

Minutes of the
Meeting of the Board of Directors
March 10, 2025

Board Members in Attendance

Mrs. Laura Russell, Chair; Mr. Joshua Kellam, Vice Chair; Mr. Kent Shoemaker, Second Vice Chair; Mrs. Valerie Boyd, Treasurer; Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr., Secretary; Mr. Roger Young, FWC Executive Director; Mrs. Daphne Wood; Mr. Nick Wiley; Mr. Keenan Baldwin; Mrs. Kathy Barco; Mr. Rodney Barreto; Mr. Carlos Alfonso; Mr. Ed Burr; Mr. Jim Etscorn; Mr. Todd Jones; Mr. Joe Neber; Mr. Townsend Tarpani; Ms. Kate MacGregor

Board Members Not in Attendance

Mr. Jerry Pate; Mr. Paul Avery; Mr. Preston Farrior; Mr. Tucker Frederickson.

Staff in Attendance

Mr. Andrew Walker; Mr. Will Bradford; Mrs. Erin Smart; Ms. Michelle Ashton; Ms. Tindl Rainey; Ms. Dani Richter; Ms. Paula Pack; Ms. Rachel Schirmer; Ms. Cindy Fray; Ms. Francesca Klypchak; Ms. Julie Lane; Ms. Emily Dey; Ms. Melodie Griffin.

Guests in Attendance

Ms. Sarah Barrett, FWC Director Conservation Engagement and Education; Ms. Jessica Crawford, FWC Chief of Staff; Mr. Mark Anderson, The Lacy Group/Merrill Lynch.

I. Call to Order – Mrs. Laura Russell

The meeting was called to order at 10:06 a.m. by Mrs. Laura Russell, Chair.

Mrs. Russell welcomed all Board members and staff, expressing gratitude for their participation and contributions. She extended a special welcome to the newly appointed Board members, as well as Ms. Jessica Crawford and Ms. Sarah Barrett from FWC and acknowledged the resignation of Mr. John Phelan who has accepted a position within the President's administration.

She thanked the staff for their efforts in organizing the meeting, particularly for arranging the previous evening's dinner and networking events. Special recognition was given to Mr. Gil McRae for providing an insightful tour of the Fish & Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) earlier that morning, which gave the Board a deeper understanding of ongoing research and conservation initiatives.

New staff introductions:

- Ms. Melodie Griffin – Director of Grant Programs
- Ms. Emy Dey – Major Gift Officer
- Ms. Julie Lane – Accountant

Ms. Russell emphasized the Foundation's continued focus on strategic conservation initiatives, expanding partnerships, and securing sustainable funding sources to support the Foundation's mission and work.



II. Consent Agenda – Mrs. Laura Russell

Chair Russell introduced the consent agenda items, which included the December 3, 2024 meeting minutes, the FY2025 goals progress report, the Grant Committee's recommendations on grant applications under \$50,000, and an index of final grant reports. Mrs. Daphne Wood noted several minor corrections in the minutes, which were discussed, and it was agreed to have them incorporated into the final draft. Mrs. Wood then moved to approve the Consent Agenda and Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr. seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously. The approved grants are attached to these minutes as Attachment A.

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

FWC Executive Director, Mr. Roger Young welcomed everyone and introduced Sarah Barrett, Director of Conservation Engagement and Education, and Jessica Crawford, Chief of Staff. He mentioned that Gil McRae has been a staple for over 30 years and part of research development at FWRI and FWC. He then provided an in-depth update on legislative priorities, budget allocations, and key conservation initiatives.

2025-2026 Budget Highlights:

- \$10 million requested by FWC for artificial reef construction and monitoring projects.
- \$20 million requested for oyster restoration and habitat enhancement.
- \$10 million requested for continued expansion of the Florida Wildlife Corridor.
- \$8 million requested for youth conservation and education programs.
- Proposed 20% salary increase for FWC law enforcement officers and staff, a significant step in retaining and attracting top talent.

Key Discussion Points:

- Bear Management Program: A new five-year plan was unveiled, focusing on reducing human-bear conflicts. Public meetings are being held to discuss potential regulations for bear hunts, with a decision expected at a 2025 FWC Commission meeting.
- Apalachicola Oyster Restoration: The ongoing five-year closure is still in effect, and as noted above, FWC is seeking \$20 million in funding to support further restoration efforts. Community reliance on oysters for livelihoods was noted as a critical concern.
- Red Snapper Regulations: Col. Young then reported on NOAA's possible revisions to Amendment 59 of the Fishery Management Plan for Grouper-Snapper South Atlantic populations. FWC opposes the three-month federal closure.
- Silver Glen Springs Protection: Proposed legislation aims to restrict anchoring and mooring in historically significant spring areas. This proposal has received mixed reactions from both environmental groups and boating communities.

Ms. Jessica Crawford was asked if she would be willing to keep the Foundation aware of potentially controversial issues and provide talking points for such, as Foundation board members are often asked about key topics before the Commissioners. She was also asked if she would help keep Board members informed of legislative bills on which FWC would like the Foundation's help in advocating for or against.

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

Mr. Andrew Walker, CEO, provided an overview of recent accomplishments and upcoming initiatives.

Recent Successes:

Coastal Corridor Reception in Tallahassee: The event attracted nearly 100 attendees, including key legislators, agency partners, and conservation leaders. He suggested making this an annual event and thanked all of the Board members and staff who helped organize and attend the event.

Grants Summary: Mr. Walker reported the Foundation distributed a record \$13.4 million in 2024, including 80 grants to multiple organizations beyond FWC. This included \$405,000 for relief from Hurricanes Milton and Helene, which was used to match \$1M received from the Florida Disaster Fund to assist rebuilding of Florida's maritime infrastructure in the Big Bend region.

Donor Update: Mr. Walker provide an update on two of the Foundation's most important donors:

- Bass Pro Shops & Cabela's
 - Bass Pro Shops' multi-year \$1 million "Florida Conservation Solutions Fund" is nearing completion – just \$80,000 remains on their original pledge. In reality, Bass has given the Foundation \$1.465 million since 2018 for a variety of needs, including its annual \$50,000 commitment to Trophy Catch. Restoration of Lake George in the St. John's River remains a principal interest of theirs. Foundation staff will begin discussing what we'd like to see next for this relationship.
 - An anonymous donor's giving is now at \$8.9 million for a wide variety of needs that have been negotiated over the past few years, which Mr. Walker listed for the Board. These include \$3M for reefing ships, \$2M of which they desire to be used for the SS *United States*. They are also our largest current donor to the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network, with a total of \$1.45 million given to FWC's six camps and nature centers.

Key Conservation News: In addition to projects included in Ms. Rainey's subsequent conservation report, Mr. Walker updated the Board on the Split Oak Wildlife and Environmental Area (WEA) land swap that will bring FWC a net addition of ~1500 acres to Split Oak, along with ~\$43 million for management and additional WEA and Wildlife Management Area in-holding acquisitions across Florida. He also provided a brief status report on planned expansion of our Florida Coral Rescue Center in Orlando, and planning for construction of an overnight camp at Tenoroc and improvements to the Everglades Youth Conservation Center.

V. Conservation Report - Ms. Tindl Rainey

Mrs. Tindl Rainey, Director of Conservation and External Relations, provided an update on the Foundation's Conservation Program. She highlighted ongoing aquatic habitat restoration efforts, including active management of \$3.5M in seagrass and eelgrass projects across 13 locations, with an additional \$5M in projects expected in the next few months.

Mrs. Rainey noted continued progress in land protection, with 2,650 acres in active projects. She provided an update on the Williams' property, emphasizing renewed efforts to advance the acquisition following previous challenges. She also referenced FDOT's ongoing wildlife crossing construction, reinforcing its significance to the Florida Wildlife Corridor.

She underscored the Foundation's role in financial stewardship, specifically highlighting the establishment of the Cape Sable Seaside Sparrow Conservation Fund in collaboration with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the South Florida Water Management District.

Looking ahead, Mrs. Rainey outlined key priorities, including refunding the next cycle of the Foundation's Freedom-to-Fail grant program to spur innovation in coral restoration; creating an emergency response fund for coral in anticipation of future extreme heat and disease events; expanding our conservation work to the Panhandle; securing funding for land acquisitions; and scaling up coastal habitat restoration efforts.

She concluded by reaffirming the Foundation's commitment to advancing conservation efforts and ensuring continued impact.

VI. Grants Program - Mrs. Kathy Barco, Grants Committee Chair



Mrs. Kathy Barco, Grant Committee Chair, presented five over-\$50,000 grant applications for Board review. The Wekiva River Basin Black Bear Study was tabled to allow staff to gather further information. Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr. moved to approve the three grants recommended by the Committee, and Ms. Daphne Wood seconded the motion. Motion carried unanimously. The approved grants are attached to these minutes as Attachment B.

VII. Government Relations – Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr. *et al.*

Board members Robert Spottswood, Jr., Josh Kellam, and Keenan Baldwin discussed their efforts to secure state funding for the Coastal Corridor concept. They, Townsend Tarapani and Mr. Walker spent a full day with state leadership on February 18th. House and Senate leaders and the Governor's staff have given this a favorable hearing, and a Member Request for \$12.8 million to come to the Foundation has been introduced in the House. They expressed confidence in the Senate being supportive once the House and Senate come together to align their respective budget packages.

VIII. Communications Report - Ms. Michelle Ashton

Ms. Michelle Ashton, Director of Communications and Events, presented an overview of recent media coverage and communications efforts. Thanks to Ms. Rachael Schirmer's work, our social media audience now exceeds 36,000. The fastest growth has been on Instagram with 11,000+ followers. Our 2024 annual Impact Report is complete and at the printer. Our eblasts remain a vital tool with a 38% open rate on all emails this fiscal year and a 0.13% unsubscribe rate. Our work continues to receive prominent, positive coverage in the media, including internationally in *The Guardian*. Our trial "geofenced" Spanish-English ads in the Miami and Key West airports far outperformed industry standards. (Geofencing uses GPS, Wi-Fi, or cellular data to create virtual boundaries around a geographic area. It allows apps or software to trigger actions or send notifications when a device enters or exits this defined area.) Thanks to this success, we will be using it to promote our *Protect Florida Springs* license plate this spring in conjunction with two billboards, the first time we have tried the latter.

Ms. Ashton then introduced Teresa Collington and Clay Hollis from TuckerHall for a short crisis communication training.

The Board broke for lunch at 12:36pm, which included Crisis Communication training for the Board and staff.

IX. Finance & Audit – Mrs. Valerie Boyd, Treasurer & F&A Committee Chair

After lunch, Mrs. Valerie Boyd, Treasurer, gave a brief recap of the recent Finance & Audit Committee meeting and then introduced Mr. Mark Anderson of The Lacy Group. Mr. Anderson gave an update on the Foundation's investment portfolio and announced that the Foundation had recently surpassed \$100 million in funds under management. All account allocations are in line with the investment policy and are outperforming all standard benchmarks.

Ms. Erin Smart, Director of Finance, presented the 2nd quarter financial report. Highlights include \$14.7 million in total income (operations and program) year to date and \$7.5 million in expenses, for a \$7.2 million year-to-date total surplus. Gopher tortoise permitting revenue has grown 14% year over year and license plate revenue has grown 12%.

Mr. Will Bradford, Chief Operating Officer, distributed a table showing all current funds with balances greater than \$1 million and explained which organization maintains control over how the funds are distributed. The Foundation controls approximately 16% of these funds, while FWC and our federal partners control 64% and 20% respectively (Attachment C). Per the Board's previous direction, the Foundation has also increased its discretionary grant making to reduce its unrestricted surplus from 24 to 9 months of operating expense.

X. Fundraising – Ms. Dani Richter, Ms. Michelle Ashton

Ms. Michelle Ashton provided an update on *A Night for Nature*, to be held on March 28, 2025, at Loggerhead Marinelife Center. She thanked the *Night for Nature* Committee for its work, particularly in selling out sponsorships and tables before the invitation could even be printed! Despite a smaller capacity and lower sponsorship pricing, she stated that sponsor revenue is close to prior years; a full financial report will be available at the June Board meeting. She concluded by thanking all the Board and staff for creating what is sure to be a magical evening. To date, \$552,000 in gross revenues has been raised.

Director of Philanthropy Ms. Danielle Richter reported on the FYCCN campaign preparation that she, Ms. Emily Dey and Philanthropy Assistant Francesca Klypchak have been doing. She then introduced Ms. Sarah Barrett, outlined new initiatives for the Tenoroc Youth Conservation Center, which operates currently as a day camp using the Daphne and C. Martin Wood Education Center. Ms. Barrett also added that FYCCN's 15th Anniversary is this year, and a celebration is planned.

Ms. Richter finished by asking the Board members to continue to help identify individuals, corporations, and foundations they feel may wish to donate to Tenoroc and Everglades Youth Conservation Center construction, particularly at the 7-figure leadership level.

XI. Open Session

Mrs. Russell opened the floor for new or emerging business. With no new business she moved on to adjournment.

XII. Closing Remarks & Adjournment

Ms. Russell thanked the Board for their participation and dedication to the Foundation's mission. The meeting was adjourned at 2:09 pm.

The Board of Directors will next meet via Zoom on Tuesday, June 3, 2025, at 2:00 pm.

Mrs. Laura Russell, Board Chair

Date

Mr. Robert Spottswood Jr., Secretary


Date


Mr. Andrew Walker, CEO

Date




Attachment A

 Spring 2025 CWT Board Approved Grants Under \$50,000					
ID	Project Title	Organization	Request	Award	Comment
CWT 26-02	Updated Abundance and Genetic Diversity of Black Bears in Florida	FWC	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	Approved.
CWT 26-04	Carotenoid Content and Egg Morphometrics in Wild Versus Captive Florida Grasshopper Sparrows & Implications for Conservation Breeding	FWC	\$ 23,721	\$ 23,721	Approved.
CWT 26-05	The Last Chance for the Cedar Key Mole Skink?	FWC	\$ 48,343	\$ 20,000	Recommend partial funding of \$20,000.
CWT 26-06	Oyster Rake Enhancement for Breeding American Oystercatchers on the South Amelia River	FWC	\$ 28,200	\$ 28,200	Approved.
CWT 26-07	Dragonfly Telemetry: Radio-tracking the Imperiled Say's Spiketail Dragonfly to Inform Conservation in Florida (Phase 2)	FWC	\$ 15,932	\$ 15,932	Approved.
CWT 26-08	Bat Education on the Go: Advancing Public Awareness and Conservation	FWC	\$ 4,687	\$ 4,687	Approved.
CWT 26-09	Determination of Freshwater Mussel Host Use Through Genetic Barcoding of Juvenile Mussels Metamorphosed on Naturally Infested Fishes	FWC	\$ 25,000	\$ 25,000	Approved.
CWT 26-10	Characterizing Range-wide Baseline Heavy Metal Contamination in Florida's Seaside Sparrows	FWC	\$ 11,000	\$ 11,000	Approved.
CWT 26-12	Enhancing Settlement of Larvae from Nursery-propagated Sponges	FWC	\$ 39,079	\$ 39,079	Approved.
CWT 26-16	Remote Sensing Using LiDAR to Identify Solution Hole Habitat in the Florida Keys	FWC	\$ 47,443	\$ 47,443	Contingent approval pending R. Spottswood/A. Walker meeting with FWC
CWT 26-17	Distribution of John's Disease (Paratuberculosis) in Key Deer	FWC	\$ 30,000	\$ 30,000	Approved.
CWT 26-18	Zooniverse: Citizen Science Collaboration for Identification of Florida Keys Marine Resources	FWC	\$ 35,497	\$ 35,497	Contingent approval pending R. Spottswood/A. Walker meeting with FWC
TOTAL	Conserve Wildlife Tag Requests		\$ 333,902	\$ 305,559	

 Spring 2025 DFO Board Approved Grants Under \$50,000					
ID	Project Title	Organization	Request	Award	Comment
DFO 25-07	Diamondback Terrapin Monitoring Research at the Deering Estate	The Deering Estate Foundation	\$ 10,000	\$ 10,000	Approved.
DFO 25-08	Exploring the Indian River Lagoon Aboard the FAU Harbor Branch Discovery Floating Classroom	Florida Atlantic University	\$ 20,633	\$ 20,633	Approved.
TOTAL	Discover Florida's Oceans Tag Requests		\$ 30,633	\$ 30,633	

Attachment B

 Spring 2025 CWT Board Approved Grants Over \$50,000					
ID	Project Title	Organization	Request	Award	Comment
CWT 26-01	Community Bear Resistant Equipment Program	FWC	\$ 100,000	\$ 100,000	Approved.
CWT 26-03	Outreach, Extension, and Web Content for FWR's Plant-pollinator Network Research Program	FWC	\$ 51,202	\$ 51,202	Approved.
CWT 26-15	Are Florida Salt Marsh Voles Extinct? Determining the Status of the Florida Salt Marsh Vole to Implement Recovery Actions	FWC	\$ 71,000	\$ 71,000	Approved.
TOTAL	Conserve Wildlife Tag Requests		\$ 222,202	\$ 222,202	

Attachment C

Foundation-Held Funds with a Balance Greater than \$1 Million, as of 2.28.25			
Fund	Purpose	Balance	Control
General Fund (unrestricted)	Used for normal operating expenses; funds come from a variety of sources as outlined in our budget.	\$ 1,362,289	Our Foundation
Unrestricted Reserve	Available for operations, emergency needs, grantmaking. This has been built over time via operating surpluses. The Board approved a policy several years ago setting 18 months of operating expense as our maximum reserve. Over the past 36 months, via grants like the \$250,000 for Amendment 2, we have consciously reduced our "run time" from 24 months of reserves to currently 11 months.	\$ 2,200,259	Our Foundation
Gopher Tortoise	FWC's gopher tortoise relocation program. We serve as the middle man, essentially holding funds from developers in escrow until FWC needs them. This fund has grown because FWC is first spending down monies not held by us, but eventually this fund will be more actively used. FWC's goal is to use this fund to endow the tortoise program.	\$ 53,192,536	FWC
Eglin Air Force Base Gopher Tortoise Recipient Site	Funds received from developers, utilities, and governments used to support Eglin AFB's operation as a tortoise recipient site.	\$ 9,992,117	FWC & Eglin AFB
Anonymous Donor	Support for a wide array of agreed-upon programs, with most funds to be spent over three to five years. \$250,000 remains unallocated.	\$ 7,676,577	The Foundation is carrying out donors' wishes; funds being spent as needed by FWC and others.
Mitigation Properties	Maintenance & improvements on 22 privately owned properties whose owners entered agreements with USFWS for the conservation of those properties.	\$ 7,006,745	USFWS
Imperiled Species Permitting	Funds received from development-related mitigation payments for impacts to various imperiled species.	\$ 5,593,770	FWC
Our Four Specialty License Plates	These funds are granted out each year per our Board's decisions. We generally reimburse grantees for their expenses as opposed to making up-front payments, so some of the funds we hold are encumbered but not yet distributed until we receive receipts.	\$ 2,859,784	Our Foundation
Crested Caracara Conservation	Development-related mitigation payments for the benefit of the Crested Caracara. We've been working with the USFWS and FWC to identify a worthy project(s) for these funds.	\$ 1,464,417	USFWS
FWC's Shooting Ranges	We hold revenues from the shooting ranges, which are released back to FWC as needed for the operational needs of the shooting ranges.	\$ 1,399,882	FWC
Manatee & Aquatic Vegetation Projects	Funds raised from donors; \$875K allocated to specific projects per donor agreements; balance available for general manatee-related projects.	\$ 1,147,007	Our Foundation carries out the agreed-upon wishes of donors.
Total:		\$ 93,895,383	