

**Minutes of the  
Meeting of the Board of Directors  
Tuesday, December 2nd, 2025**

**Board Members in Attendance**

Mrs. Laura Russell, Chair; Mr. Joshua Kellam, Vice Chair; Mr. Kent Shoemaker, Governance Chair; Mrs. Valerie Boyd, Treasurer; Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr., Secretary; Mr. Carlos Alfonso; Mr. Keenan Baldwin; Mrs. Kathy Barco; Mr. Edward Burr; Mr. James Etscorn; Mr. Preston Fariior; Mr. Todd Jones; Mr. Joe Neber; Mr. Nick Wiley; Mr. Townsend Tarpani; Mr. Roger Young, FWC Executive Director; Mr. Rodney Barreto; Mr. Jerry Pate.

**Board Members Not in Attendance**

Mrs. Daphne Wood

**Staff in Attendance**

Mrs. Tindl Rainey, Interim Executive Director; Mr. Will Bradford; Mrs. Erin Smart; Ms. Michelle Ashton; Mrs. Dani Richter; Mrs. Francesca Klypchak; Ms. Julie Lane; Ms. Rachael Schirmer; Mrs. Melodie Griffin; Ms. Mary Sunukjian; Mr. Tom Zimmerman.

**Guests in Attendance**

Mr. Andrew Walker; Mr. John Lacy, The Lacy Group/Merrill Lynch; Mr. George Warthen, FWC Chief Conservation Officer

**I. Call to Order**

Chair Laura Russell called the meeting to order at 2:03 p.m. and welcomed the Board, staff, and guests to the final meeting of calendar year 2025. She expressed appreciation for the Board's commitment over the past year and noted the significance of the work that had been accomplished, particularly during a period of executive transition.

In her opening remarks, Mrs. Russell took a moment to recognize Mr. Andrew Walker, the Foundation's former President & CEO, who retired earlier this fall. She acknowledged Mr. Walker's exceptional leadership over the past 10 years, crediting him as instrumental in the Foundation's success. Mrs. Russell remarked that Mr. Walker's legacy would be deeply felt for years to come, and Directors joined in expressing their gratitude for his tenure and vision. She presented him with a sculpture by Geoffrey Smith as a token of the Board's gratitude.

**II. Consent Agenda**

Chair Russell introduced the Consent Agenda, which included the approval of the minutes from the September 15, 2025, Board meeting and the approval of the Grants Committee's recommendations for grant requests under \$50,000.



Mr. Edward Burr moved for approval of the Consent Agenda. Mr. Carlos Alfonso seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously, with Mr. Joshua Kellam, Mr. Rodney Barreto, and Mr. Preston Farrior abstaining.

### III. FWC Director's Remarks

Mr. Roger Young, Executive Director of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), provided an extensive update on recent agency activity, upcoming Commission actions, and major fisheries and wildlife management decisions. He noted that FWC committee meetings were underway this week and that the next full Commission meeting would take place in Tallahassee on February 4 and 5.

#### *Atlantic Red Snapper*

Mr. Young reported that Governor DeSantis announced FWC's submission of an Exempted Fishing Permit to the U.S. Commerce Secretary that, if approved, would allow Florida to implement a 39-day Atlantic red snapper season in 2026, a dramatic expansion from the two-day federal season in 2025. The proposed season includes May 22 through June 20 and three October weekends, representing a 1,850 percent increase in fishing opportunities. He credited Division Director Jessica McCauley and her team for their leadership and noted widespread excitement and strong support for the proposal.

#### *Apalachicola Oysters and the Special Activity License (SAL)*

Mr. Young next discussed that the Commission unanimously approved reopening the Apalachicola Bay oyster fishery, supported by a revised management plan establishing abundance-based harvest levels and a new season running January 1 through February 28, 2026, with future seasons occurring October through February. The plan requires a commercial Apalachicola Bay endorsement, creates a lottery-based recreational harvest permit, and establishes reporting requirements for all harvesters. Applications opened November 10 and run through December 16, with over 65 commercial applications already received as staff help former oyster fishermen register.

#### *Special Activity License (SAL) Program*

Mr. Young shared that the Commission approved Phase Two of updates to the Marine Special Activity License Program, including streamlined processes, updated eligibility requirements, clearer conditions across license types, and new transparency measures for evaluating release activities. The SAL update is a three-phase effort, with Phase Three expected in early 2026. He noted heightened public attention after a manta ray was transferred to an aquarium abroad, emphasizing the need for improved clarity and stakeholder engagement.

### *Nonresident Fishing License Sales*

Mr. Young explained that three-day and seven-day nonresident recreational licenses are no longer sold online, though still available at in-person vendors across the state. Online purchasers are now offered only the annual nonresident license, which includes snook and lobster permits to ensure full compliance for visiting anglers. While some Panhandle bait shops expressed concern, the change has increased license revenue and simplified requirements for out-of-state anglers.

### 2025 Florida Black Bear Hunt

Mr. Young concluded by announcing that the first Florida black bear hunt in 10 years will begin on December 6 and run through December 28, 2025, following a random permit draw in which all 172 permits were claimed. He stressed that the hunt would follow strict guidelines and that public communications would emphasize science-based wildlife management. Mr. Young acknowledged the concern regarding the potential for public scrutiny and noted that a comprehensive suite of outreach materials had been prepared in advance to support clear, proactive communications around the hunt.

## **IV. Interim Executive Director Remarks**

Mrs. Tindl Rainey, Interim Executive Director, began her remarks by expressing appreciation for the Foundation staff and thanking the Board for their ongoing support during the executive transition. She shared reflections on the progress made in recent months across conservation, fundraising, and strategic planning, and said that the team remained focused and motivated as the year comes to a close. She highlighted two recent recognitions: the Foundation received the Wes Skiles Water Stewardship Award from the Rotary Club of Downtown Gainesville for its springs and freshwater work, and the Florida Philanthropic Network independently featured the Foundation's Weeki Wachee Restoration Project, a positive sign of the organization's growing visibility.

Mrs. Rainey then provided a brief update on the SS United States reefing project, reporting that vessel inspections are underway, and deployment is expected shortly after the new year. She confirmed the Foundation's \$2 million transfer to Okaloosa County for its portion of the project and noted that while some recent social media posts did not reference the Foundation, staff are coordinating communications with the county as deployment approaches.

She closed by sharing her experience speaking to a class at Florida State University, where she used the Panther PES pilot program to introduce students, many unfamiliar with conservation, to the Foundation's work. The visit was well received, led to an invitation to return, and she expressed optimism about building a deeper connection with the university.

## V. Governance

Mr. Kent Shoemaker, Chair of the Governance Committee, introduced the proposed slate of officers for 2026. The slate included Mrs. Russell continuing as Chair, Mr. Burr serving as Vice Chair for one year before assuming the Chair role, Mr. Robert Spottswood Jr. continuing as Secretary, and Mr. James Etscorn becoming Chair of the Governance Committee. He also noted that Mrs. Valerie Boyd had chosen not to seek an additional three-year term due to other commitments. Mr. Barreto moved to approve the slate as presented, and Mr. Kellam seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Shoemaker then introduced four candidates for Board membership: Mr. Scott Bores, Mr. Chris Carrere, Mr. Seth McKeel, and Mrs. Julie Morris. The Board voted on each candidate individually. The nomination of Mr. Bores was moved by Mr. Barreto and seconded by Mr. Spottswood Jr. The nomination of Mr. Carrere was moved by Mr. Burr and seconded by Mr. Farrior, and the Board approved the motion. Both motions carried without opposition.

Consideration of Mr. McKeel's nomination prompted discussion regarding reappointments following long-term prior service. Rather than voting, the Board chose to defer his candidacy pending a broader review by the Governance Committee of reappointment policies. A motion to defer was made by Mr. Kellam and seconded by Mr. Townsend Tarpani, and the Board approved the deferral.

The Board next considered the nomination of Ms. Julie Morris. A motion to approve her nomination was made by Mr. Todd Jones and seconded by Mrs. Kathy Barco. Following significant discussion and a voice vote, the motion did not receive sufficient support, and the nomination did not move forward.

Mr. Shoemaker then introduced the recommended updates to the Foundation Bylaws. Mr. Kellam moved to approve the updates, and Mr. Alfonso seconded. There being no discussion or objections, the Board voted unanimously to adopt the revisions.

At the request of the Chair, Mr. Shoemaker concluded by providing an update on the Executive Director search. He reported that interviews were underway and that the Search Committee, consisting of Mr. Burr, Mr. Keenan Baldwin, Mr. Alfonso, and Mr. Shoemaker, expected to bring a recommendation forward in early 2026.

## VI. Conservation

Director of Conservation & Strategic Project, Mrs. Rainey, provided a brief conservation update, noting that most active projects remain in maintenance mode while she focuses fully on her responsibilities as Interim Executive Director. She directed the Board to the written conservation report in the Board book and invited questions before moving the conversation to the Coastal Corridor Project. Hearing none, she yielded the floor to Mr. Spottswood Jr. for a more detailed update.

Discussion then shifted to the Coastal Corridor Project. Mr. Spottswood Jr. reported that the subrecipient agreement with FWC is nearing completion, allowing formal implementation of the Coastal Corridor Project to begin. He noted that interviews for the new project manager have started and the position is expected to be filled by January. Financially, the Foundation has \$3 million available for the revolving, fund \$1 million from Board reserves and \$2 million remaining from the Koons family gift, with preliminary approval for an additional \$5 million line of credit if needed, though he hopes to avoid using interest-bearing funds.

Mr. Spottswood Jr. explained that the Committee is exploring an expanded vision for the Coastal Corridor, including branding, marketing, and a potential \$2 million fundraising campaign that would require an adjustment to the FY26 goals. Several Board members expressed support and encouraged deeper Board engagement, with Mrs. Boyd suggesting a workshop or expanded committee meeting. Other Board members also discussed donor opportunities such as naming rights for individual sites.

Chair Russell concluded by noting that the Board had provided sufficient input for staff and the Committee to continue refining the proposal.

## **VII. Finance & Audit**

Mrs. Boyd, Treasurer, began by noting that the Foundation ended the year in a strong financial position. She reported that the Foundation's assets have continued to grow, surpassing \$112 million, and noted that the Finance Committee met the prior week to review first-quarter results. Mrs. Boyd invited Mrs. Erin Smart, Director of Finance, to present the Foundation's first quarter financial report. Mrs. Smart summarized the financial highlights, stating that the Foundation began FY26 in a strong position with year-over-year growth across major indicators. She reported a quarterly surplus of \$7.3 million, driven by program income and investment performance, and noted that program efficiency remained strong at 84 percent. The Foundation disbursed \$3.2 million to conservation projects in the first quarter. Operating results were stable, with minor timing-related variances expected to normalize as *A Night for Nature* contributions continue to arrive. The Foundation ended the quarter with 7 months of unrestricted reserves, down from 11 months due to the Board's previously approved



\$2 million allocation for the Coastal Corridor Project. Several Board members discussed how the Foundation presents its financial position.

Following Mrs. Smart's report, Mr. John Lacy of The Lacy Group delivered the investment update. He reported strong calendar-year returns, continued compliance across asset allocations, and steady earnings despite shifts in short-term interest rates. He noted that the Foundation manages 32 separate investment accounts and reaffirmed that all funds are administered under established Florida Uniform Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act (FUPMIFA) standards. Additional discussion focused on the structure and use of restricted funds, treatment of investment gains, and long-term expectations for the gopher tortoise endowment.

Mrs. Smart addressed several questions from Board members regarding changes in unrestricted net assets and the pacing of spending on temporarily restricted gifts, clarifying that recent fluctuations were related to the timing of scheduled grant payments and that the restricted funds would be drawn down according to donor agreements.

Chair Russell concluded the section by thanking Mrs. Boyd for her leadership of the Finance and Audit Committee and recognizing her service to the Board as she completes her term.

## VIII. Fundraising

Mrs. Dani Richter, Director of Philanthropy, opened the fundraising report with a temperature check on the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network (FYCCN) capital campaign, reminding the Board that the effort aims to raise \$50 million to support construction of the Tenoroc overnight camp, renovations at Everglades, and creation of a maintenance endowment. She noted that preliminary planning work is complete and that staff is prepared to enter the quiet phase of the campaign, which will require outreach beyond the Foundation's existing donor base and active engagement from Board members.

The Board discussed whether to pause the FYCCN capital campaign due to leadership transitions and competing organizational priorities, including the Coastal Corridor. Board members noted donor hesitation and emphasized that the Foundation must first secure updated architectural plans, accurate cost estimates, and clearer permitting pathways. Multiple members referenced past challenges at the sites, where unclear designs and shifting requirements created delays, and stressed avoiding similar issues before seeking major gifts. Some suggested exploring legislative funding to complete pre-construction work. Others reaffirmed strong support for expanding youth conservation programs. They agreed the campaign should not move forward until a more fully developed and reliable plan is in place.

To advance this work, Chair Russell proposed forming a small subcommittee of interested Board members to collaborate with staff on preparing a clear development roadmap. Several members volunteered, including Mr. Lacy, Mr. Alfonso, Mr. Jones, and Mr. Young, who noted that FYCCN's leadership could support the effort. Staff will coordinate the first meeting and prepare an update for the full Board at the March meeting. With no additional items to cover, Mrs. Richter concluded her report.

## **IX. Communications & Events**

Ms. Michelle Ashton, Director of Communications & Events, provided an update on *A Night for Nature*, thanking Committee members who have already sponsored or contributed auction items. She noted that sponsorship commitments remain below 50 percent of goal, encouraging members to reach out to Mrs. Richter if they wish to participate.

Ms. Ashton reported that the Foundation's social media audience has grown to more than 45,000, with recent posts such as a manatee feature, reaching over 70,000 views, thanks to Ms. Rachael Schirmer's effort. Work is underway to finalize the annual report for release prior to the event. She highlighted the success of ongoing campaigns and previewed upcoming ones.

Ms. Ashton noted a recent lull in earned media coverage due to grant cycles and intentional restraint surrounding coverage of the bear hunt, but shared that several strong opportunities are forthcoming, including the Coastal Corridor and the SS *United States* reefing project.

During discussion, Mr. Joe Neber encouraged the team to emphasize the Coastal Corridor communications efforts across the Foundation's channels. Ms. Ashton agreed and noted that this coordination is already underway.

## **X. Grant Programs**

Mrs. Barco, Chair of the Grants Committee, presented the grant requests for the Board's consideration, noting that each had been reviewed through the appropriate advisory committees. She began with Grant PFS26-22 submitted by FWC for \$51,094, which met all requirements and was recommended by both Committees. After brief discussion, Mr. Alfonso moved to approve the request, and Mr. Tarpani seconded. The motion carried unanimously.



Mrs. Barco then introduced Grant WFF26-42, Deer Tag proposal for \$53,000 supporting transfer-of-development-rights work aligned with the Foundation's strategic plan. The Deer Tag Advisory Committee and the Grants Committee had both recommended approvals, but due to the size of the request and the order in which steps were completed, auditors advised that the full Board must act on the grant. Mr. Spottswood Jr. moved approval, and Mr. Jones seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

The final request, Grant FG26-03, centered on funding to establish the Florida Center for Integrative Water Resource Management. During the discussion, Mr. Jerry Pate voiced strong support for the project and offered to personally contribute \$50,000 to ensure the research was fully funded. Mrs. Barco concluded the section by thanking staff and Committee members for their work in reviewing and preparing the grant materials.

#### **XI. Humphrey, Barreto, & Emerging Legacy Award Nominees**

Chair Russell invited Mrs. Rainey to introduce the annual award nominations; however, Mrs. Rainey deferred to Mr. Young, noting that he was best positioned to speak to the nominees' accomplishments. Mr. Young presented the recommended recipients for the three annual FWC awards.

Mr. Young presented the recommended recipients for the three annual recognitions. He announced that Alexis Trotter was nominated for the Rodney Barreto FWC Employee of the Year Award, recognizing her outstanding performance and contributions. For the Louise Ireland Humphrey Award, he recommended Dr. Robbin Trindell of the Habitat and Species Conservation, citing her leadership and achievements. Finally, he presented Elizabeth Kamerick, from the Law Enforcement Division as the nominee for the FWC Emerging Legacy Award, honoring her exemplary early-career service and potential for continued impact.

Mr. Barreto moved for approval and seconded by Mr. Alfonso. The motion carried unanimously.

#### **XII. Open Session**

Chair Russell opened the floor for new business or any final items the Board wished to raise. No new business was introduced.

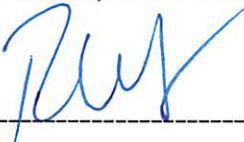
Chair Russell thanked the Board members and staff for their participation and contributions throughout the meeting.

#### **XIII. Closing Remarks & Executive Session**



There were no closing remarks beyond the Chair's appreciation for the Board's engagement during the meeting. No Executive Session was held. With no further business to discuss, Chair Russell adjourned the meeting at 4:56 p.m.

Laura Russell 4/06/2026  
Mrs. Laura Russell, Board Chair Date

 4/13/2026  
Mr. Robert Spottswood Jr., Secretary Date

Tindl Rainey 04/06/2026  
Mrs. Tindl Rainey, Interim Executive Director Date