

Board of Directors Meeting Minutes



February 5th, 2025

10:00am

Florence Natural Resource Center
5638 Forestry Dr.
Florence, WI 54121

Members Present: Kayla Littleton (Forest County LWCD, virtual), Sherry Pethers (Forest County), Scott Goodwin (Florence County), Shawna Dishaw (Florence County LCD), Dana Nelson (Dickinson CD, virtual), Nicole Shutt (Forest Service), Aaron McCullough (WDNR-Marinette)

Members Absent: Sheri Denowski (Marinette County), Larry Sommer (Lumberjack RC&D), Larry Phelps (Menominee County), Tracy Beckman (Lumberjack RC&D)

Guests: none

Staff: Lindsay Peterson (Coordinator), Natalie Hunding (Project Manager)

Meeting called to order at 10:04 am by L. Peterson.

Board of Directors Meeting

1. **Approval of Agenda** – Motion to approve the agenda as presented was made by K. Littleton / S. Pethers. **Motion carried.**
2. **Approval of Minutes** – Meeting Minutes from the December 11th, 2024 BOD Meeting were presented. K. Littleton / S. Pethers moved to accept the minutes as presented. **Motion carried.**
2. **Grants & Treasurer's Report** – D. Nelson introduced herself as the new Dickinson CD Manager and led this portion of the meeting.
 - a. All grants were reviewed and reported to be on track and progressing as expected, with several closeouts or extension requests in progress. Deliverables are generally on track as well. L. Peterson expressed concern about the Sawyer Lake Contract showing up with expenses on the report because that contract was fulfilled earlier in the 2024. Additionally, L. Peterson noted the EPA Phragmites Subaward has been fully spent out but the grant doesn't close out officially until April 2025. It will be removed from the list at the time of close out.
 - b. Undesignated fund balance is \$10,696.44 and Cost Share fund was reported at a total of \$11,491.
 - c. L.Peterson called for motion to place the Grant report on file. Motion to place the report on file made by S. Pethers / K. Littleton. **Motion carried.**
4. **Project Updates/Reports**
 - a. **Events:** Peterson led this portion of the meeting. Since the last BOD meeting, WRISC attended several events. Overall, all events were successful. L. Peterson and N. Hunding attended HWA training in Torch Lake and the HWA UP Stakeholder meeting to bring together partners. WRISC also hosted two Landowner Trainings in Menominee Co, both of which were well attended. L.Peterson also noted several upcoming events, including National Invasive Species Awareness Week (NISAW) at the end of February, Dickinson CD's Spring Tree Sale in April, and Invasive Species Trade-Up Days in May.
 - b. **Grants:**
 - i. L.Peterson reported on the current status of all WRISC grant projects.

- ii. Extension was approved for the MEF PL grant. Project teams are discussing a Phase 2 project proposal.
 - iii. An extension will be requested for MEF Cost Share to help support 2025 Trade Up Days events and to alleviate budget stress due to the federal funding freeze.
 - iv. It's anticipated that Rob will return for CBCW in 2025. There's some concern about the level of funding, since this project had to start earlier off-schedule and there may not be enough funds to carry staff throughout the full season. Additional funding is being explored to support this program.
 - v. GLRI Buffer Zone project received an extension for full year, but will likely only need one quarter to wrap up in 2025.
 - vi. GLRI CWMA grant partnering with our road commissions was awarded late and will likely need to be extended. Making some headway on connecting with road commissioners. May be impacted by federal funding freeze.
 - vii. Phragmites project has been extended and the grant will be closing out in spring 2025.
 - viii. MISGP 22 extension will end in January. Still some budget categories underspent due to the lack of an additional project manager position. May do short-term extension through the spring to reduce the remaining funds.
 - ix. MISGP 23 will need to be extended as it is underspent again due to the lack of a third full-time staff position (PM). Most deliverables are progressing well with this project though.
 - x. HWA UPRC&D wraps up in April. Hired an additional field staff to assist with surveys.
 - xi. WRISC submitted a proposal for the Circle Power Groveland Mine Area Habitat Improvement Project with a request around \$25,000. Should hear back about this award in Spring 2025.
 - xii. WE Energies MEF 2025 pre-proposals are due mid-March.
 - xiii. Have not yet heard back on several proposals, including Landscape Scale Restoration, MISGP, or MI DNR EPA.
 - xiv. May submit for an early detection rapid response project for flowering rush found at High Falls Reservoir, but dependent on capacity. Open request and can pursue this at any time.
 - xv. Was not awarded the National Forest Foundation grant with Forest County Potawatomi. L.Peterson has a meeting with grantors for reviewer feedback.
 - xvi. UPR C&D submitting UP wide proposals to MISGP for HWA surveying and UP Wide Trade-Up Days program support, partnering with Go Beyond Beauty.
- c. **Hiring:** Recently hired M.Hayes to assist with HWA surveying. Heard from long-term seasonal B.Martonen that he is interested in returning for 2025 season. May not need to hire additional staff at this time, depending on funding freeze and capacity.
 - d. **Outreach:** Outreach is consistently growing. Annual report will be developed soon, with goal to tailor reports for each county and include a donation campaign with mailing.
 - e. **Questions:** N/A

5. New Business

- a. **Board Member Changes:** L. Peterson discussed recent changes to the board of directors' membership. L. Phelps notified L. Peterson of restructuring of committees at the Menominee County board of commissioners and he will no longer be serving on the WRISC board and has appointed Connie Westrich to the remaining term held by a Menominee County rep. L. Peterson clarified that C. Westrich will be the designated alternate for L. Phelps until the Annual Meeting when she can be properly elected into the seat for the remaining term length. Additionally, S. Goodwin is no longer employed at Florence County, which results in him no longer being affiliated with an MOU Partner and is now ineligible to be a board member according to the

bylaws. L. Peterson requested to board discuss options for how to proceed and laid out several potential solutions. After much discussion, the board came to consensus that S. Goodwin could remain on the board as chair to lead the meetings as a non-voting member until elections in June. S. Dishaw, as S. Goodwin's designated alternate, will fill S. Goodwin's voting seat and represent Florence County.

- b. Federal Funding Freeze:** L. Peterson initiated discussion about the current federal funding freeze and the impacts to WRISC's grant funding. L. Peterson stated that WRISC did receive the reimbursements from the previous quarter. Currently she is trying to limit spending on federal grants, primarily GLRI. Hopefully will know more soon.
 - i. Contingency Plan:** In light of the federal funding freeze, L. Peterson suggested that WRISC develop a contingency plan to address rapid and/or unexpected changes to funding in order to streamline decision making and allocation of funds in crisis. There was much discussion on this topic. Suggestions were made to prioritize reducing staff hours over utilizing undesignated funds to cover payroll, and to utilize up to 20% of undesignated funds in the case of emergency to cover base operational expenses, such as insurance and taxes, but not use them to cover staff wages. The undesignated funds should be held available for the expenses of the non-profit transition. L. Peterson will draft a plan based on the discussion and suggestions made and will present a draft at the April meeting. The plan will also require DCD board approval since there are staffing contingencies included.

6. Old Business

- a. Hiring Update:** As stated earlier, hired on another tech, M. Hayes, for HWA and she may stay on as a summer seasonal. Potential is also there for her to stay on as a full-time project manager, but do not want to offer that at this time until we know more about funding. B. Martonen also reached out expressing his interest in returning this summer. At most we may hire one for seasonal, or just use a smaller crew. If we do move forward with hiring, L. Peterson will get the job posting out this week.
- b. 2025 Annual Meeting Planning:** Event set for Friday June 6th, aiming to be located at Belgiumtown Restaurant in Stephenson, MI (Menominee County). Large space and great on-site catering options. L. Peterson is taking suggestions for meeting topics/speakers.
- c. DEI Committee:** Held a committee meeting in December, but only S. Denowski and L. Peterson were present. With the current workload, L. Peterson suggests postponing further committee meetings for some time. This is still important work and will be addressed at some point.
- d. Non-Profit Filing:** A Google Drive folder has been shared with the board, including many non-profit 501c3 filing resources and examples. L. Peterson expressed that she has exhausted her research options unless there is a decision to move forward with filing or not. L. Peterson states she feels confident this transition would be successful, and even with the funding freezes, it seems like the best move for WRISC and could open us up to new funding opportunities. S. Pethers asked who would be responsible for paying taxes if we transitioned, and the answer was that an accountant or accounting firm would be hired, and that would take some liability off of WRISC. S. Goodwin asked if any board member thinks this transition should not happen. There was a concern raised about whether this is a good time due to the funding issues. L. Peterson expressed that undesignated funds can help fill that gap and those funds can be increased with the ability to fundraise and contract work until things stabilize. Motion to pursue non-profit 501(c)3 filing made by S. Pethers / N. Shutt. Motion Carried.

S. Goodwin did organize for WRISC to reach out to Florence County's lawyer to assist in finding appropriate legal counsel. A. McCullough and S. Pethers offered to share resources and contacts. L. Peterson welcomes suggestions and assistance in this process.

7. Round Robin (Chance for WRISC partners to share updates)

- a. Kayla Littleton (Forest Co): hired a tech, who will start June 2nd.
- b. Sherry Pethers (Forest Co): Will be attending the Wild Ones conference.
- c. Aaron McCullough (WI DNR): hiring LTE positions, losing a long-term staff member
- d. Shawna Dishaw (Florence Co.): acting as interim currently
- e. Nicole Shutt (USFS): commented on FS hiring freeze, looking to bring back an ACE AmeriCorps crew again, reviewing wild parsnip management on the forest, and exploring 3rd party internships

8. Other Business: The next meeting is scheduled for April 2nd, 2025 in Wausaukee, WI.

9. Future Agenda Items: Continued discussion on non-profit matters, contingency plan draft. Review of strategic plan postponed until 2026.

10. Adjourn. The meeting was adjourned at 11:43am.

Minutes compiled and submitted by Natalie Iwaszek & Lindsay Peterson

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