

2023 Member Meeting
WSO Annual Convention • Saturday, May 20th
Ingleside Hotel, Waukesha

Present: Sunil Gopalan, Lynn Barber, Rebecca Gilman, Jeff Baughman, Steve Holzman, Carl Schwartz, Carl Schroeder, Dani Baumann, Jack Coulter, Greg Bisbee, Wendy Schultz, Tom Schultz, Dar Tiede, Tim Hahn

Not present: Quentin Yoerger, Davor Grgic, Dan Pickarts

2022 Annual Report was available to members who attended the convention.

2022 Year in Review

WSO President, Sunil Gopalan, and Executive Director, Jennifer Lazewski, presented a review of 2022. Following is a summary.

Board Committee Reports

Governance Committee Report

The Governance Committee was chaired by Mary Murrell (first half) and Lynn Barber (second half) over the 2022 calendar year. In 2022, the committee approved a committee charter, established a conflict-of-interest policy, and created a Board Manual. The committee also began the process of reviewing and consolidating WSO officer job descriptions as found in the bylaws and other WSO documents.

Planning Committee Report

Chaired by Sunil Gopalan, the committee focused on beginning an organization-wide strategic planning process and interviewing consulting firms (a further update to follow).

Finance Committee Report

In 2022, the committee established an annual financial plan/budget process that engages and incorporates input from all committees of the Board. It also established document retention and investing policies, and developed a plan to transition to a standard accounting system (QuickBooks).

Conservation Committee Report

Rebecca Gilman presented the report, noting that she and Jennifer Lazewski took over as co-chairs from Carl Schroeder in November of 2022. She thanked Carl for putting the committee together and all his work for the WSO.

Rebecca presented an overview of highlights of the committee's work in 2022, including positions, updates, and outcomes on the following issues:

- Bird-safe Glass

- Recovering America's Wildlife Act
- No Lead (banning lead ammo and fishing tackle)
- Connecticut Warbler and Greater Prairie Chicken conservation and DNR master planning process

She then gave an overview of the Conservation Committee's ongoing priority issues. A member asked if WSO continues to oppose the hunting of Sandhill Cranes? Gilman explained that WSO's position on that issue has not changed and that it opposes a Sandhill Crane hunt in Wisconsin.

Treasurer's Report

The report was presented by Dani Baumann. The full report is available upon request. Following is a summary.

In 2022, donations totaled just over \$113,000. Of that amount, over \$62,000 came in as unrestricted donations to help increase operational capacity, staff and program development. In addition, over \$33,000 supported the continued management of our Honey Creek property in Sauk County and over \$13,000 supported the Wisconsin Breeding Bird Atlas II project. Dani then explained to members the difference between restricted and unrestricted funds and presented the full financials to members.

A member asked how WSO makes up the deficit between unrestricted revenue and expenses? Dani responded that we do that through fundraising. In 2022, WSO ran at a deficit, which was due to the fact that our fall fundraising campaign did not bring in as much revenue as we expected.

A member pointed out that our Flight Forward campaign was successful in that its goal was to cover two years of staffing salaries, which it did.

Dani then presented the 2023 budget. She predicted that WSO will be running at a slight deficit, but it should not exceed \$2,000.

A member asked how will we plan to cover the deficit. Dani responded that the deficit will be covered by cash reserves. The unrestricted cash balance is approximately \$180,000.

Historian's Report

Carl Schroeder presented the report and began by thanking Nancy Nabak for her dedicated service as historian. He reported that he hopes to establish a document retention policy and digitize critical WSO records. He also hopes to digitize bird observation records and assemble a complete backup set of *The Passenger Pigeon*.

Operations Report

Jennifer Lazewski described the progress WSO has made in moving from an all-volunteer organization to a professional non-profit. She stressed that progress is being made, but that

it's taking time to articulate what the WSO is and what we want to be. WSO is working to understand which duties fall to staff, which to the board, and which to volunteers. She stressed that we need more of our members to volunteer their time and expertise to the organization.

She then presented summaries of the WSO programs and publication.

Membership Report

We've seen slight increases in membership every year but we're basically just back to where we were 10 years ago. Income from dues has been higher, however. 60% of our membership renews in final quarter, 16% in January. Each member gets at least 3 notices before they lapsed

Development

The Flight Forward campaign was successful. Our goal of \$150,000 was reached. However, our year-end appeal was not as successful. We haven't done a lot of fundraising except for land purchases. We need our members to understand that if we need staff to run the organization, it needs to be funded – WSO is changing from a purely volunteer organization to a professional non-profit.

The Honey Creek Campaign was very successful (raising over \$30,000) almost twice as much as our goal.

Honey Creek Preserve and Land Management –

WSO is working on a new land management plan for Honey Creek that will hopefully be implemented in 2023. Amy Staffen (WI DNR) is very excited by what we can be doing and what's there for us to protect. Current land-management includes controlling/removing invasives and trail maintenance. Dan Pickarts is responsible for both, as well as for upkeep of the Cox Nature Center and outhouse maintenance.

Big Birding Bash

The bash was a success and we're hoping to do more virtual programming this coming year

Field Trips

Our field trips continue to be popular, however Tom Schultz and Jeff Baughman would still like to step down from chairing the Field Trip Committee and are looking for volunteers to help.

Grants

WSO awarded \$500 grants each to:

- Project SOAR program dedicated to the safe removal of Snowy Owls and other birds of prey overwintering at airports.
- NEW Audubon Society bird monitoring efforts on restored Oneida Nation lands.
- Steenbock Award - "Tracking the Phantoms: A Red-shouldered Hawk Telemetry Study." This project works to shed more light on the life history and ecology of Red-shouldered Hawks breeding in Wisconsin.

WSO dips into principle for grant funding and supplements the fund with unrestricted income.

Membership Dues Resolutions

Jennifer Lazewski then gave an overview of the proposed changes to the membership dues structure. She began by explaining the goals for membership dues: they should be contributing to income that goes to operations, events, conservation work, etc.

Dues are gifts. Because more than half of our members are not donors, WSO looked at the transactional nature of dues. If dues are meant to cover membership expenses, then they are not accomplishing that. 40% of member dues are spent on publications, however they do not cover the expense publications.

However, we decided not to increase dues for all members. Instead, we'll charge more for publications and eliminate some member categories.

Sunil Gopalan then presented six resolutions changing the membership dues structure and designating that all levels of membership dues will go towards WSO's unrestricted rather than restricted funds.

Sunil opened the floor to questions.

A member asked if the current Life Members will retain their member status and if "Life Member" will still be a membership category. Sunil explained that all current life memberships will continue to be honored, but the category is no longer offered as an option.

A member asked if the board is concerned about eliminating the student level? Would it discourage new, younger birders?

Jennifer responded that we're adding an introductory level that students may use and that we hardly have any student members because we offer no special services for young people. If we decide to establish programming for students, we can revisit that change.

A member asked if the \$10 Badger Birder fee and the \$15 Passenger Pigeon fee will cover the cost of the publications? Jennifer answered, "No." We'll have to see how it works out.

A member brought up the Student Membership again, noting that \$25 might seem like a lot to a young person. Could we make that a lower rate to attract more K – 12 students.

Jennifer responded that we do want to attract younger students, but at present we have no working Education Committee to do that. She also noted that any services we offer K – 12 students should be separate from membership. We want simply to engage those students, not to recruit them as members.

A member asked if our outreach efforts could focus on underrepresented groups and if that could be reflected in membership categories.

Sunil answered that this also feels less like a membership question and more like an existential question. We absolutely want to diversify the organization.

Finally, a member voiced appreciation for the work that went into the resolutions.

Peter McKeever moved to approve the six resolutions.

Lynn Barber seconded.

The six resolutions were unanimously approved.

WSO Board Changes

Our new board member, Chrissie Lindemann, was introduced to members. Welcome to Chrissie!

Two members of the board stepped down in 2022. The board voiced its appreciation of Nancy Nabak for her years of outstanding service as WSO Historian; and of Mary Korkor for her outstanding service as past president of WSO.

Carl Schwartz, who is retiring from the board, was given a standing ovation for his years of dedicated service to the WSO and his work as editor of The Badger Birder. He will be sorely missed.

Looking Ahead

Sunil described our plans for the future.

We're planning an "Unconvention" in November.

Strategic planning is underway. WSO recently signed a contract with Timpano Consulting. We need a brand new plan to help a brand new organization. We'll consider what we want to preserve; how we can adapt; and what aspects of the organization might be set aside.

WSO is evolving so we need a new plan. Our members are of paramount importance. We'll be reaching out in June to hear from our members but Sunil encouraged members to reach out to us sooner if they'd like.

The meeting ended with a heartfelt THANK YOU TO OUR MEMBERS for their continued support of WSO and all they do for the birds.

Respectfully submitted, Rebecca Gilman, WSO Secretary

