

Board Meeting
Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges
Friday, May 25, 2012; Discovery Center, Brazoria NWR

Board Member Attendees: Ed Barrios, Ron Bisbee, Marty Cornell, Sarah Heller, Sandy Henderson, Phil Huxford, Neal McLain, Denis Mudderman, David Plunkett, Krissy Plunkett, and Tom Taroni. **Refuge Management:** Jennifer Sanchez. **Other Attendee:** Jane Plunkett

President Ed Barrios opened the board meeting at 2:01 pm.

The Minutes of the January 20th Board Meeting, as amended via e-mail comments, were accepted by all after so moved by Ron Bisbee and a second by Sarah Heller.

The Financial Report, as presented by Treasurer Krissy Plunkett, was unanimously accepted after a motion to do so by Phil Huxford and a second by Ron Bisbee:

FRIENDS OF BRAZORIA WILDLIFE REFUGES FINANCIAL REPORT May 24, 2012

FOBWR FINANCIAL STATEMENT				
Updated: May 24, 2012				
ACCOUNT BALANCE				\$289,904.95
-				
GRANT No. & Name	Grantor	Total Awarded	Amount Spent	Amount Available
Funded Grants & Allocated Funds				
20080201 Deerslayer Program	Fines	\$3,825.00	\$3,674.89	\$150.11
McGovern Brazoria Refuge Allocated	Katherine McGovern	\$37,000.00	\$28,954.09	\$8,045.91
McGovern San Bernard Refuge Allocated	Katherine McGovern	\$37,000.00	\$5,900.00	\$31,100.00
20070803 Revolving Reimbursement, Houston Endowment	Houston Endowment	n/a	n/a	\$20,000.00
20080303 Cox Native Tree Restoration		\$500.00	\$500.00	\$0.00
20091123 Dow Woods Trail	Dow/TPWD	\$220,000.00	\$202,087.48	\$17,912.52
201006623 Dow Woods Pavilion	Challenge Cost Share USFWS	\$69,525.00	\$63,141.62	\$6,383.38
20110401 Reforestation	Fines	\$2,500.00	\$2,500.00	\$0.00
20110825 Otter Slough Boardwalk	The Dow Chemical Company	\$25,000.00	\$25,000.00	\$0.00
20110926 Brazoria Birding Initiative*	NFWF	\$5,000.00	\$282.91	\$3,717.09
20110928 Al Clarke Fish Casting Shelter	Clarke Family	\$3,000.00	\$0.00	\$3,000.00
20111115 Land Acquisition Discovery	Houston Endowment	\$300,000.00	\$138,471.61	\$161,528.39
TOTAL ALLOCATED FUNDS				\$251,837.40

*Expected funds of \$6034.50 from USFWS CCS will raise funds back to \$14,080.41

**\$23,100 of the San Bernard McGovern funds has been allocated by the Board to projects that develop the Dow Woods Unit.

Reimbursable Grants				
20110729 Pentagon Marsh IV	NFWF	\$32,000.00	\$2,956.00	\$29,044.00
20110926 Brazoria Birding Initiative***	NFWF	\$5,000.00	\$0.00	\$1,000.00
***Received \$4,000 12-27-2011				
GENERAL FUNDS				\$38,067.55
TOTAL OF GRANTS & FUNDS				\$289,904.95

Krissy reported that on May 14th she filed the Friends Form 990 with the IRS.

Krissy noted that a letter needs to be sent by the Friends to the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex acknowledging that the Discovery Center Exhibit project (grant 20100909) has been completed. This will enable closing the books on Challenge Cost Share funds allocated to this project. **Marty Cornell** acknowledged that he was remiss in sending this letter, and **committed to meet with Julie Chisolm to finish this task.**

Kathrine McGovern Recognition: An unresolved issue from the January 20th board meeting was our intent to provide Mrs. McGovern with a photo document that illustrated the impact of her gifts to our refuges. Marty Cornell noted that we have very few photos showing people using McGovern-sponsored projects; to wit the Wolfweed shelter, the San Bernard butterfly garden, or the Discovery Center exhibits. We do have photos of the opening day of the Dow Woods trails that will use some McGovern funds. Denis Mudderman noted that the new class of Junior Naturalists will start on June 2nd with a meeting at the Discovery Center, and suggested that this would be an opportune time to get photos of kids around the lobby exhibits. **Marty Cornell agreed to attend this meeting and take the desired photos.** [This was done.]

Ed Barrios announced that he has been contacted by Steve Sonbury of the **Houston Endowment Foundation** requesting photographs showing the construction or use of our capital projects; Steve will select one photo for use in their next annual report. [Mr. Sonbury subsequently came to the Brazoria NWR headquarters on May 31st and took photos of the volunteer crew who were decking the Otter Slough boardwalk; Ed Barrios, Marty Cornell, Billy Heck, Jim Hillis, and Archie Pratt.]

Jennifer Sanchez provide the **Refuge Update:**

✓ The second **Junior Naturalist** class for 12 to 14 year old children will start on Saturday, June 2nd with a kickoff for the students and their parents at the Discovery Center. This class has accepted 18 students of diverse background: 13 girls and 5 boys from 13 schools in Brazoria County, their ethnic diversity consists of one African American, 4 Hispanic, and 13 Caucasian; three are special needs children including one who is autistic. Classes will run from June through January.

The cost of this class is funded with \$9,725 from the USFWS Youth Initiative program. Since this grant money cannot be used on food or beverages, Marty Cornell moved, Krissy Plunkett seconded, and the board unanimously approved an allocation of \$400 to cover such incidental expenses of the 2012 Junior Naturalist Program. **Sarah Heller noted that BASF might be willing to cover these extra costs and she will contact Cindy at BASF to explore this possibility.**

✓ Jennifer informed the board that the Texas Mid-coast National Wildlife Refuge Complex (TMCNWRC) Land Protection Plan (LPP), which is under development, will now be a part of the Environmental Assessment (EA) portion of the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), which is nearing completion. This change in protocol is at the direction of the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Southwest Regional Office in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The combined document will be ready for review by the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department

(TPWD) in June and then published in the Federal Register (FR) in July for public review and comment. [Don't ya just love government acronyms!]

- ✓ Our request for \$450,000 from the John O'Quinn Foundation was rejected. This money was intended for the purchase of the 212.7-acre **Texas Red Oak Tract** of the Columbia Bottomlands Forest ecosystem. Mr. O'Quinn's untimely death has tied up his estate in probate, thus preventing the execution of any grant proposals.
- ✓ A total of 7,200 acres of land has been or is in the process of being acquired by the TMCNWRC. A 500-acre parcel of the Brothers Ranch on the west side of Highway 36 between Brazoria and West Columbia is now part of the San Bernard NWR. Across the road, a 1,500-acre section of the Brothers Ranch to the east side of Hwy 36 extending to the west bank of the Brazos River is being negotiated, with potential financial help from the Trust for Public Lands. this section will cost \$1,500,000; current donations toward its purchase are \$450,000.
- ✓ The TMCNWRC expects to soon close on the 1,300-acre Yelderman tract, which is one of the largest sections of contiguous forest in our area. This land will be paid for from the Migratory Bird Fund.
- ✓ More than 3,000 acres, located north of Sargent Unit, currently owned by the McCormic and Williamson families will be donated to the Service soon. A Wetlands Reserve Program easement has been purchased by NRCS and the fee title will be donated. The Service has completed an appraisal on a parcel of land located just west of this property on Live Oak Bayou. The Service received a 1 million dollar grant from the North America Wetland Conservation Act (NAWCA)*¹, utilizing the McComic/Williamson donation toward the purchase of this forested and marsh wetland.
- ✓ 900 acres are being acquired along Hwy 35 near East Columbia, using funds from the Trust for Public Lands. This will be part of the Brazos River Unit of the SBNWR.
- ✓ Jennifer reported that the Complex decided not to pursue the acquisition of property near the county landfill.
- ✓ Because of further potential cuts of 10% each year for the next two years in USFWS budgets, on top of the 2% cut imposed in 2011 and the 3% cut mandated in 2012, the TMCNWRC will not be filling any vacated positions. The discretionary portion of the complex budget is limited, so the budget cuts will de facto impact public use activities the most. NFWF is asking for financial help from Friends organizations to support lobbying efforts to mitigate such drastic budget cutbacks. After discussion, Ron Bisbee motioned that \$1,000 be sent from the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges to NFWF to help in their lobbying campaign. This motion

¹ North American Wetlands Conservation Act (103 Stat. 1968; 16 U.S.C. 4401-4412) -- Public Law 101-233, enacted December 13, 1989, provides funding and administrative direction for implementation of the North American Waterfowl Management Plan and the Tripartite Agreement on wetlands between Canada, U.S. and Mexico.

was seconded by Phil Huxford and passed by a unanimous vote of the board. [It is presumed that the Treasurer will send our contribution.]

✓ Jennifer notified the board that the caracara nest camera has been dismantled and stored because it displayed no animal activity. She suggested that perhaps it might be used on Otter Slough.

Ed Barrios noted that the Texas AgriLIFE Extension Service is enforcing **background checks** for volunteers. Ed noted that we were under the misimpression that such checks were routinely done by BIRD for volunteers involved in DEEP activity; in reality this school district requires that such checks be done annually on volunteers listed by the refuge. Apparently the refuge was under the impression that Texas Master Naturalists instigated the background screening process. It was noted that many DEEP volunteers are not Master Naturalists.

Ed reported that his recent communication with BIRD indicated their willingness to continue to conduct background checks at no cost to the volunteers. Ed noted that drivers license numbers are sufficient for volunteer identification; social security numbers are not required. It was agreed that Jennifer will delegate to Bryan Adams the responsibility for initiating the annual background screening and maintaining records of positive screening results.

Discussion ensued on the need for background checks on the +120 volunteers involved in Migration Celebration. It was decided that this screening would not be needed because attending young children are always accompanied at this event by their parent or other responsible adult.

A draft **Friends-USFWS Partnership Agreement**, approved by the USFWS Southwest Regional Office, was submitted to the board for approval. Discussion included the requirement for volunteers to wear easily identified badges noting the wearer to be a USFWS volunteer; this need will be met by indication on name tags for Migration Celebration and other Friends public events. It was noted that the agreement requires pre-approval by the Project Manager of all items sold at a Friends store. It was concluded that this will not be a burden because the complex Project Leader is engaged with Friends board meetings and Migration Celebration planning sessions and is thus aware of our intended store inventory. Following this discussion, Marty Cornell moved, Sarah Heller seconded the motion, and the board unanimously approved the partnership agreement.

Denis Mudderman raised the issue of our right to **public use of photos** taken during refuge activities. He suggested that we adopt the policy of the USFWS that puts such photos in the public domain to use free of charge for any photos taken with government cameras, or taken on restricted areas of the refuges, or involves volunteer activities (like our sea turtle patrols). A motion was made by Denis Mudderman that the Friends of Brazoria Wildlife Refuges adopt the USFWS policy of the public use of photographs, with the proviso that any such photos that show identifiable faces of children must have a release signed by their parent or responsible adult. Neal McLain seconded the motion, which was then approved unanimously by the board.

Grants: Marty Cornell reviewed our active grants, noting as shown in the above Treasurer's Report that sufficient funds are allocated to the completion of the crossing of Bastrop Bayou, which is the final task to be done as part of the **Dow Woods Trail** (grant 20091123). Jennifer Sanchez reported that she has been discussing this crossing with Mike Montagne of the National Fish Hatchery in San Marcos, which has funds for "fish passing structures" and who could help on the engineering of this structure. Jennifer envisions large box culverts for the main part of the crossing. She hopes to be able to start building the crossing this fall. Cost sharing funds from the National Fish Hatchery would proportionally reduce the amount of Friends money needed to complete this grant.

Ron Bisbee reported on the **GCJV Mottled Duck Conservation Plan-IV** (\$32,000 grant 20110729). A little under \$3,000 has been paid to date (see above Treasurer's Report), but pending invoices include ~\$7,300 to examine an existing well, which showed its screen to be highly mineralized. The cost to fix this well will be about \$11,500 for sonar jetting and another \$2,000 to repair the pump. Texas R.I.C.E. will be paid \$5,000 for its management services to date. This well will mitigate effects of drought such as occurred last year, which restricted water draw from the Colorado River (this project is located on refuge land near Sargent, which is part of the Colorado River watershed).

The **Boardwalk across Otter Slough** (grant 20110815) is ready for decking along its 350-foot length, which will then be lined on each side with a toe rail. Because the drop to the slough bottom in the center of the span exceeds 30 inches, a railing on that part may be necessary. It was agreed that a grand opening with Dow dignitaries present should be arranged after the boardwalk is completed.

The final engineering of the boardwalk substructure required the use of 8-inch diameter piling posts and an increase in the number of stringers and cross bracing from the original estimate. These modifications have increased the cost by \$7,000. Marty Cornell thus moved that "Up to \$10,000 of McGovern funds shall be allocated to cover the increased costs of Grant 20110825, the Otter Slough Boardwalk." Sarah Heller seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Denis Mudderman noted that the **Birding Initiative** grant (20110927) has a September 30, 2012 deadline for completion. A \$4,000 advance of this \$5,000 NFWF grant has been received. Invoices must be submitted before the deadline to clear this advance, so materials should be purchased as soon as possible. The final \$1,000 would be paid after our final report is accepted by NFWF; this report must be submitted before the end of this year.

The **Fish Casting Shelter** (20110928) will be built by the refuge staff, including the concrete slab work, by mimicking the dimensions of the Bug Sweeping shelter next to the Discovery Center. [Note that construction has in fact started on 1June12,] Although funding is based on a \$3,000 donation from the Al Clarke family, it was noted at the last meeting that Friends will need to augment this money to pay for materials. Cost will be less than the Bug Sweeping shelter because the refuge staff is constructing the structure (instead of using contract labor), and in-stock corrugated roofing material will be used. As a contingency, Marty Cornell moved to spend up to \$3,000 of Friends unallocated funds on the Fish Casting Shelter; the motion was seconded by Ron Bisbee and approved by all board members present. [At the Friends General

Meeting following this board meeting, Donna Jablecki suggested that a dedication ceremony be held for the new shelter on the first day of the fall DEEP program. The Clarke family should be invited to this event, which should include recognizing Doctors Marcum and Slack for sponsoring the initial fish casting module of our DEEP curriculum circa mid-1990's.]

Krissy Plunkett noted, as reflected in her financial report above, that the reforestation funds in two small grants to Friends have been spent. The grants **Cox Native Tree Restoration** (20080303) and **Reforestation** (20110401) are now closed.

The Board Meeting adjourned around 3:05 pm

Marty Cornell,
Substitute Secretary for this meeting.