

Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge



Annual Meeting January 12, 2023, 6:30pm

27 in Attendance: Leah Bronken, John Reibel Sr, Myrna Krueger, Matt Finn, Carol Mertesdorf, Helle Lukk, Susan Julson, Sue Hix, Cynthia McSherry, Roger Leider, Bill Kolbinger, Scott Suhsen, Bruce Galer, Randall & Hollie Holt-Woehl, Terry & Donella Petro, BearPaw Shields, Steve Chesney, Mike Brubaker, Greg Dehmer, Jade Pederson. And attending via Zoom: Dorothy Holmes, Nancy Haugen, Jessica Nelson, Clay Watercott, Renay Leone

President's report, Steve Chesney, Friends President:

- **Our Mission:** The Friends of Sherburne nurture an appreciation for and the conservation of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge through education, volunteerism, and philanthropy.
- **Strategic Vision:** confirmed in 2019 and 2021. Five Pillars: Education, Advocacy, Volunteerism, Inclusion, Sustainability
- More visitors came to the refuge to experience the outdoors during Covid shutdowns. Traditional events were canceled including a fundraiser event, plant sale, silent auction, and Wildlife Festival. But we found ways to have other events online, such as an online fundraiser for the Sandhill Celebration, Facebook refuge programs, online nature store. Returning to more in-person meetings in 2022. We funded a webcam/mic accessory for the OSLC that allows us to add remote Zoom participants to every meeting.
- **Nature Education:** 2nd and 4th Grade classes with our volunteer-led curriculum are beginning to happen. Other organizations have self-led programs using refuge materials.
- **Festivals and Activities:** The Spring and Fall events happened this year! Spring plant sale was canceled to prevent the spread of jumping worms. Fall Wildlife Festival and Silent Auction took place on a smaller scale than before, but with good turnout and high engagement. Friends paired with Refuge Volunteers to represent Sherburne NWR at **community expos**.
- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** We sponsored outings led by Urban Bird Collective, Promise Neighborhood. Education flowed both ways. Our support included funds for transportation, meals, and leaders.
 - **Urban Bird Collective:** September Wildlife Drive tour and Sunset Crane tour with 36 guests
 - **Promise Neighborhood:** A St. Cloud non-profit that serves students at Lincoln and Talahi elementary schools. We funded transportation and provided volunteers for a visit June 18th and for 20 students to the Wildlife Festival. We participated in two neighborhood gatherings at their site in St. Cloud
 - **Scholarship administered by St Cloud State University.** Funds provided for a promising Naturalist or Biology major planning for a career in environmental topics or life sciences. Second Annual Scholarship was awarded to Biology: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Evolution major *Ruthie Lucht* planning graduate study in Marine Biology
- **2022 Advocacy.** Met with staff of Congressman Tom Emmer to discuss refuge needs. Submitted formal testimony to Congress in support of NWRA recommended funding for the Fish and

Wildlife Service. Thanks to Advocacy Committee: Emy Minzel, Steve Chesney, Sue Hix, Myrna Krueger, Randall Holt-Woehl

- Marketing & Communications Committee: Newsletters, E-news, website, member & donor letters, mailings, implementation of New CRM Platform. Thank-You to Committee Members: Sue Hix, Bruce Ellingson, Steve Chesney, Myrna Krueger, Marilyn Danielson, Diane Stroschein
- 2022 Refuge Grazing Tour. The refuge grazing operators, Kent Solberg and Doug Voss, who also represent the *Sustainable Farming Association (SFA) of Minnesota*, presented how intensive rotational grazing has a positive impact on soil health and habitats. They also discussed how the University of Minnesota, Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge and the SFA are partnering to learn more and share. We saw first-hand how **intensive rotational grazing** works and how it benefits the refuge, the environment and beef consumers.
- Sandhill Stations – Saturdays and Sundays Friends and Refuge volunteers had contact with 85 visitors. Recommended hours next year 3-5pm
- Fund Raising:
 - Year-end Fundraising Campaign was very successful so far, bringing in substantially more than average.
 - Summer newsletter and year-end Newsletter and Fundraising Mailer
 - Give to the Max Day online fundraising
- Membership: We now have 613 total members: 186 1-year. 260 3-year. 167 Lifetime. This is 11% growth over last year when we had 558 members. We have 130 due to renew for the year.
- Eagles Nest Nature Store: Molly Feit of Big Lake has accepted a contractor position to manage the store and online sales. Thanks to the faithful volunteers who staff the store and answer many, many visitor questions. Our sales as of year-end were \$21,456.
- Our 5-Year Partnership Agreements with the Refuge were amended and approved.
- 2023 Amphitheater Vision: Identified as priority for programming by Refuge staff. The construction should be ADA compliant, low maintenance, and connected to the trails both above and below.
 - **The fundraising agreement with USFWS has been approved.**
 - **Consulting and Training with Katrina Lynn LLC.**
 - **Steering Committee formed and meeting by Zoom and in-person.**
 - **Reception held for Steering Committee and Potential Donors**
 - **Damon Farber Landscape Architects selected after bid process.**
 - **Plan and bill of materials prepared and submitted to USFWS Region 3 for approval**
 - **Working with Terra Construction (Tom Brown) as Prime Contractor and interim estimates**
 - **All memorials and donations will be dedicated to the amphitheater during the campaign**
 - **Awaiting approval of Construction Documents from Region 3, USFWS before getting contractor bids**
 - **Total cost 300-400K – final cost will depend on start date.**
 - **New donations and memorials will be allocated to the amphitheater fund until we are successful. (We have adequate operational funds to continue normal activities)**
 - **Between legacy “Be Wild” funds, Board pledges, Memorial Fund and recent donations, we are about 66% there – already!**
 - **We still have to raise a large sum, so we look forward to getting out and working with donors and civic groups in 2023 to make this happen!**

- 2023 Diversity and Inclusion Goals
 - **Outreach:** Build on our contacts in target communities, outdoor groups and schools, to help bring individuals to the refuge. Consider presentations at schools, expos, farmers markets and powwows.
 - **Mentor:** Continue our college scholarship for minority student in natural resources studies
 - **Learn:** Hire speakers about how to improve diversity and inclusion
 - **Recruit:** Recruit diverse candidates to represent us on the board and committees as well as general membership
- 2023 Trail Signage
 - Friends will fund new directional trail signs for Mahnomen, Blue Hill and Oak Savanna Learning Center Trails
 - This is a goal deferred since 2021. Funds are already available.
- Other 2023 Plans
 - Fully resume 2nd and 4th grade Partner School visits, the Fall Wildlife Festival and fun in-person fundraisers (COVID permitting)
 - Diversity and Inclusion activities, online fundraisers, “Sandhill Stations” and more
 - The Eagle’s Nest Nature Store in-person and online sales will continue.
 - We are (always!) looking for new Board, Amphitheater Steering, DEI, and Advocacy Committee members.
- Treasurer’s Report: 2022 year-end, and 2023 proposed budget were presented.
 - 2022 Actual: Income 111,207. Expenses 61,647. Net Income \$49,560
 - 2023 Proposed 116900 income, 75,500 expenses.
- Motion to approve 2022 Treasurers report. approved.
- Motion to approve minutes from 2022 annual meeting. approved.
- Motion to approve 2023 Budget, approved.

Refuge Report, Greg Dehmer, Assistant Manager.

Steve Karel is away on assignment. Staff Updates: Jade Pederson – Seasonal Visitor Services Intern Jan-Dec 2022, and then extended into 2023. Mitch Fox- Seasonal Firefighter. Corey Grey- GAOA crew, Tyrrell Halvorson- GAOA crew, Patrick McCoy- GAOA leader, Chris Dauw- GAOA (EOD 1/17/23). Departures: Alaina Larkin – Visitor Services Manager, departed for MN Valley NWR. Christina Giarusso – Admin officer, departed for USDA.

GAOA – Great American Outdoors Act, Enacted by Congress August 4, 2020. Established funds to address deferred maintenance backlog. Allows us to address scheduled maintenance that hasn’t been done for years, including visitor centers, roads, trails, and critical infrastructure. Project for 2022 was laying fabric and adding crushed granite to Prairie Trail, Woodland Trail, Welcome Station

BIL – Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, enacted by Congress November 6, 2021. Sends 28.1 billion to department of Interior over five years, to restore critical habitats, address the drought crisis, assist with wildland fire management, and Help communities prepare for extreme weather events. Sherburne NWR Projects include Hazardous Fuels Reduction and Fire Break Construction, and purchase of Forestry Mulcher

2022 was a year of weather extremes: Flooding, hail, wind, draught. Fewer than 50 acres of prescribed fire this year. 2050 acres grazed. Virtual Fence Pilot.

Oak Savanna restoration efforts: 300 Bur Oaks planted in May/June 2022, with staff, volunteers and students.

MAPS: Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship. Banding project. Primary Focus on Golden Wing Warblers Early June through Early August.

Visitor Services: headquarters open eight to four Monday through Thursday new America the Beautiful pass free for veterans OSLC is open to group reservations nature's education 890 partner school visits 540 other visits borrowing materials self-led. spring celebration had 450 visitors. wildlife festival down sized 750 visitors 60 volunteers 12 organizations four birding tours 3 wildlife tours 78 participants 9 expose led by Dorothy Holmes Native American storytelling Jenny Hengel sandhill watch 29,256 double our previous record in 2021 what's 13,130 2020 was 11,244 February 18th will be the snowshoe event.

2023 projects: aerial cat-tail treatment, signage for hiking trails, water control gates, youth Turkey hunt in the spring, accessible deer hunt. Thank you to the Friends. Keep loving your refuge.

Leaving the Board: Susan Julson, Randall Holt-Woehl, Myrna Krueger, Dorothy Holmes, Emy Minzel
Nominations to the board: Leah Bronken, Helle Lukk, Bruce Galer, Scott Suhsen. A motion was made and seconded to elect the nominated directors to the board of the Friends of Sherburne. Motion Passed.

Motion to adjourn 8:55 PM