Minutes of the
Meeting of the Board of Directors
Monday, March 2nd, 2026

Board Members in Attendance

Mrs. Laura Russell, Chair; Mr. Ed Burr, Vice Chair; Mr. Kent Shoemaker, Treasurer; Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr.; Secretary; Mr. Jim Etscorn, Governance Committee Chair; Mr. Carlos Alfonso; Mr. Keenan Baldwin; Ms. Kathy Barco; Mr. Scott Bores; Mr. Chris Carrere; Mr. Preston Farrior; Mr. Todd Jones; Mr. Josh Kellam; Mr. Joe Neber; Mr. Townsend Tarpani; Mr. Nick Wiley; Mrs. Daphne Wood; Mr. Roger Young, FWC Executive Director

Board Members Not in Attendance

Mr. Rodney Barreto; Mr. Jerry Pate

Staff in Attendance

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

Guests in Attendance

Mr. John Lacy, The Lacy Group/Merrill Lynch.; Mr. George Warthen, FWC Chief Conservation Officer; Mr. Rett Boyd, FWC Assistant Executive Director; Ms. Jessica Crawford Long, FWC Chief of Staff

I. Call to Order

Chair Laura Russell called the meeting to order at 9:03 a.m. and welcomed the Board, staff, and guests to Tall Timbers Research Center. Chair Russell thanked the Tall Timbers team for hosting the meeting and noted the importance of gathering at a location that reflects the Foundation's shared commitment to conservation, land stewardship, and scientific research.

Chair Russell recognized the Board members, Foundation staff, and invited guests in attendance and expressed appreciation for their continued engagement and support of the Foundation's mission.

II. Executive Director Candidate Review

Chair Russell and Mr. Kent Shoemaker introduced the Executive Director candidate review process and provided an overview of the evaluation conducted by the Executive Committee.

Mr. Shoemaker introduced the leading candidate, Mr. Nick Wiley. Mr. Shoemaker discussed Mr. Wiley's professional background and longstanding relationship with the Foundation and the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC). Board members discussed Mr. Wiley's extensive experience in wildlife

conservation, public service, and nonprofit leadership, as well as his familiarity with the Foundation's mission and strategic priorities.

During the discussion, several Board members commented on Mr. Wiley's leadership experience and his ability to strengthen the Foundation's partnerships with the FWC and other conservation stakeholders. Board members also expressed confidence in Mr. Wiley's ability to guide the organization through its next phase of growth and to continue advancing the Foundation's conservation initiatives across the state.

Following discussion, the Board expressed strong support for the candidate. Mr. Josh Kellam moved to approve Mr. Wiley as the Foundation Executive Director; Mrs. Daphne Wood seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

III. Consent Agenda

Chair Russell introduced the consent agenda, which included approval of the minutes from the December 2, 2025, Board meeting, the Grants Committee's recommendations for grant proposals under $50,000, the index of final grant reports, and the recommended term renewal of Mr. Keenan Baldwin.

Mr. Kellam moved to approve the consent agenda; Mr. Farrior seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Conserve Wildlife Tag 2027 (CWT27) Proposals

Proposal ID	Project Title	Organization	Funds Requested	Committee Rec	Board Decision
CWT27-01	Why Are Holbrook's Southern Dusky Salamander (Desmognathus auriculatus) Populations Disappearing in Florida?	FWC - FWRI	$25,564	$25,564	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-02	Genetic Diversity and Population Structure in Florida's Burrowing Owls	FWC - FWRI	$16,605	$16,605	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-05	Check It Out! The Great Florida Birding and Wildlife Trail's Birding Backpack Loaner Program	FWC – Habitat & Species	$16,500	$0	Declined
CWT27-06	Expanding Access, Empowering Volunteers: The VEMS Portal Project	FWC – Habitat & Species	$40,000	$40,000	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-07	Crafting Effective Outreach for Uncharismatic Species	FWC – FWRI	$33,000	$0	Declined
CWT27-08	Last Chance for the Cedar Keys Mole Skink? Phase II	FWC – FWRI	$25,000	$25,000	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-10	Trophic Consequences of Nearshore Hardbottom Habitat Degradation in the Florida Keys	FWC – FWRI	$49,518	$0	Declined
CWT27-11	Surveys of the Sponge Communities of the Lower Florida Keys: Assessing Sponge Restoration Needs 2026-2027	FWC – FWRI	$25,000	$0	Declined
CWT27-12	Identifying Communication-Based Pathways to Improve Human–Crocodile Coexistence	FWC – FWRI	$36,952	$36,952	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-13	Incorporating Drones to Improve the Monitoring of Imperiled Horseshoe Crabs in Coastal Habitats	FWC – FWRI	$43,500	$43,500	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-15	Assessing Occupancy and Detection Probability of the Alleghenian Spotted Skunk (Spilogale Putorius Putorius) in Florida	FWC – FWRI	$20,436	$0	Declined
		Total	**$332,075**	**$187,621**	

Koons Marine Fisheries Innovation Grant Program 2027 (KMFI27) Proposals

Proposal ID	Project Title	Organization	Funds Requested	Committee Rec	Board Decision
KMFI27-02	Exploring the Use of Electronic Monitoring for Collecting Recreational Fisheries Data	FWC – FWRI	$43,472	$0	Declined
KMFI27-04	Chemical Ecology Meets Fisheries Innovation: Artificial Bait Development for the Florida Spiny Lobster	FWC – FWRI	$25,000	$0	Declined
KMFI26-05	NEFL Dolphin Entanglement Gear Study	FWC – FWRI	$5,500	$0*	Declined
		Total	**$73,972**	**$0**	

IV. FWC Director's Remarks

Mr. Roger Young, Executive Director of the FWC, provided an update on recent agency initiatives, fisheries management issues, and wildlife conservation priorities across the state.

Apalachicola Bay Oyster Fisheries

Mr. Young first discussed ongoing work related to the Apalachicola Bay oyster fisheries. He noted that restoration and management efforts continue to focus on rebuilding oyster populations while supporting the long-term sustainability of the fishery and the communities that depend on it. FWC staff continue to work with scientists, local stakeholders, and partner agencies to monitor oyster populations and implement strategies that will allow the fishery to recover responsibly.

Atlantic Red Snapper

Mr. Young next provided an update on Atlantic red snapper management. He noted that FWC and the South Atlantic states submitted an application to NOAA for an Exempted Fishing Permit (EFP) that would allow the states to test state management of the recreational Atlantic red snapper fishery, similar to the management structure currently used in the Gulf. Mr. Young reported that NOAA had requested additional information regarding the proposal and that FWC had submitted responses and revised materials. He also noted that the proposal was currently in a federal public comment period.

Board members discussed the importance of improving recreational fishing access, concerns regarding existing federal management and discard mortality estimates, and opportunities to support FWC's efforts during the public comment process. Following discussion, the Board directed the Foundation to submit a letter of support for the EFP proposal.

Cold-Stun Events and Invasive Species

Mr. Young also discussed the recent cold snap and its impacts on marine wildlife. He explained that extreme cold weather events can lead to cold-stun incidents affecting certain marine species, prompting monitoring and response efforts by FWC staff. Mr. Young noted that such cold weather events can also influence invasive species populations, which the agency continues to monitor and manage as part of its broader conservation efforts.

Florida Black Bear Hunt

Mr. Young concluded by sharing an update on the recent Florida black bear hunt application period. He reported that the program generated approximately $1 million in revenue through application fees, reflecting strong public interest and participation in wildlife management initiatives. Mr. Young noted that the level of engagement demonstrates continued public support for responsible wildlife management programs.

V. Interim Executive Director's Remarks

Mrs. Tindl Rainey, Interim Executive Director, provided an update on the Foundation's recent work and priorities. She began by noting that the financial, philanthropy, grantmaking, and communications items before the Board all serve a broader purpose and reflect the Foundation's responsibility to steward resources in ways that advance conservation across the state.

Mrs. Rainey first updated the Board on the Foundation's role in the SS United States artificial reef project. She reminded the Board that the Foundation contributed $2 million in restricted philanthropic funds to support the reefing of the vessel, which is expected to become the largest artificial reef in the world. She explained that the funds, originally donated by the Koons family for artificial reefs, have now been transferred to the county. She noted that the Foundation expects to participate in the eventual deployment event and related public communications surrounding the sinking. Board members discussed the significance and cost of the project, as well as opportunities to document and promote the effort.

Mrs. Rainey next reported on the establishment and early progress of the cape sable seaside sparrow conservation fund. She explained that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approached the Foundation in 2024 about creating a dedicated fund to support recovery efforts for the endangered sparrow and that, after consultation with FWC, the Foundation executed an MOU and formally established the fund in October 2024. She emphasized that the Foundation's role was to serve as a neutral and trusted financial steward for a broad partnership of agencies and organizations working on the issue. Mrs. Rainey reported that the South Florida Water Management District pledged just under $600,000 to the fund and that those funds had been received in the prior month, marking an important milestone. She further noted that Zoo Miami would run the conservation breeding program while partners developed aviary construction estimates, monitoring parameters, and plans for sourcing birds. She also highlighted the larger conservation significance of the effort, noting discussion that recovery of the sparrow is tied to broader Everglades restoration objectives.

Mrs. Rainey also shared that she had the opportunity at the recent FWC meeting to present the Foundation's annual employee awards to several deserving honorees. She remarked on the strength of FWC's staff and noted that the recognition was a meaningful opportunity to highlight outstanding work being done across the agency.

Finally, Mrs. Rainey highlighted several upcoming conservation projects. She noted that the Foundation is preparing to resume aquatic vegetation fencing work at Lake George, continue seagrass planting in the St. Johns River, support prop scar restoration in Biscayne Bay, and advance several large-scale mitigation and restoration efforts, including projects in Satellite Beach, Bright Shore Village, the Space Coast Conservation Fund, and Split Oak Forest. Mrs. Rainey and staff answered questions from Board members regarding the scope and long-term conservation value of those initiatives.

VI. Communications & Events Report

Ms. Michelle Ashton, Director of Communications & Events, began her report by providing an update on the Foundation's communications initiatives and campaign performance. She reported that the Foundation's Protect Florida Springs billboard campaign, which included two billboards and a geofenced digital advertising component promoting the springs specialty license plate, recently received a design award. Ms. Ashton noted that the campaign helped increase visibility for the springs plate and contributed to an uptick in specialty plate purchases.

Ms. Ashton also highlighted the Foundation's ongoing "Watch the World Wake Up" campaign, now in its third iteration. Ms. Ashton reported that the campaign has generated strong engagement, including more than 43,000 visits to the Foundation's website since its launch earlier in the year. She noted that once the campaign concludes, the Foundation will make the campaign content available to FWC for use in its own outreach and licensing initiatives.

Ms. Ashton then provided an update on preparations for *A Night for Nature* 2026, scheduled for March 27. She reported that sponsorship commitments were progressing well and that staff continued working with Board members and event partners to secure additional sponsors and auction items ahead of the event. Ms. Ashton reviewed elements of the evening's program, including the Lifetime Conservation Achievement Award presentation, planned performances, and silent and live auction.

Lastly, Ms. Ashton reported on the Foundation's broader communications performance, including continued growth across social media platforms, engagement through the Foundation's email communications, and recent earned media placements highlighting Foundation-supported conservation projects and partnerships.

VII. Fundraising Update

Mrs. Dani Richter, Director of Philanthropy, presented the major gifts and revenue report and summarized charitable contributions received since the previous Board meeting. She reported on trends in donor retention, reactivation, and acquisition, noting the Foundation's continued efforts to cultivate relationships with existing donors while expanding outreach to new supporters.

Mrs. Richter also discussed the broader philanthropic landscape and its potential impact on giving patterns. She noted that while some areas of philanthropy are experiencing increased competition for donor attention, the Foundation continues to benefit from strong support tied to its conservation mission and partnerships with FWC.

Mrs. Richter provided an update on fundraising priorities, including the campaign supporting the Florida Youth Conservation Centers Network. She described ongoing efforts to engage donors in supporting youth outdoor education programs and highlighted opportunities to connect philanthropic interests with conservation and outdoor recreation initiatives across the state.

Board members discussed strategies for strengthening donor engagement and expanding the Foundation's fundraising capacity. Some noted the importance of continued Board involvement in donor cultivation and stewardship efforts and discussed opportunities to connect prospective donors with specific conservation projects supported by the Foundation.

VIII. Finance & Audit Committee Report

Mr. Shoemaker, Treasurer, reported that the Finance & Audit Committee met to review the Foundation's financial performance and investment portfolio. He invited Mrs. Erin Smart, Director of Finance, to present the FY26 second quarter financial report.

Mrs. Smart reviewed the Foundation's financial performance for the period, including assets under management, operating results, and program expenditures. She reported that the Foundation continues to maintain a strong financial position while supporting conservation initiatives and programs throughout the state. Mrs. Smart also discussed operating and program efficiency metrics and highlighted areas that staff will continue to monitor as the fiscal year progresses.

Following the financial report, Mr. John Lacy of The Lacy Group presented the quarterly investment report. Mr. Lacy reviewed portfolio allocation, market performance, and the Foundation's investment strategy. He discussed current market conditions and the Foundation's approach to maintaining a diversified investment portfolio consistent with the Foundation's investment policy. Mr. Lacy also announced that following a review of the Foundation's account in February, fees on actively managed accounts were reduced from 50 basis points to 36 basis points.

The Board then considered a Finance and Audit Committee recommendation to authorize staff to establish a Line of Credit facility with Bank of America in the amount of $5 million which would be used to fund the Coastal Corridor state appropriation. After discussion, the Board instructed staff to pursue creation of an internal loan borrowing from other restricted Foundation funds where allowed by law for the Coastal Corridor project.

IX. Coastal Corridor Ad Hoc Committee Update

Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr. provided an update on the Coastal Corridor initiative, including ongoing work to establish a governance structure, implementation framework, and long-term funding strategy. He noted that the Committee continues to work with partners and stakeholders as planning for the initiative advances.

Mr. Spottswood, Jr. also discussed efforts to develop a logo and brand identity for the Coastal Corridor. He noted that establishing a clear brand and messaging strategy would help communicate the initiative's conservation objectives, strengthen public recognition, and support future outreach and fundraising efforts.

During the discussion, Mr. Mike Norberg, Coastal Corridor Project Director, was asked to provide additional information regarding the SS United States artificial reef project. Mr. Norberg described the status of the project and the anticipated conservation and recreational benefits associated with deploying the historic vessel as an artificial reef.

Board members discussed opportunities to highlight major conservation initiatives through coordinated communications efforts and emphasized the importance of clear messaging as the initiative continues to develop.

The Committee also presented a recommendation to direct staff to pursue development of a $2 million fundraising and awareness campaign to support expansion of the Coastal Corridor Initiative beyond the legislatively funded project, and to reallocate $200,000 from the $2 million in unrestricted funds previously set aside by the Board for the Coastal Corridor project to provide upfront readiness funding for the campaign. Mr. Townsend Tarpani moved approval of the recommendation; Mr. Spottswood, Jr. seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Spottswood, Jr. concluded by outlining next steps for the Committee as it continues refining governance, branding, and implementation strategies for the initiative.

X. Government Affairs

Mr. Spottswood, Jr. also provided an update on government affairs, summarizing legislative developments and policy considerations affecting conservation funding and related initiatives. He discussed ongoing engagement with policymakers and partner organizations regarding issues that may affect conservation funding, habitat restoration efforts, and related initiatives supported by the Foundation.

Mr. Spottswood, Jr. noted the importance of maintaining awareness of legislative developments that could influence the Foundation's work and emphasized the value of coordination with state agencies, conservation partners, and other stakeholders.

Board members discussed the importance of strategic engagement with policymakers and the role the Foundation can play in supporting conservation priorities through collaboration with partners and stakeholders.

XI. Grant Proposals over $50,000

Ms. Kathy Barco, Chair of the Grants Committee, presented grant proposals exceeding $50,000 for the Board's consideration. Mrs. Barco noted that each proposal had been reviewed through the appropriate advisory and Committee processes prior to being brought to the full Board.

Ms. Barco first presented the Conserve Wildlife tag grant requests. After brief discussion, Mrs. Wood moved to approve the tag grant requests; Mr. Tarpani seconded. The motion carried unanimously, with Mr. Farrior, Mr. Kellam, and Director Young abstaining.

Ms. Barco then presented Grant KSAF-2601 for the Board's consideration. Following discussion, Mr. Spottswood, Jr. moved approval of the grant request; Mr. Tarpani seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

The Board then considered Grant KMFI 27-01. After discussion, the Board agreed to table the request for further review and consideration at a future meeting.

Ms. Barco concluded the section by thanking staff and the members of the advisory and Grants Committees for their work in reviewing the proposals and preparing the materials for the Board.

Conserve Wildlife Tag 2027 (CWT27) Proposals					
Proposal ID	Project Title	Organization	Funds Requested	Committee Rec	Board Decision
CWT27-03	Updated Abundance and Genetic Diversity of Black Bears in Florida	FWC - FWRI	$80,000	$80,000	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-04	Assessing the Potential Association Between the Presence of the Raccoon Variant of the Canine Parvovirus and a Neurodegenerative Disorder in Bobcats and Florida Panthers	FWC - FWRI	$59,675	$59,675	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-09	Germination of Keystone Wildflower Seeds for Pollinator Habitat Restoration	FWC – FWRI	$64,602	$0	Declined
CWT27-14	Revealing the Conservation Value of Florida's Disturbed and Ephemeral Grasslands for Avian Communities	FWC – FWRI	$82,060	$82,060	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-16	Florida Residents' Opinions on Black Bears and Black Bear Management	FWC – Habitat & Species	$55,000	$55,000	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-17	Salt Marsh Songbird Health Assessment: Determining Baseline Health Measures for Florida's Resident Salt Marsh Passerines	FWC – FWRI	$50,000	$50,000	Approved at recommended amount
CWT27-18	Deep Water Acoustic Surveillance of Spawning Fish at a Regionally-Important Spawning Aggregation Site	FWC – FWRI	$100,000	$100,000	Approved at recommended amount
		Total	**$491,337**	**$426,735**	

Koons Marine Fisheries Innovation Grant Program 2027 (KMFI27) Proposals					
Proposal ID	Project Title	Organization	Funds Requested	Committee Rec	Board Decision
KMFI27-01	Utilizing Smart FADs in Biscayne National Park	FWC – FWRI	$77,000	$77,000*	Gather additional information then bring to June board meeting
		Total	**$77,000**	**$77,000**	

XII. Grantmaking Program Presentation

Mrs. Melodie Griffin, Director of Grants, provided an overview of the Foundation's grantmaking efforts and highlighted the role these programs play in advancing conservation initiatives across the state. She discussed the range of projects supported through the Foundation's grant programs, including efforts focused on habitat restoration, wildlife conservation, research, and public engagement.

Mrs. Griffin also described how the Foundation works with partners, agencies, and stakeholders to identify priority conservation needs and direct resources to projects that produce meaningful outcomes for Florida's wildlife and natural resources. She noted that the grantmaking programs continue to support innovative conservation work while strengthening collaboration among organizations working to protect Florida's ecosystems.

Board members discussed the importance of the Foundation's grantmaking programs and the positive impact these initiatives have on conservation efforts throughout the state.

XIII. Open Session

Chair Russell opened the floor for comments and discussion from Board members. She asked Directors to share recommendations for future in-person Board meeting locations and encouraged members to provide suggestions to herself, Ms. Mary Sunukjian, Mr. Wiley, or Mrs. Rainey. Chair Russell also encouraged Board members to continue identifying potential candidates for future Board service.

Mr. Kellam provided an update on work related to the Lake Okeechobee Council, noting ongoing efforts focused on aquatic vegetation management within the lake and the importance of maintaining healthy aquatic habitats for fish and wildlife resources.

Mr. Kellam also referenced a recent aircraft accident near North County Airport in Palm Beach County and raised the question of whether there may be opportunities to work with Palm Beach County to improve measures that protect both wildlife and public safety in areas where aviation activity intersects with wildlife habitat.

Mr. Farrior expressed appreciation to FWC and its staff for their continued dedication to conservation efforts across the state and for their partnership with the Foundation.

Mrs. Wood raised the topic of conflict-of-interest policies and suggested that the Board consider providing additional guidance or clarification to Directors to ensure transparency and consistency in the Board's governance practices.

Chair Russell thanked the Board members for their comments and engagement.

XIV. Closing Remarks

There being no further business, Chair Russell thanked the Directors, staff, and guests for their continued commitment and contributions. She expressed appreciation for the thoughtful discussions throughout the day and for the dedication shown to advancing the Foundation's mission.

Chair Russell then adjourned the meeting at 1:18 p.m.

Laura Russell
Mrs. Laura Russell, Board Chair — 06/18/2026 Date

Mr. Robert Spottswood, Jr., Secretary — 6/26/2026 Date

Tindl Rainey
Mrs. Tindl Rainey, Interim Executive Director — 06/18/2026 Date