

Friends of Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge
Board Meeting Minutes
April 26, 2008

Attendees: Joan Davis, Steve Horowitz, John Marshall, Nancy Marshall, Cynthia Plockelman, Jean Poleshuck, Sid Rotter, David Underwood, Elinor Williams

Friends Vice-President Steve Horowitz conducted the meeting in the absence of President Jay Brenner. Jay's picture was placed at the head of the table instead. Steve will represent the Friends at the Refuge staff meeting, because it has been moved from the 1st Thursday of next month to the last Tuesday of this month, and Jay will not return until Wednesday.

Last month's meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

New Board Member Sid Rotter!

Long-time Refuge volunteer and Friends member Sid Rotter was unanimously approved to join the board. Sid joined the meeting after the vote. Welcome Sid!

Treasurer's Report

Jean reported balances of \$14,950 in the regular checking account, \$3,200 in the exhibits checking account, \$25,057 in our 4-month promotional CD and \$10,091 in the 3rd Federal CD. A few checks written recently for store expenses from the regular checking account are not reflected in the above balance.

Threats to Refuge

Helena Chemical has withdrawn plans for its distribution center at the Refuge entrance, happily ending a 2-year battle.

The Palm Beach County commission approved 2 rock mining permits in the Everglades Agricultural Area on Thursday evening by a 4-2 vote. This battle continues as permitting moves to the state and federal levels. John Marshall notes that the Department of Interior, specifically Sam Hamilton, Regional Director for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Southeast Region, has been actively registering opposition to threats such as this and the proposed landfill on the Refuge's western border. In fact, he has been more outspoken than the non-governmental organizations (NGO).

Visitor Center

The new Visitor Center is now expected to open the last week of May or the 1st week of June. The elevator people came last Tuesday, AT&T came out and is almost ready, and the alarm people came and gave their OK last Thursday. Furniture is being ordered from Atlanta.

Prescribed Burn

A prescribed burn was conducted in the Refuge interior yesterday.

New Refuge Employee Jackie Pelt!

Jackie Pelt has been hired to assist David with the volunteer program. She starts Monday. She will be a part-time USFWS employee and she can also work in the gift shop part-time as a contractor for the Friends. The best of all worlds!

Everglades Coalition

Our Friends group has joined the Everglades Coalition. We will be billed for dues shortly. Cynthia Plockelman and Tom Poulson will represent us as voting members. Coalition members host their meetings on a rotating basis. Once our new Visitor Center opens we could consider hosting one of their meetings. We should plan to participate in their conference to be held in 2010 in West Palm Beach. Last year the cost for attendance per person was \$125 for early registration. This fee helps with their fundraising for their executive director's salary and the cost of the conference.

Nancy has asked the National Wildlife Refuge Association and Friends of Ding Darling Refuge to consider joining the Everglades Coalition in hopes of making this a truly statewide coalition and adding to its clout.

Photo Contest

Our photo contest was held April 13 in the Boynton Beach branch of the Palm Beach County library system. 24 photographers entered. Their lovely photos are now on our website <http://www.loxahatcheefriends.com> thanks to Webmaster George Berman. All on the board agreed that George is doing an amazing job!

Cindy Bartosek, who has run our photo contest single-handedly for several years, is stepping down. The board asks Jay to write her a thank you letter for her selfless donation of expertise, time and materials over the years. She has outlined the steps involved in running a photo contest in a suggested timeline. She suggests starting early - with announcements in August, getting the word out through a number of different venues.

A committee will be formed to run next year's photo contest. Sid (a photographer and birder) was selected chairman of the committee, to be assisted by Elinor and Joan. The committee will first meet with Cindy so she can share more of her insights and ease the transition.

Sid suggested that all the photos be displayed in the Visitor Center, not just the winning ones, and Elinor agreed. Sid also suggested putting together a coffee table book of photos.

Jean suggested, and Joan tentatively agreed to be in charge of selling the photos to raise money for the Friends at the annual luncheon, Everglades Day, in the store, etc. Elinor suggests putting price tags on any hanging in the hall of the Visitor Center. Joan suggests reproducing photos so we can sell the same ones more than once.

New Project Leader Sylvia Pelliza!

Our new Project Leader Sylvia Pelliza has 27 years experience in fire and law enforcement in every region of the country except this one. She is now in Hawaii and expects to arrive here in late June or early July. The board asks Jay to write her a letter of welcome.

Friends of Academy of Environmental Science & Technology

The Friends of the Academy of Environmental Science & Technology at Forest Hill Community High School is creating a Leah Shad memorial scholarship and has asked us for a contribution. Leah Shad was instrumental in raising funds for the exhibits to be in our new Visitor Center. Cynthia recommends that we check our

bylaws to see if a small donation for this purpose would be allowed. Jean will make a copy of the bylaws for Sid, Joan and Elinor.

Fundraising for Exhibits is Complete!

Nancy reports that fundraising for the exhibits for the new Visitor Center is complete! Construction can now start. With 6 months required for production and installation, the grand opening can be anticipated in October or November. Video work starts Monday. Linda Humphries, President of the Audubon Society of the Everglades (and also a Friends member) will present a check for \$20,000 to the USFWS at 7:30PM on May 6 at the Howard Park Community Center in West Palm Beach.

They are presenting this in the form of an oversized check, and Nancy suggests that we do the same with the \$20,000 we have committed. These checks should be made out directly to the USFWS. Our check will be needed in mid-June.

The Audubon check will be funding the exhibits on birds and the benefits of wetlands. Our check was supposed to fund the video, estimated to cost between \$20,000 and \$40,000. However, the Bachelor Foundation is donating \$100,000 for the auditorium and movie theater with hi-def equipment, and they will be credited in the video. We must decide if we want to share credit with them for the video, or leave them with sole credit and take credit for one of the exhibits such as the gator hole or "you manage the Refuge". The virtual airboat ride is a possibility, but it costs a bit more, approximately \$53,000. Nancy suggests something with high visibility. She will get the exact costs for all of the exhibits. While the funding is complete, the assignation of credit is still fluid. More grant money may come in and more pledges are expected. Any overflow can be used for other things such as more signage, landscaping, butterfly gardens, etc.

About 30 bricks have been sold so far. We can use 2,000. Each brick sells for \$100, and we get \$85 in return, so we should try harder to sell more bricks. Nancy brought in a sample brick engraved with 2 lines, "Help the Refuge, Buy a Brick". She's not sure what the character limit is, but hasn't hit it yet, and knows for sure "Arthur R. Marshall Loxahatchee National Wildlife Refuge" fits. The sample brick and "What a Croc" brochures will be placed in the Visitor Center to help boost sales. The bricks sold so far can be installed now, and more can be installed as we sell them.

Benches were initially more popular than bricks, but the return to the Refuge on a \$150 bench is not nearly as good. About 25 have been sold. Ten benches will be placed on each pavilion.

David is in charge of the grand opening. The Friends and the Marshall Foundation will contribute funds. A budget is needed.

Visitation is Up!

The Refuge logged 336,829 visitors at the main fee booth in 2007, an increase over previous years (2007 - 315,519; 2006 - 274,505).

Next Meeting

Next meeting will be Saturday, May 31 at 9:00 AM.

New Cash Register

Steve and Jean are investigating a new state-of-the-art cash register for the gift shop that will allow them to input inventory into the system and tie into our existing Quick Books accounting system. David suggests getting something more like the cashiers in grocery stores use, so as not to scare off computer-phobic

volunteers. Steve estimates the money required to buy a cash register with the needed features would be in the \$2,000 range.

Elinor