

**Hays County Master Naturalist  
Board Meeting  
White Wings Ranch**

**January 10, 2006**

In attendance: President Tom Watson, Treasurer Winifred Simon, Vice President Dale Shively, Secretary Susan Nenney, Walt Krudop, Dixie Camp, Betty Findley, Melinda Gumbert, Richard Barnett, Dell Hood, Bryan Davis, Herb Smith, Barbara Jacobson, Cecelia Kelly, Judy Telford, Minette Marr, Nancy Turner.

The meeting was called to order at 7:05.

Tom reviewed his desired guidelines for meeting protocol, including two-minute limit on comments, signaling a desire to speak, and an intention to adhere to a tight meeting schedule

Tom reviewed the board's concerns about the chapter. Beyond the training program, the chapter has not had enough volunteer resources to operate as successfully as it should. Tom noted that the chapter needs to involve more people and have more fun and achieve more. His vision is that the board will begin this year to accomplish more things with the help of additional people. Tom noted that building the volunteer corps is a priority. Our retention of active members is low compared to existing statistics from other chapters. The Hays County chapter has the lowest retention rates of almost any chapter – 19% compared to much more.

Tom described a number of strategies to build volunteer participation and chapter visibility:

- The Training Committee will help more clearly articulate the volunteerism aspect of the MN program. Trainees will be encouraged to join the volunteer corps to help carry out the mission of the MN program: beneficial resource management.
- Build Chapter outreach activities. Develop programs to take to the general public, such as promoting our function as land management advisors as a chapter service. (One chapter has developed this activity very successfully, helping relieve requests placed on county agent.) This project could be promoted through real estate agents, as an example.
- Increase outreach to school students. Bryan Davis had a program already developed which can be offered around the county.
- Provide better programming and advanced training to chapter members.

All these strategies require more volunteer involvement to achieve.

**Volunteer Report**

Judy Telford reported on the 2005 volunteer statistics and distributed three handouts. She noted that board meeting time can count as volunteer or advanced training. She reviewed the history of volunteerism primarily in 2003 and 2005, noting that the category of education includes working on the Training Committee. Volunteer hours in 2005 were lower than in 2003, when one volunteer accrued 600 hours. In 2005, 58 individuals reported volunteer hours. She explained the distinction she draws between indirect outreach i.e. surveying plants at the LBJ Wildflower Center, and direct outreach, i.e. working directly with individuals.

Tom noted that outreach is low. Outreach was defined as taking MN programs to general public in the form of seminars, educational meetings, site visits, and educational hikes.

## **Training Committee**

Nancy Turner reviewed the minutes of the Training Committee (TC). Highlights included:

- The Training Committee has changed its name from Curriculum Committee.
- Bryan Davis reported to the TC that previously proposed background checks for all students and members will not be required. Those working directly with youth will continue to undergo background checks.
- The TC discussed transition of students to chapter responsibility. The committee will support new graduates in completing hour requirements for certification up to 30 days after graduation. After 30 days, the chapter will assume that responsibility if needed, including providing shirts, pins, and certificates. This year graduation is set for November 7 and the chapter will assume responsibility for graduate follow-up 30 days later.
- Little publicity has occurred for the 2006 class. None of the seven newspapers with which Bryan works have published the 2005 graduation photo or news of upcoming class.
- The TC discussed at great length the requests from the Board for the training program to relocate and develop a shortened schedule and considered in depth three proposed schedules from Walt plus a fourth plan. None of these plans drew substantial support. The committee voted to recommend to the Board a continuation of the 10 month schedule including 14 week time period with no classes. The needs of the trainees were primary consideration.
- The TC has adopted the state curriculum; this schedule allows for adjustments as needed. The change in curriculum, time and location variables will complicate evaluation. The new class will begin at White Wings Ranch, while a search continues for a more suitable site.
- The TC meets again next week to complete planning.
- The TC discussed training costs, additional expenses of materials and budget and asked for clarification from the Board. Registration fees have been published as both \$120 and \$150. The background check would have been an additional cost.

The group discussed the training budget and possible alternative class sites.

Walt said that the Executive Board had looked at numbers and had told the Training Committee there was enough money in the training committee account to cover the cost of state curriculum books.

Dell Hood reported that the fee structure for new Wimberley Center will be fixed this month. A rate for local nonprofit will be a minimal rate. He estimates that the fee after-hours for large groups might be approximately \$60 -75 per meeting.

## **Hays County Extension Office**

Bryan Davis reviewed the history and status of the new background check requirement initiated August 12 which was rescinded January 9. Background checks for volunteers working with youth will continue to be a requirement. Members currently working as an adult leader with students may continue doing so during processing. Background checks will be redone every 3 years. Former teachers who have undergone background check in past 3 years do not need to reapply.

Bryan also reviewed the enrollment process for the class.

## **State Program Report**

Walt Krudop reported that in the fall, the Texas MN Program was recognized by the Department of the Interior as one of 10 programs in the country. State Director Michelle Haggerty has scheduled a leadership retreat for the state committee to address leadership issues, including the most effective way to utilize volunteer component. With 35 chapters now in place in Texas, the state structure may need some revisions.

## **Treasurer's Report**

Winifred Simon reported that she has set up separate accounts for the training class and the association. The chapter began and ended year with about \$2000, about \$100 increase. The class account began 2005 with \$2,387 and ended the year with \$3,252, including expenditure of \$600 for digital video and microphone. The class had a surplus of \$1,500, providing the cushion that the class needs. Winifred projected that these funds would cover the increased costs of the new state curriculum manual. Tuition could also cover some costs for meeting space if needed this year. Meal costs for the class totaled about \$1200. Graduation expenses were \$1486.

An outside audit is ahead and Winifred is ready. Winifred suggested that at a minimum the treasurer should send copies of monthly statements to the president.

The group again discussed projected class expenses. Nancy said the TC was interested in partial scholarships to improve diversity. This idea will be revisited one day. The Board agreed that the cost of the new books could be covered from the class account. It was moved and seconded that the Board would cover cost overruns if needed. The Board agreed that the Training Committee will decide whether to set the class fee at \$120 or another figure based on projected needs.

### **Program Development**

Dale Shively reported that his request for volunteers with program development was answered by Jamie, Nancy and Lydia Morgan. Bryan also has a list of program ideas.

There was no old business.

### **New business**

**Agreement with White Wings Ranch** – The Board reviewed the event agreement with White Wings Ranch. Of note: MN announcements to public that mention White Wings Ranch must be approved by the White Wings Business Manager. Susan moved and Dale seconded a motion that the president be given approval to sign the agreement.

**Goals and Evaluation** – Vice President Dale Shively noted that comments have been made about the chapter being successful or not successful without a clear definition of success. Goals will help set the right path. The Board needs to plan what we want to accomplish and how to measure it. Tom noted that the chapter is not fully functional and could do more. The board needs to smooth the way for volunteers to achieve.

Tom proposed two goals for the chapter: 1) double active membership to 80, and 2) double reported outreach hours.

Susan suggested that reinforcing and reminding members about the volunteer activity reporting system (the form is now on the web site) could improve outcomes.

Tom asked about increasing local outreach, such as Earth Day and with schools. Judy Telford and Nancy Turner reported they were at Earth Day. Bryan was accompanied by several volunteers to schools, about 7 schools in 5 counties. Ag Days were supported by volunteers. The Wimberley Library has also offered an outreach opportunity for which Judy Telford and Cecelia Kelly will volunteer.

Tom suggested the replication of the Land Management Assistance Program from the Hill Country chapter. That chapter advertised this service and completed 52 site visits. Dell expressed support for keeping up the training for those who do site visits. He noted that site visits historically were the main activity of the Hays County chapter with 15-20 site visits a year lasting 3-4 hours each. It is unclear why this activity has declined. Walt proposed identifying members to take the lead in some of these potential outreach areas.

Continuing his report, Dale noted that goal setting takes time and thought. A committee should be formed to propose guidelines and to explore what activities correlate with goals. Dixie cited the

example of evaluation in classroom activities, such as pre and post tests with teachers and students. We have to assume that outreach has an impact on some individuals. In lieu of no other tools, tracking hours may be our only measurement. We can track retention and outreach, assuming that what we are doing is useful to those people. In the process create other activities that keep interest in.

Tom identified a third goal 3) increasing the volunteer activity in projects.

The discussion continued about how to evaluate success, conversion of class members to chapter members, and retention of active members, including the definition of "active".

The Vice President is responsible for setting up advanced training for the chapter and promoting local opportunities.

TW proposed the use of telephone trees to retain new class members and to reconnect with inactive members. The chapter will have a membership directory. Members should have the option of not having names printed in the directory which could include about 200 people. Dale proposed that these ideas be developed for further discussion next year.

### **Chapter Calendar**

Walt distributed copies of the chapter's proposed training calendar to the Board which included chapter dates and possible field trips for both chapter and trainees. He proposed that Dale review possibilities and make a proposal. Nancy suggested that some field trips are of interest to both members as advanced training and as additional advisors. Dale noted that the training Committee is a function of the chapter so we need to look for blended opportunities that benefit members and trainees alike.

### **General membership meeting**

The general membership meeting February 9 will include a tour of the Jacob's Well site prior to the meeting. David Baker will lead the tour, and the meeting with pizza will be conducted in the old tennis club. The Board discussed strategies and schedules for inviting the new class to the chapter event. A contribution jar will be set up to pay for the pizza. The program will feature David Baker, president of the Wimberley Valley Watershed and advocate for Jacob's Well. This program will qualify for advanced training.

### **Bylaws**

Tom will request a motion to present the state bylaws and state operating manual to the general membership for approval February 9. Winifred suggested a review of the operating manual before adoption. Nancy Turner moved and Dale Shively seconded a motion that the Board approach the general membership at the February 9 mixer for the approval and adoption of the state bylaws and operating manual.

### **Next Board Meeting**

The next Board meeting will be Feb. 16, Thursday at White Wings. Dale moved that the meeting be adjourned.