NETWS Quarterly Board Meeting –Summer 2020

Conference Call

29 Jun 2020, 4:00 pm CST

Members present: Shelly McPherron, Will Inselman, Shaun Dunn, Matt Gruntorad, Mel Nenneman, Andrew Little, Mercy Manzanares, Sarah Nevison, Jenny Prenosil, Carl Wolfe.

Meeting called to order at 4:00 pm

This is the first board meeting since elections closed on 23 Mar 2020, with newly elected members taking up their new roles. New board members are:

President-elect: Will Inselman

Treasurer: Matt Gruntorad

At-large board members: Sarah Nevison, Jenny Prenosil

The rest of the board members are as follows:

President: Shelly McPherron

Past-president: Shaun Dunn

Secretary: Melvin Nenneman

At-large board members: Andrew Little, Mercy Mananares

Secretary’s report: A copy of the 24 Feb 2020 board meeting in Kearney, NE was emailed to all board members in advance of the meeting. Nenneman provided a verbal summary of the meeting minutes for those on the conference call. Nevison asked if we had a formal application process for members asking the chapter for reimbursement for the Associate/Certified Wildlife Biologist application. Dunn has started an application form for members to use to document their application, and to request reimbursement. Dunn moved to accept the meeting minutes as sent and summarized, McPherron seconded, and the motion passed.

Treasurer’s report: Matt Gruntorad reported that he currently does not have access to the NETWS accounts and files, and still needs to work with Jessica Jurzenski to finalize the transfer of the treasurer’s responsibilities. Shelly indicated that she would work with Matt and Jess to get this transfer accomplished. As of the Annual Meeting, the NETWS checking account was in good shape, but will need to be updated with expenditures from the annual meeting, and income from the auction.

Committee reports

Nominating: Shaun said not much to report at this time, but will start working on a slate of candidates for board positions as we get into the fall (elections this year for President-elect, Secretary, 2 At-large board members).

Membership: Dunn is still nominally chairing the committee, but would like to hand off to another member interested in the committee. A couple of people had expressed interest, but have since declined to take on the duties. Dunn said that the 2 main times members renew is at the end of the year/new year and at the annual meeting. Most members renew through the website. Dunn has created an Access database to track the membership roster. Chair also has access to national database to download the membership roster from TWS. Dunn said he has also been maintaining the NETWS Google group email list.

Programs: Discuss in New Business

Conservation Review: Zach had an appointment, so wasn’t able to attend the meeting, but did share information with McPherron. Committee was quite active this spring with supporting the Recovering Americas Wildlife Act (RAWA) and working to hold the Nebraska Environmental Trust (NET) board accountable for following through on how projects are funded based on rankings of those projects. Wolfe suggested that the NETWS chapter and its members need to follow up with more letters to let the NET board know that actions like defunding higher ranked projects in favor of lower-ranked projects is not acceptable. Dunn said that NET is really important in providing matching funds to NGPC and other agencies in Nebraska that work to complete wildlife conservation projects. Wolfe said that it is important to educate the public about the importance of the NE Environmental Trust. Manzanares suggested that we should put together a coalition of agencies and non-profits that can advocate for continuation of NET, and have documents available to support the work NET has helped fund. Wolfe asked if it would be possible to suggest that the NE Attorney General look into if the NET board actions were legal, suggesting that NET has become a political football. Holding the board accountable is important. Dunn was willing to contact Mark Ronan (Shaun, it this name correct?) to ask if there is potential for the Attorney General to intervene. Zach sent an email to the board suggesting that one possible action for NETWS could take is to suggest is a by-law change for the NET board.  In his email, Zach said “One issue we had was that the board arbitrarily chose [to defund] much higher ranked projects to fill the funding need of the [lower ranked] ethanol project.  We could suggest the board change the by-laws to state that when changes are made to the Grants Committee recommendations, that any funding necessary to meet that obligation be taken from the lowest ranked, funded, project first.  If additional funds are necessary then the board works in reverse rank order until the need is met.  That would at the least make it "fair" and would reduce the scrutiny the board receives when they make these decisions.  Thoughts on something like that?  Honestly the NET board is stacked and if certain people don't like this suggestion, it won't happen.”

Information and Education: Erin Considine was not on the call/no report

Awards: Little mentioned that it is difficult to recruit people willing to nominate their peers for awards. He will be working to find people willing to write up award nominations. Carl Wolfe said that we should have a list of award winners on our website so that our membership can see past award recipients.

Certification: Wolfe said certification is important, and said that the refund on the certification application for NETWS members is a great benefit. He indicated that he wants to think of a better way to get students interested in certification.

Old Business: Updates to the Strategic Action Plan (SAP) and Annual Plan of Operations (APO)- Dunn and Considine liked a lot of what was in the SAP, and made some modifications to the existing SAP prior to the annual meeting. Dunn can send out the latest copy of the SAP to the board. Mike Gutzmer also made some extensive comments, some of which might be beyond the scope of the SAP.

New Business: 2021 Meeting planning- McPherron has been in contact with the Kearney Conference Center, and they are willing to allow a contract without charging cancellation fees, which could be important if we are unable to hold an in-person meeting next year. Dunn said it might be good to keep our options open for the next couple of months to see what happens with the Covid-19 pandemic before getting to far into planning the meeting. If the pandemic is still limiting in-person meetings, we might need to plan for a virtual event. Inselman suggested we might want to plan a virtual option along with the in-person meeting for those not wanting to risk travel and joining a large meeting. Wolfe suggested that we could ask TWS about resources to make a virtual meeting work out. McPherron will work with Inselman to set up a planning committee call in a month or so to make some more definite plans.

Inselman asked a question of the board and attendees- In the future, what is the goal of the NETWS chapter? Are we looking to increase student and young professional engagement in the chapter? Dunn said that NETWS has tried to be as student-friendly as possible, and has worked to make students as comfortable as possible coming to and participating in a professional meeting. It was also suggested that the chapter could strengthen its activities in writing letters to legislators and advocating for wildlife as a professional organization. It was brought up that students don’t see the value of going to a meeting to see presentations on research going on across the state. Little would like to conduct a survey of students to get feedback from them as to what would increase the value of the annual meeting to them. Wolfe suggested that perhaps a short course in letter writing, or teaching skills not taught in the classroom could be of value. Little added that student/professional mixers and resume workshops might be ways to engage students. Inselman asked if the chapter has the ability to set or pick 1 or 2 priorities for the year to get done (sounds like the APO). McPherron said the chapter can do this, and is ok with making increasing student involvement a priority.

McPherron moved to adjourn the meeting; Little seconded the motion, and passed by voice vote. Adjourned at 5:11 pm.