



FRIENDS OF BRAZORIA WILDLIFE REFUGES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting

of the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges

January 10, 2020

Gulf Coast Bird Observatory, Lake Jackson

Attendance by Members in good standing: Barbara Burkhardt, Jerry Eppner, David Heinicke, Mike Lange, Layna Lewis, Ruby Lewis, Cathy MacDonald, Neal McLain, Jo Myers, Larry Peterson, Archie Pratt, Sharron Stewart, Thomas Taroni, Regina Tippet

Attendance by Board Members: Oron Atkins, Ed Barrios, Phil Huxford, Herb Myers, Lisa Myers, David Plunkett, Kim Richardson, Dick Schaffhausen, Torrie Tvedt

Absent (excused): Mickey Dufilho, Marty Cornell

Refuge Staff in Attendance: Jennifer Sanchez, Tom Schneider

- I. A quorum being present, President Lisa Myers called the annual FRIENDS OF BRAZORIA WILDLIFE REFUGES (FOBWR) General Meeting to order at 1:00 p.m.
- II. Nomination for the 2020 Board of Directors was presented by the Nominating Committee and nominations were open from the floor. **Motion** was made by Phil Huxford, seconded by Kim Richardson and passed by the attending membership, that **the Board of Directors be composed of the following: Oron Atkins, Ed Barrios, Marty Cornell, Mickey Dufilho, Phil Huxford, Herb Myers, Lisa Myers, David Plunkett, Kim Richardson, and Dick Schaffhausen.**
- III. The amended FOBWR Bylaws were discussed. **Motion to accept the amended FOBWR Bylaws was made by Kim Richardson, seconded by Ed Barrios and carried by the membership.** A copy of the amended Bylaws is attached to these minutes of the meeting.
- IV. Overview of 2019 FOBWR activities for the year 2019 was presented by Lisa Myers; these included:
 - a. DEEP at BNWR: ~36 program days, ~1800 students (over 2000, as corrected by Tom Schneider)
 - b. BNWR Holiday Open House (12/26-1/1): 701 visitors from 22 states and 11 countries; 18 volunteers
 - c. Monthly Refuge Field Trips led by Jennifer Sanchez
 - d. Migration Celebration 2019:
 - i. The Kickoff Dinner—168 Attendees
 - ii. Migration Celebration Event: 2,025 Event Attendees and Volunteers (approximately 90 volunteers)
 - iii. Income \$29,067; Expense \$18,466; In-kind Contributions \$3,145; resulting in a profit of \$10,601 to be used for future Migration Celebrations and other activities
 - e. "A Taste for Nature":
 - i. Attendees 198
 - ii. Income \$68,000 from sponsors / donors / general tickets; \$18,580 auctions; \$3,401 wine sales; totaling \$90,081. Expenses of \$30,089 with a profit for Cannan Bend of \$59,992
 - f. Citizen Science: Sea Turtle Patrol



FRIENDS OF BRAZORIA WILDLIFE REFUGES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

- g. Birds of Prey Programs
 - h. Projects included:
 - i. **Cedar Lake Plantation Trail**—Extended to the western side of the slough and trail surfaced with granite fines (hog damage to be solved; crossing at south end to be completed)
 - ii. **Bobcat Woods Trail**—Last 256' of 1300' of boardwalk and trail underway
 - iii. **Bryan Adams Memorial Water Garden**—Planned, executed, dedicated
 - i. **Major Bequest:** \$100,000 bequest by Dick and Doris Hickner—To be used for the development of Cannan Bend Recreation Area (Dedication ceremony to be held at Cannan Bend ~March)
- V. Goals for 2020 include:
- a. Complete Bobcat Woods Trail and Signage
 - b. Complete Cedar Lake Plantation Trail (including hog-resistant surfacing)
 - c. Establish plan and timeline for Phase One Cannan Bend Project; go after matching grants; begin Phase One
 - d. Establish plan and timeline for refresh of BNWR Discovery Center display
 - e. Refresh of BNWR Visitor Info Pavilion
 - f. Execute another record-breaking Migration Celebration
 - g. Get more people out to the refuges
- VI. An overview of the year's discovery and land acquisitions was presented by Mike Lange. During the calendar year 2019, the Friends helped complete the following acquisitions, which are now part of the San Bernard National Wildlife Refuge:
- a. **The Doss Tract** which consists of 693 acres. Although it is officially part of the San Bernard NWR, it is located adjacent to the Big Boggy NWR. It consists of marsh and salty prairie habitat. It is excellent habitat for wading birds, waterfowl and rails and connects Big Boggy Refuge to the shores of Lake Austin.
 - b. Two tracts were acquired next to **Hanson County Park**. One is 355 acres, which is now part of the San Bernard NWR and a 5-acre tract, which was acquired by Brazoria County as the new headquarters for the Hanson County Park. The BCPD and the Refuge will partner to manage this new land on the San Bernard River. The county will develop a trail system for the park and the adjacent refuge land and will someday establish a camping area on the open portion of the property near the headquarters.
 - c. Another important acquisition was completed at San Bernard NWR on FM 2918 near the boat ramp on the intracoastal waterway. This is the **Davant Tract**. This inholding has been a priority for the service for many years and was finally closed in December. This was primarily the good work of Tom Smith. It consists of 501 acres of prime habitat for rails and nesting mottled ducks and other wildlife.
 - d. Mike Lange and Tom Smith have also helped the Service secure a contract on approximately 4,700 acres of prime bottomland hardwood forest habitat on the **San Bernard River and Peach Creek in Wharton County**. This is a very large, old-growth forest dominated by oaks, green ash and bald cypress and is a priority purchase for the refuge. It is prime habitat for migrating, wintering and breeding songbirds and is also habitat for waterfowl and water birds. Jennifer Sanchez, Mike



FRIENDS OF BRAZORIA WILDLIFE REFUGES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Lange and Tom Smith, with the help of Ernest Cook, have prepared a grant application to the Knobloch Family Foundation to try and secure initial funding for the project in the amount of approximately \$1.4M. The project will then be presented to the Migratory Bird Conservation Commission in April of 2020, to try and secure most of the remaining funds. A total of about \$13.5M will be needed.

- e. Finally, a unique and very **pristine native prairie tract** was conserved in 2019. This 35-acre tract is located **near the Brazoria NWR** and contains over 200 species of native plants. The Galveston Bay Foundation is holding the fee title and will donate a conservation easement to USFWS as part of the refuge. This tract is very important as a seed source for restoring other prairie tracts throughout the region.
 - f. Mike Lange showed a list of **8 tracts currently being worked on** in 2020. Mike pointed out that the Friends support and grantsmanship has made it possible to conserve a significant amount of very important habitat each year.
- VII. Refuge update was presented by Jennifer Sanchez
- a. **Black Rail and Management Activities** - Anticipate listing as a Threatened Species. Requires a Section 7 Consultation on all refuge activities that could impact the species, including prescribed burning program. We must show that at any point in time, more than 50% of the rail habitat is in a successional stage that meets the needs of this species. About half of the 12,000 acres we burn a year are within rail habitat.
 - b. **Dressing Point Island, Big Boggy NWR** - Working with partners for more than 10 years to protect the island. Initiated construction to protect and grow the rookery island. Paid for out of NRDA funds from Deep Water Horizon
 - c. **Invasive Species Management** - ACE Epic Interns: hired three interns for nine months to assist with invasive species work. Apple Snails: Last Year we removed more than 10,000 snails from mid-August through mid-December at Hudson Woods. Initiated collection of snails in March and continued for nine months. Invasive Plant Management: Target areas included Brazoria prairie, Eagle Nest Lake and prairie, San Bernard Tour road area
 - d. **Protecting the Integrity of our Coastal Marshes** - We are working with Ducks Unlimited and the Coastal Program using 5.2 M in supplemental funding from hurricane relief to protect saltmarshes through limiting saltwater intrusion, preventing shoreline erosion and restoration through thin-dredge placement. Priority Locations: Long Pond Outfall, Christmas Marsh, Sargent and Cedar Lakes
 - e. **Managing Freshwater Wetlands** - The farm fields and managed wetlands support wintering waterfowl, wading and water birds and shorebirds and tally the greatest bird use days/acre of all the habitat types. Freshwater wetlands require manipulation to maintain productivity for wildlife. Last year we rented a large agricultural tractor to assist in management at Brazoria. Working on replacing structures and movement of water at Wolfweed Wetlands
 - f. **Brazoria Visitor Services** - Complete NEPA and planning for expansion of hunting opportunities. Begin development of the Cannan Bend Recreation area including: Two miles of trails, restroom, boat launch, fishing platforms, roads and parking areas.



FRIENDS OF BRAZORIA WILDLIFE REFUGES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

- g. **San Bernard Visitor Services** - Replace the low-water crossing on the tour loop with culvert crossings. Complete Bobcat Woods Trail. Remove the boardwalk at Hudson Woods and replace with DG trail. Complete interpretive signs for Cedar Lake Plantation Trail and Bobcat Woods.
 - h. **Environmental Education** - Continue DEEP Program. Within the new butterfly lab, breed several species of butterflies and provide 3500 butterflies for environmental education and outreach opportunities. Planning to replace interpretive panels and taxidermy mounts in the Discovery Center.
- VIII. A Financial update was presented by Dick Schaffhausen See distributed email.
- IX. The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m.