

# Friends of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge



## Annual Meeting - January 17, 2025, 6:45pm

31 in Attendance

Board Members: Leah Bronken, Carol Mertesdorf, Helle Lukk, Bill Kolbinger, BearPaw Shields, Steve Chesney, Brett Soeder, Matt Finn, Bruce Galer, Emy Minzel, Stephanie Tatum

Absent: Roger Leider

Board Candidates: Cheryl Pagel, Chad Young, Tanya Platz-Sandberg, Jeni Hamilton

Members: Dean Kleinhans, Sue Hix, Myrna Krueger, Sue Stroinski, Leslie Waterhouse, Jennifer Justice-Hudson, Drae Solberg, Alexis Adams

Refuge Liaisons: Bill Peterson, Jade Paulsen

Members attending via Zoom: Chris Lommel, Renay Leone, Dorothy Holmes, Susanne Mattison, John Riebel, Clayton Watercott

### Call to Order, Carol Mertesdorf

- Meeting called to order at 6:45pm.
- Motion to approve meeting minutes from 2024 annual meeting was made, seconded, and passed.

### President's report, Carol Mertesdorf

Our Mission remains the same: The Friends of Sherburne nurture an appreciation for and the conservation of Sherburne National Wildlife Refuge through education, volunteerism, and philanthropy.

- Mission and Strategic Vision remain unchanged. The Vision was confirmed in 2019 and 2021. Five Pillars: Education, Advocacy, Volunteerism, Inclusion, Sustainability
- In 2024 there have been several significant activities including amphitheater construction, nature education, the spring and fall festivals, and community outreach programs.
  - **Fundraising:** Has focused on bringing in money for the amphitheater, its Native art and the Native Gathering to introduce it to the Native nations and Friends.
  - **Amphitheater:** Fundraising goals were met. The amphitheater is now in use.
  - **Nature Education:** 34 Partner School classes participated in programs during the year with about 1,800 visitors. In addition, 7 other schools conducted self-guided activities with an additional 275 visitors.
  - **Festivals and Activities:** The spring and fall events were supported by Friends and volunteers. Friends have also paired with refuge volunteers to represent Sherburne NWR at multiple community outreach events and one Powwow alongside refuge

volunteers. Also, we staffed “Sandhill Stations” with refuge volunteers to provide guidance to visitors during the Sandhill Crane migration.

- **Diversity, Equity and Inclusion:** We sponsored two outings led by Urban Bird Collective and assisted in Promise Neighborhood participation. The scholarship administered by St. Cloud State University for a BIPOC student majoring in natural areas has been awarded for a third year.
- **Advocacy:** We submitted formal testimony to both houses of Congress in support of increased funding for the National Wildlife Refuge System. The effort was coordinated by the National Wildlife Refuge Association along with the Coalition of Refuge Friends and Advocates and Defenders of Wildlife.
- **Membership:** We now have 697 total members, up from 675.
- **Eagle’s Nest Nature Store:** Thanks to Molly Feit for 2 years of service to the Nature Store! Also, thanks to the many volunteers who staff the store and answer the various visitor questions. Net sales as of year-end were \$19,960.63. The adoption of barcode price labels increased inventory accuracy and made checkout easier for customers and volunteers. We look forward to working with our new store manager, Sue Stroinski.
- In 2025 we will continue our efforts as described above. In addition, we will search for a naturalist contractor to coordinate the Partner School Program and improve our public educational programs; fund new trail signage in partnership with the USFWS; and fund bird collision deterrents for the OSLC east-side windows.
- We are (always!) looking for new Board, DEI, and Advocacy Committee members. Store volunteers, too!
- Donor and Community Supporter Recognition: People and businesses contributing cash or in-kind were thanked and listed by name.

### Treasurer’s Report, Carol Mertesdorf in Roger Leider’s Absence

2024 year-end and 2025 proposed budget were presented by Carol Mertesdorf in the absence of treasurer Roger Leider.

- Motion to approve 2025 budget was made, seconded, and passed.

### Refuge Report, Bill Peterson, Project Leader, Jade Paulsen, Park Ranger

#### Staff Updates:

- Rod Hansen has moved to a regional position. There is an opening for a Central Minnesota Law Enforcement Officer covering the entire complex and more.
- Carrie Anderson (Fire Tech) has left. Sophie Schaumann (Biologist), Grace Kuhlmann (Seasonal Fire), and Eamonn Thurmond (Forester) have joined the complex.
- Bill Peterson is our new Project Leader (boss of the whole complex), and Jade now has a permanent position.

#### 2024 Highlights

- Amphitheater is in use!
- Research projects: Hunt for Least Weasels, Oak Savanna Browse Research, Habitat Management (esp. seeding).
- Nature Education and Community Outreach events continue as reported above.

- Sandhill Crane viewing tours consistently fill up early. Saturday Strolls (replacing snowshoeing) were popular as were bird and wildflower tours.
- Spring Celebration and autumn Wildlife Festival were successful.
- “Wildlife Wednesdays” at the Welcome Station were introduced.

#### **2025 Plans**

- New Staff: Seasonal Biological Technician Hannah Van Isembrouck, Seasonal Fire Technician Carolyn Keck, CCMI Seasonal Biological Technician Ren Carlson, and a GAOA Maintenance Worker
- Working with local government on new bike trails within the refuge
- Working with other refuges and agencies, especially on threatened and endangered species
- Constant maintenance of facilities and infrastructure
- Reviewing designs for expansion of the Oak Savanna Learning Center for staff offices and a reception and exhibit area. Detailed visitor center drawings to be completed and approved sometime in the autumn.
- A full slate of events is planned for 2025.

#### Volunteer Recognition, Carol Mertesdorf

#### Election of New Board Members

**Nominations to the board:** Chad Young, Tanya Piatz-Sandberg, Cheryl Pagel, Jenifer “Jeni” Hamilton. Also, Roger Lieder is renewing for one year.

A motion was made and seconded to elect the nominated candidates to the board of the Friends of Sherburne. Motion Passed.

**Leaving the Board:** Thank you to Bill Kolbinger who has served since 2017 – most recently as Vice President. Bill has been our parliamentarian, friend, legal advisor and deep, quiet voice of reason.

**Board Officers proposed for 2025:** Carol Mertesdorf – President, Bruce Galer – Vice President, Roger Leider – Treasurer. Secretary to be determined.

Motion was made, seconded, and passed to adjourn at 8:05 PM.