



**The Wild Center Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes
Monday, January 30, 2023 - 1:00 PM - 5:00 PM
Zoom Meeting**

Board of Trustees in Attendance: Karen Thomas, Chair, Linda Rosenstock, Vice Chair, Joseph Beck, Treasurer, Ginny Valkenburgh, Secretary

Paul Alioto, Lee Bailey, Michael Bettmann, Terry Birdsong, George Cigale, Larry Clifford, Kathleen Colson, David Fadden, Ed Forbes, Charles Frenette, Richard Godin, Robin Gosnell, Sally Hart, Nancy Howard, Michael Hunsinger, Nicky Hylton Patterson, Ben Ireland, Elizabeth Lowe, Paul Maroun, Pam Matt, Brooks Reynolds, Meadow Hackett Rutenbar, Charles Svenson, Joel Treisman

Advisory Board in Attendance: Allison Birdsong, Sarah Bogdanovitch, Emily-Hunt Forbes, Lynn Fox, David Jones, Michael Phinney, MaryBeth Reiss, Anna Sommer

Emeritus Trustees in Attendance: Lynn Birdsong, Peter Kindler, Nancy Simpkins

Wild Center Staff in Attendance: Stephanie Ratcliffe, Executive Director, Hillarie Logan-Dechene, Deputy Director, Robert Kronenberger, Director of Finance, Ruth Burnell, Robin Ellis

Karen Thomas called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM

K. Thomas

October 6 & 7, 2022 Board Meeting Minutes were unanimously approved as distributed.

Trustee on Committee Report and Annual Election

K. Thomas, T. Birdsong

Terry Birdsong offered the Committees on Trustees report. First, was the **Election of New Trustees** so that the new class could be admitted to the meeting.

The following individuals were nominated to stand for election to serve their first three-year term running from January 2023 - January 2026.

- Ed Forbes (from AB)
- Ben Ireland (from AB)
- Robin Gosnell (from AB)
- Nicole "Nicky" Hylton Patterson

Ginny Valkenburgh motioned to approve the election of New Trustees, Lynn Fox seconded the motion. The slate of New Trustees were unanimously approved. Karen Thomas welcomed the new Trustees into the meeting and invited them to each say a few words.

Karen then announced the **election of Peter Kindler to Emeritus Trustee** by electronic votes in recognition of his distinguished 22 years of service to The Wild Center Board. Motion made 01-10-2023. Terry Birdsong motioned he be elected Trustee Emeritus; Pam Matt seconded. Motion passed by electronic vote.

Next Terry Birdsong called for the **Re-election of Trustees**.

The following Trustees were nominated to stand for election to an additional three-year term running from January 2023 - January 2026.

- Paul Alioto
- Joseph Beck
- Michael Bettmann
- Charles Frenette
- Meadow Hackett Rutenbar
- Sally Hart
- Juan Rodriguez
- Jack Ryder
- Joel Treisman

Linda Rosenstock motioned to approve the slate of Trustees nominated for reelection. Paul Maroun seconded the motion. The reelection of the proposed slate of Trustees was unanimously approved.

In addition to the reelection of Trustees, Committee of Trustees Chair, Terry Birdsong made the announcement of **two new Advisory Board members**: Lynn Fox will be stepping down from the Board of Trustees and will serve a three-year term on the Advisory Board, and Allison Birdsong was appointed to Advisory Board effective October 7, 2022, Board meeting. Both AB members' terms will run from January 2023 - January 2026.

Terry also noted the **resignation of Trustee John Sammon and long-time Advisory Board member Bill Hutchens**. She thanked them both for their service.

Next, Terry called for the **Election of Executive Committee**. The following Trustee members were nominated to serve an additional one-year term on the Executive Committee.

- Karen Thomas - Chair
- Linda Rosenstock - Co-Vice Chair
- Jack Ryder - Co-Vice Chair
- Joe Beck – Treasurer
- Ginny Valkenburgh-Secretary

Charles Frenette motioned to approve the Executive Committee. Michael Bettmann seconded the motion. The Executive Committee was unanimously approved.

Terry thanked all of the board members for their service.

Committee Structure

Karen then shared that she has spoken with many Board members about their 2023 Committee assignments and that the 2023 Committee structure will be sent with the meeting minutes. It will also be available on the website on the password protected Trustee & Advisory Board Library Webpage.

<https://www.wildcenter.org/board/>

Password:: TWCBoard22

2023 Code of Ethical Conduct & Annual Potential Conflicts Disclosure Statement

The Chair reminded Trustees that they are required by law to annually complete a Code of Ethical Conduct and Annual Potential Conflicts Disclosure and the Whistleblower Policy. Both documents were

sent prior to the meeting and are accessible via the links below. Hard copies upon request. Paperwork is to be completed by January 31, 2023.

Code of Ethical Conduct & Annual Potential Conflicts Disclosure:

<https://form.jotform.com/213545231328046>

Whistleblower Policy: <https://form.jotform.com/213545149518055>

New Board Orientation will be a Zoom meeting on March 3, 2023 from 9 am to 11:30 am (EST)

DEIA Committee

K. Colson

Former DEIA co-chair Kathleen Colson announced that Michael Bettmann and David Jones would head this committee for 2023. Kathleen presented the following 2023 DEIA Committee Work Plan:

- Present updates on staff work around DEIA – cognitive dissonance, etc.
- Review/Revise TWC Diversity statement
- One of two more Board University learning sessions with Ellen Bettmann
- Session with Committee Chairs to integrate DEIA liaison to serve on the DEIA committee
- Conduct a Board diversity self-assessment survey
- Repeat John Brown farm program and explore other ways to collaborate with the Farm and John Brown Lives
- Bring diverse voices from Adirondack residents and visitors into our work

Chair & Executive Director Reports

K. Thomas, S. Ratcliffe

Karen began her Chair Report by referring to [studies](#) showing that museums are the most trusted source of information in the US. Museum attendance exceeds attendance at all sporting events combined. Museum's informal education pick up where schools and other formal education leaves off. Museums as nonprofits fill the gap between business and government. We deliver what society needs and wants in this in-between area.

Keeping museums relevant is essential. The updating and work our board is doing on mission and strategy keeps us relevant. Our work is complex. One: We want to attract visitors to our campus and deliver an engaging and inspiring experience that further inspires personal action, membership and financial support. Two: Our climate work reaches beyond our campus, grows our reputation nationally, expands our base of donors and grows our membership, grant and endowment opportunities. What makes this small museum in the Adirondacks consistently show its presence locally, nationally and globally? It's our marketing, staff, networking, our Youth Climate work and **you**.

Karen shared stories of two **recent marketing and PR successes**:

She thanked Ed Forbes for once again facilitating PR for TWC and our climate work. Elodie Linck, TWC Jeanne Hutchins Youth Climate Coordinator Op Ed was published on the USA Today digital network on January 24 and in print publications on January 29. The link will be in an upcoming email.

And Second, from our long partnership with I Love NY marketing efforts, a travel journalist visited The Wild Center and had a great experience. When asked to judge the USA Today's 10 Best Science Center in the country, he put TWC on the list.

Executive Director Report

Stephanie gave an overview of the 2023 work plan:

- Top of the list is to track new funding opportunities from Inflation Reduction Act
- Continue campus Master plan including (Convening Center, Facilities building and Waterfront dock/Boathouse)
- Capital campaign plan
- Build new bog trail(Fall) and interpretive elements (Spring/Fall)
- New movie - Backyard Wilderness

- Execute year two of Climate Solutions exhibits
- Experiment and test technology-based experiences. (Birdly/AR)

Stephanie then reported on the two recent collaborative events with the **FISU World University Games**.

A meaningful partnership was built by our staff with FISU, and TWC was able to host both a Torch Stop, where the entire Tupper Lake School District was involved and community members attended an exciting after school event with Senator Dan Stec.

Then we hosted a premier reception for the VIPs as part of the Save Winter Conference. Highlights were when Jen and Stephanie had the opportunity to walk Doreen Harris, head of NYSERDA around the Climate Solutions exhibit. In the conversation NYSERDA agreed to be a sponsor at our upcoming Adirondack Building Conference. Neil Patterson was also featured as keynote and a link to that was shared after the meeting. Stephanie also shared that the TWC Curt Stager movie was featured at LPCA.

Stephanie gave an update on the bird flu and Otter COVID vaccinations. Two of the four of our otters are vaccinated so far and two others refused (NB they have subsequently acquiesced and been vaccinated).

Adirondack Building Conference (formerly known as BAGA) is coming back March 2, 2023. Stephanie thanked Sally Hart for working with this conference for the last several years.

The 2023 Food Justice Summit will be once again hosted at The Wild Center on March 2. We are the conveners.

Stephanie went through details of the new film "[Backyard Wilderness](#)" that will be shown in 2023.

Stephanie introduced the Birdly experience that is coming in May. This virtual reality experience will be a new experience experiment; it will have an upcharge for non-members. She suggested that Board members attending the July meeting at TWC experience it first hand.

Financial Reports - 2022 Results

J. Beck, R. Kronenberger

Joseph Beck, Finance Committee Chair started by saying in reviewing the 2022 financials that we ended the year well due to contributed income. He noted that earned income has declined through the year and we need to grow membership. He also reported the spider web needs replacement at a cost of \$80,000 and we need to decide how to fund this. He turned the report over to Bob to present the financials and the proposed budget.

Bob Kronenberger reported on TWC's financials for 2022

2022 Summary

- Overall, forecast for 2022 shows operating surplus of \$16,000, based on strong fundraising offsetting earned revenue shortfalls.
- Rationale for the 2022 forecast:
 - 2022 attendance was down 12% from last year, with admissions revenue being down by 10%.
 - The 2023 budget assumes the same attendance levels as 2022 but with an increase in revenue coming from a planned increase in ticket prices.
 - 2022 earned income was down \$62k from last year and \$224k below budget.
 - Total contributions and operating grants were \$250k over budget and \$263k over last year.
 - 2022 operating expenses were \$115k under budget.

- Total endowment funds are \$10.3 million including \$2.1 million in the Obie Clifford fund and \$1.3 million in permanent endowment.
 - Investment market values decreased by \$1.8 million in 2022 and led to overall negative investment return of 15% in 2022.
- Line of credit balance was not used at all in 2022. (\$1,000,000 is available)
- While our plan for 2023 reflects a deficit budget, it allows us to build on past success and continue to grow. The plan contains both realistic and aspirational elements that are ambitious and innovative. A detailed budget form is included in the appendix if anyone would like to look at the numbers further.
- The 2023 budget proposal is supported by the Finance Committee

Bob asked if there were any other questions or discussion.

Paul Maroun asked what the admission charge is going to be in 2023. Bob noted that adults will go from \$22 to \$24, and youth from \$13 to \$14.

He asked what the role of the new event group person is. Bob explained that it is for the purpose of weddings, facility rentals and group sales.

Charlie Frenette asked if Wild Lights numbers were included in attendance. Bob affirmed that they have been included since we began Wild Lights. Charlie expressed concern about lower attendance numbers and suggested that it be addressed at another time.

Joe Beck responded that our focus needs to be on rejuvenation and refurbishing and growth to increase admissions again.

Joe complimented Hillarie and her staff for their fine fundraising and said we needed to think of operating with targeted fundraising for the capital budget.

2023 Budget for Approval - 2023 Budget Observations:

Bob shared a series of slides detailing the revenue and expenses for the 2023 proposed budget:

- 2023 attendance is budgeted at the same attendance levels as 2022
- 2023 budgeted admission revenues reflect a ticket price increase effective in May (adults \$2, youth \$1) and upcharge for new Birdly experience.
- 2023 budget revenues are projected to be \$4.9mm
- Projecting a \$247,700 deficit

Michael Bettmann motioned to approve the FY2023 Budget. Lee Bailey seconded the motion. The FY2023 Budget was unanimously approved

Development Committee

L. Fox, H. Logan-Dechene

2022 Annual Fund Results

Lynn Fox, Development Committee Co-Chair, began with presenting 3-year Annual Fund comparison numbers, and the 2022 giving report. She noted that our Annual Fund was very successful even though overall giving was down in 2022 because of two very special \$1,000,000 endowment and capital gifts that were given in 2021.

Take 5 Update

Lynn proceeded to give a brief update on the Board's Take 5 program. She explained there are currently 16 Trustees and AB members who participate in the Take 5 program and expressed that the Development Committee is always looking for more members to participate. She invited Board members to help host or sponsor an event at their home, or at their camp. If you can host, please contact Hillarie.

Ginny then thanked Lynn as outgoing Development Committee chair for her great job. Karen Thomas also offered her thanks to Lynn for a job well done.

Programs Overview and Updates

H. Logan-Dechene

Through **Wild Lights**, The Wild Center partnered with Franklin County to create Tupper Lights on the streets of Tupper Lake as a collaborative community support effort. At the Center, Wild Lights nightly attendance increased 47.4%, and we have seen a 76.9% increase per night revenue so far this season, with 15 nights still scheduled. Wild Lights is a great way to introduce people to TWC.

Hillarie then presented an **AmeriCorps Project** overview, starting with a [What is AmeriCorps? video](#). The grant will include eight full-time AmeriCorps workers and four part time AmeriCorps members, who will do what our fellows do and will also work with the Tupper Lake school system. It is a 2-year grant; one year plus an option for one year renewable. Overall, it's \$577,680 of funding.

Hillarie shared that several Wild Center staff are AmeriCorps alums, and that she was the New York State chair of AmeriCorps.

Karen acknowledged Hillarie for her connection in championing AmeriCorps to include education, environment and climate as well as including the North Country in their current funding priorities. She noted that Hillarie resigned from the Americorp Commission to allow TWC to be able to apply for the program.

Generative Discussion

K. Thomas, S. Ratcliffe

Board input from the October meeting was used by a sub-committee to refine the strategic framework for TWC. Karen noted we are moving quickly to refine goals and strategy to be ready for the Inflation Reduction Act funding opportunities. The Inflation Reduction Act funding is coming and it will be coming fast. We are positioning The Wild Center to best compete for these grants. Having a clear and relevant mission representing what the Center is today is part of that work.

Including the thoughts of the Trustees and Advisory Board members in this process is vital. Two breakout sessions encouraged discussion on the proposed mission statements and the strategic goals document.

Breakout 1: Mission Statement

Poll #1 Ask the Board members to choose which option they would vote for before discussing them:

Option #1

Ignite an enduring love of nature to inspire action for a thriving natural world.

Option #2

Ignite an enduring passion for nature and the Adirondacks to inspire action for a thriving natural world.

The Pre-discussion mission poll and the results were:

Option #1 - 35%

Option #2 - 65%

Stephanie noted that our last two mission statements have served us very well, and it is now time to update and have our mission reflect who we are today.

The Board then went to Breakout Rooms. Participants were asked to discuss two things: if they were comfortable with adopting the preferred option (#2)

When groups returned and reported out, the consensus was that the group was not comfortable voting on a new mission today. Two groups presented alternative suggestions for the mission statement, which were noted:

- Ignite an enduring passion for nature that inspires action to ensure a thriving natural world
- Ignite an enduring passion for nature and the Adirondacks to inspire action for a thriving natural world open to all communities.

Next, a poll of Trustees (only) was taken as a mock vote on adopting a mission today.

The results were:

Adopt Option #1	3
Adopt Option #2	13
Abstentions	15

Breakout 2: Strategic Goals Document

Karen asked each group to review the strategic document circulated prior to the meeting and discuss ideas and suggestions. She asked for one person in the group to email her the group's ideas.

Karen thanked all for their engagement and participation in the discussion, and the whole meeting and said that the discussion will help further the mission work.

The Board then entered into the Executive Session. The meeting adjourned at 4:40 pm.