. He reported on Flourish, the new FWC employee recruitment, recognition and retention plan, and said FWC has created a career development plan for the entire agency based on its existing, successful plan for sworn personnel. He offered to set up a conference call with any interested board members who wish to know more about these programs.

IV. Foundation CEO's Remarks - Mr. Andrew Walker

Mr. Walker reviewed the Foundation's recent activities and initiatives aligned with the 2024–2028 Strategic Business Plan and highlighted the Foundation's 30th anniversary milestones. He also summarized past discussions with the Gilchrist Club regarding its future; these conversations temporarily ended with Bankers Trust chairman Bob Menke's passing. There was general Board discussion about Gilchrist. He reiterated the Foundation's commitment to supporting the Florida Wildlife Corridor, coral reef restoration and the establishment of new reef habitat.

V. Government Affairs - Mr. Seth McKeel

Committee Chair Mr. McKeel and Mr. Kellam provided an update on Amendment 2, the Right to Hunt and Fish initiative, and outlined potential legislative support needed in the upcoming session. They thanked everyone on the Board who has been involved, and also expressed gratitude to Ms. Michelle Ashton for the FAQ sheet and other communications support.

Mr. McKeel then talked about the Foundation's legislative priorities, most of which will be based on a fisheries habitat white paper prepared by FWC Marine Fisheries Director Jessica McCawley and her staff. The Foundation will support FWC efforts to obtain state funding for a "coastal corridor" initiative that seeks to improve offshore habitat for our fisheries in both the Atlantic and Gulf. FWC include \$20 million for this initiative in the draft budget submitted to the Governor's Office.

Mr. Keenan Baldwin spoke about the parallel need to increase public funding for terrestrial habitat restoration on private lands, particularly in dealing with serious invasive species like cogon grass. He mentioned FWC's panther payment for ecosystem services program, for which the Foundation helped raise \$1.9 million, as a promising model for making payments to private landowners to improve wildlife habitat.

VI. Finance & Accounting - Mr. Seth McKeel, Treasurer

Mr. McKeel introduced Mr. Will Bradford, Foundation COO, who presented the FY24 year-end financial report. For the year, the Foundation distributed a record \$11.3 million to a wide variety of conservation and outdoor recreation projects. Even with this spending, total funds under management grew 33% on the year from \$68 million to \$90 million. Mr. Rodney Barreto congratulated the Foundation on its continued financial growth, and Vice-Chair Kent Shoemaker reminded all the ultimate bottom line is having a lasting conservation impact.

Mr. McKeel informed the board that our auditors discovered altered expense receipts submitted by a “Wildlife Foundation of Florida” license plate grant recipient. The Foundation is working with the organization and legal representation to ensure a full recovery of funds.

Foundation Investment Advisor Mr. John Lacy shared the year-end investment report, which included a gain of \$9 million. There was discussion of declining interest rates and any potential impact on the Foundation’s budget; Mr. Bradford noted the Foundation’s FY25 budget takes a possible interest rate decline into account.

VII. Grant Requests Over \$50,000 - Mrs. Kathy Barco, Chair, Grants Committee

Ms. Barco presented and briefly discussed the grant requests which were approved as part of the consent agenda, noting that nine archery-related grants and additional funding for conservation-focused initiatives had been approved. She reassured the board that the grants committee rigorously vetted each request, and she invited interested board members to participate in future grant discussions.

Ms. Barco then presented a Chronic Wasting Disease grant request from FWC for \$165,000. The Grants Committee recommended funding this request at \$100,000. Mrs. Daphne Wood made a motion to approve, and Mr. Spottswood, Jr., seconded. The motion was unanimously approved. Staff will remind FWC there is an additional \$41,000 for CWD available from a previous gift received from the NextEra Energy Foundation.

VIII. Communications & Events - Ms. Michelle Ashton

Ms. Michelle Ashton highlighted the growth of the Foundation’s social media audience, which crossed 33,000 followers across all platforms, thanks largely to Ms. Rachael Schirmer’s work. Ms. Ashton emphasized that eblasts continue to be a vital communication tool, maintaining a high open rate of 46% with an unsubscribe rate of 0.2% to an audience of more than 45,000, which surpasses industry standards. She reported that Make-a-Will month eblasts in August resulted in five new legacy gifts. In addition to that campaign, both social media and eblasts were vital tools for the coral campaign at the end of August and the Foundation’s 30th anniversary campaign in September, she said.

Several new print pieces have been completed, including the fall newsletter. Ms. Ashton reported that the Foundation had been continuing to gain national earned media, including for Amendment 2, the \$1.5 million National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to FWC, the conch study funded by the Foundation, and more. She said the Foundation had also placed advertisements in state press and social media for fall fundraising campaigns and for promoting the sale of the Foundation’s four specialty license plates.

Mr. Barreto offered to share his personal contacts in the media and among social influencers. He also suggested that the Foundation host a reception with FWC during the legislative session. Mr. Walker promised to follow up with FWC to schedule such a reception.

Sawfish Presentation - Eric Weather, FWRI

FWC fisheries biologist Eric Weather then joined the meeting to report on the disturbing phenomena of “spinning sawfish.”



Break for lunch at 12:14pm. Meeting was called to order at 1:21pm

As the meeting was reconvening, Mr. Bradford handed out the FWFF Code of Ethics and Conflict of Interest forms for the upcoming year for each board and staff member to sign and turn in.

IX. Governance - Mr. Kent Shoemaker, Committee Chair

Mr. Shoemaker presented a new recruitment process for board members and asked the board for potential candidates. The Governance Committee is actively identifying candidates who bring diverse perspectives to conservation and outdoor recreation. This will strengthen the board's expertise and influence in conservation, he said. The 2025 slate of officers and new board members will be brought forward at the December 3rd meeting.

X. Conservation - Ms. Tindl Rainey

Director of Conservation Mrs. Tindl Rainey provided a high-level update on the Conservation Program's project portfolio, highlighting ongoing efforts and future direction. Mrs. Rainey said the Foundation currently has roughly \$3.5M in aquatic habitat restoration projects across 12 locations, including a new project on the west coast of Florida in the Weeki Wachee River. Additionally, there are four land protection projects within the Florida Wildlife Corridor for which the Foundation is negotiating in partnership with FWC. She announced FWC's panther PES program, referred to earlier in the meeting, is set to open enrollment for landowners next week.

Mrs. Rainey noted her goals include strengthening key partnerships, supporting legislative initiatives, exploring innovative funding avenues, and expanding the program's project portfolio as guided by the Strategic Business Plan. She expressed gratitude for the board's leadership and guidance on building out the program.

XI. Fundraising - Ms. Danielle Richter

Ms. Richter reported on major gifts received in the last quarter and shared plans for securing lead gifts for key initiatives, including the campaigns for Tenoroc and Everglades camps. She and Ms. Ashton also spoke about upcoming friend- and fundraising events, including an evening reception at the Stovall House in Tampa for area business leaders.

Ms. Richter closed by announcing the hiring of our new Major Gifts officer, Emily Dey, who starts on Oct. 21, 2024.

XII. Open Session

Mrs. Russell opened the floor for additional discussion. Topics included the Foundation's engagement with youth through conservation camps and the importance of fostering long-term connections with young participants. There was a recommendation for the Foundation to offer up something to replace the historic oak tree that fell in front of the Capital building; Mr. Walker promised to look into it to see if plans have been made to replace it. He noted it's common practice for arboretums to grow saplings from famous trees for the eventual moment the parent tree dies.

XIII. Closing Remarks & Adjournment

As the meeting ended, Mrs. Russell expressed her deep appreciation to all Board members and staff for their dedication and contributions. She reiterated the Board’s commitment to advancing the Foundation’s mission and encouraged everyone to continue seeking innovative solutions to the complex conservation challenges facing Florida. With no further business to discuss, the meeting was adjourned at 4:05 pm.

The Board of Directors will next meet via Zoom on Tuesday, December 3, 2024, at 2:00 pm.

Mrs. Laura Russell, Board Chair

Date

Mr. Robert Spottswood Jr., Secretary

Date

Mr. Andrew Walker, CEO

Date