

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING**  
**OF**  
**WHITE LAKE PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD**

**Thursday, April 12, 2012**

Chairman Armond Schwing opened the White Lake Property Advisory Board meeting held at the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area in Gueydan, LA and asked Ms. Lana Guidry to call the roll. The following members were present:

Armond Schwing  
Charles Toups  
Brandan Duhon  
Sean Gayle  
Miriam Davey  
R. Martin Guidry  
Eddie Lyons  
Steven Mansour  
John Prejean

The following members were absent:

Steve Linscombe  
Karl Connor  
Jeffrey Scanlan  
Larry Thomas  
Kieran Coleman

**Approval of Minutes of August 10, 2011 Meeting**

Chairman Schwing called for a motion for approval of the minutes of the August 10, 2011 meeting. Mr. Steven Mansour asked that it be in the record that he did attempt to attend this meeting, but due to miscommunications he arrived on Wednesday, August 9, 2011, one day early for the meeting; he was unable to return the next day due to other commitments. Mr. Marty Guidry moved to accept the minutes, along with Mr. Mansour's request, and Mr. Sean Gayle seconded the motion. The motion passed with no opposition.

**Introduction of New Board Members**

Dr. John Prejean introduced himself to the Board. Dr. Prejean stated he was born and raised in Abbeville, LA and went to college at Texas A & M. Dr. Prejean said after he graduated, he returned home and practiced veterinary medicine for 42 years. Dr. Prejean

stated he is very familiar with the property and worked with Mr. Gayle's father in the early 1970's. Dr. Prejean said he hopes he can be of aid to the Board.

Chairman Schwing publicly thanked Ms. Sara Simmonds for her assistance to the Board. Chairman Schwing stated she brought a lot to the table and that we will miss her, but he said it is his intentions to keep her in the loop when the Board meets and invite her to attend all meetings.

Mr. Buddy Baker added that Ms. Simmonds still maintains a very important role with this agency and that is related to whooping cranes. Mr. Baker said she is and will continue to be very instrumental in this project.

Ms. Simmonds said it has been a pleasure to have served on the Board and thanked everyone for being so nice and allowing her to be here. Ms. Simmonds asked the Board to not forget about the whooping cranes. Ms. Simmonds stated the cranes are bringing this area worldwide attention. Ms. Simmonds said we are very fortunate to have this opportunity to re-introduce the whooping cranes back into this area. Ms. Simmonds stated this is a very expensive program and we are required to raise a certain amount of money and she is very thankful that they have found some generous people to help with this project.

### **Department Financial Report**

Mr. Wayne Sweeney presented the Board with a financial report of April 5, 2012. Mr. Sweeney reported the current year to date income is \$1,109,146 and the current actual expenses are \$762,283. Mr. Sweeney stated we still have some outstanding income due for this fiscal year that we are waiting to receive.

### **White Lake Wetlands Conservation Staff Structure**

Mr. Baker reported to the Board that we hired additional staff. Mr. Baker stated we brought in two additional biologists and two additional technicians and that Mr. Sweeney is now able to focus on administrative activities. Mr. Baker stated that Mr. Sweeney handles all of the public hunting and public access whether it be fishing lotteries, corporate hunts, etc. and he handles all the logistics of conducting the draws and insuring that our agency and White Lake are transparent in our drawing process so there are no accusations of wrong use and/or catering towards political favors. Mr. Baker said Mr. Sweeney also coordinates the actual logistics on hunt days, including getting the hunters in, making sure we have the cooks, hiring additional temporary employees as guides and insuring they all get paid. Mr. Baker reported Mr. Sweeney also handles all of the procurement issues, new building construction, building repairs, and works with mineral leases. Mr. Baker stated one of the duties that were passed to new staff in relation to property management/habitat management was restoration of our deteriorating canal systems. Mr. Baker introduced Mr. Schuyler Dartez to the Board. Mr. Baker reported that Mr. Dartez came from the Marine Fisheries Division and that he supervised a large number of employees in that position. Mr. Baker stated that Mr. Dartez is a local resident

from Kaplan and has hit the ground running. Mr. Baker reported that Mr. Dartez is very capable and has demonstrated a lot of leadership ability since he has been at White Lake. Mr. Baker reported that Mr. Dartez is handling all of the habitat management and biological research. Mr. Baker stated that Mr. Dartez has two teams performing these duties. One is the marsh management team and they perform all maintenance at the lodge and habitat management. Mr. Baker said this team will also serve as hunt guides during the hunting season. Mr. Baker reported that the head of the marsh management team is Roger Cormier. Mr. Baker said the employees reporting to Mr. Cormier are Mr. Peter Breaux and Mr. Mickey Miller. Mr. Baker reported the other team is the biological team and Ms. Carrie Salyers is the Biologist Supervisor over the biological team. Mr. Baker reported that Ms. Salyers has two technicians under her supervision. The employees reporting to Ms. Salyers are Mr. Eric Ledet and the other position is vacant at this moment due to the technician recently transferring to another division in our agency. Mr. Baker reported that Mr. Sweeney, Ms. Salyers and Mr. Dartez are currently in the process of conducting interviews to fill the vacant position. Mr. Baker reported that in addition to the biological work, the employees on the biological team have responsibilities for maintenance at the lodge and the birding trail. Mr. Baker reported that these employees have been cross trained so when we do lose an employee we do not have to shut down work on any task.

### **Birding Trail**

Ms. Salyers reported to the Board that the birding trail is complete. Ms. Salyers stated that maps and educational brochures are provided at the kiosk at the birding trail and are also available on our website. Ms. Salyers reported that we have also started a photo gallery of the birding trail on our website. Ms. Salyers stated we are trying to promote the birding trail as much as possible. Ms. Salyers reported that she believes the birding trail will provide a good opportunity for school classes to visit White Lake because we will not have to deal with boats, captain's licenses, etc. and they can come free of charge. It is a safe environment and she thinks a lot of the local schools will enjoy being able to utilize the trail. Ms. Salyers said she would like to develop more educational and outreach materials for distribution to these groups.

### **Update on White Lake Leases**

Mr. Baker reported to the Board that we have nearly completed the task of leasing. Mr. Baker stated that in order to lease the properties out, we had to set minimum values and they were determined for us in a contractual arrangement with Dr. Richardson of LSU. Mr. Baker reported that we received the minimum bid or more on every single tract of property. Mr. Baker stated that it was a sealed bid process and was opened publicly. Mr. Baker reported that we ended up with all new tenants. Mr. Baker stated that we have combined the agricultural and hunting leases and now have surface leases. Mr. Baker reported that the total for all tracts is \$841,000. Mr. Baker stated that previously the leases brought us about \$300,000 and the difference is \$500,000 in operation funds, which in part is the money we are using to support the additional staff. Mr. Baker stated we executed the leases back in September and the hunting leases all begin in November;

however, the current agricultural leases did not expire until January 1, 2012 so we had multiple tenants on the property at the same time. Mr. Baker reported that we still have a problem with one tract, but we are currently working to resolve that problem. Mr. Baker stated the leases are for ten years. Mr. Baker reported that on all of the other tracts we have good tenants and they have made improvements on the property already. Mr. Dartez addressed the Board and reported that he is currently working with the former tenants and the new tenants so both parties will be somewhat satisfied. Mr. Dartez stated he is working on management plans for the new tenants. Mr. Dartez reported that most of these tenants are fairly lost; they are hunters and not farmers. Mr. Dartez said he is working with FSA and the new tenants. Mr. Gayle inquired how many new tenants have subleased the farming requirements and Mr. Dartez stated that as of now only one has been subleased to a former tenant but the rest of the property has been turned over to the new tenants. Mr. Dartez reported that the new tenants are learning the farming process from people in the area.

### **White Lake Marshland Management**

Ms. Salyers reported that due to the lack of biological staff prior to this point, there is a need for biological inventory of the property. Ms. Salyers reported that the first area of interest will be the refuge area, followed by the east side marsh and then the west side marsh. Ms. Salyers stated one objective will be to perform an inventory of the plants on the property. Ms. Salyers said we have historical data to compare the present findings with to determine if and how the area has changed.

Mr. Dartez reported that the property was in a severe drought for approximately two years in 2010 and 2011. Mr. Dartez stated the average rainfall in the area is a little over 60 inches per year for the entire Acadiana area. Mr. Dartez reported that in 2010 the area only received 42.5 inches of rain, which put us into a drought in the area. Mr. Dartez reported that in 2011 the area only received 36 inches of rain, which was the second lowest annual rainfall total in Acadiana recorded history. Mr. Dartez stated that the marsh was extremely dry. Mr. Dartez reported that 2010 and 2011 combined was the lowest two-year rainfall total on record and put us in severe drought. Mr. Dartez stated we had exceptional droughts in some of the portions of Cameron Parish and western Vermilion Parish, south of White Lake itself. Mr. Dartez reported our area stayed in an extreme drought for a very long time. Mr. Dartez stated that midway through the hunting season of 2011 there was no water on the marsh and that put us in a predicament for hunting, and it put a lot of people in the area into a predicament. Mr. Dartez said the farmers had issues with a lack of water on the land because when you do not have water on the land you have to pay to pump water on or you have to let water in. Mr. Dartez reported that when we need to hunt 12 blinds there must be 1.5 feet of water, but if we are only hunting six blinds we need about 1.2 feet of water. Mr. Dartez stated this year we did not have anywhere close to 1.2 feet of water until we started getting rainfall at the end of December and beginning of January. Mr. Dartez said that on January 11 we had over five inches of rain and that afternoon we checked the marsh and we had enough water as of that day to hunt six blinds. Mr. Dartez reported that with drought comes salinity problems because if we do not have any fresh water in the Mermentau Basin, we

end up getting salinity intrusion. Mr. Dartez stated the salinity comes from the locking systems in place. Mr. Dartez reported there are five structures in place to keep saltwater out and freshwater in, but when we are in a drought every time a boat has to pass through one of the locks they have to open gates and saltwater comes in from the outside. Mr. Dartez stated that when we have extremely high tides and strong south winds we have even more water coming in which increases the saltwater intrusion. Mr. Dartez said the drought did cause a little bit of the salinity issues we are seeing. Mr. Dartez reported that in September a barge struck one of the locking structure gates causing damage. Mr. Dartez said with that one gate removed, there was a constant flow of saltwater from the outside. Mr. Dartez stated that if we would have had significant rainfall and had not in an extreme drought, we would have seen freshwater throughout the basin and water would have been flowing out of the locking structures, but with the drought the water levels were significantly lower all day whether it be low tide, mid tide, high tide, etc. Mr. Dartez reported we are seeing the same salinity levels in our Intracoastal Waterway, the Florence Canal and all the canals that connect to the Intracoastal, and those levels are not levels that farmers can work with. Mr. Dartez stated that on January 12 there was fresh water throughout the basin and all of the tenants were allowed to pump water onto the property. Mr. Dartez reported that the average rainfall typically in the Acadiana area from January to April is approximately 18.1 inches of rain and we are currently at 18.4 inches for the year so we are at above average rainfall at the present time. Mr. Dartez reported that we will get additional monitors so we will have yearlong data recording on the property. Mr. Dartez stated that we will be able to go back two years ago to today and tell you the exact salinity level, temperature and water level in the marsh. Mr. Dartez said this will increase our ability to track and manage our marsh without having to rely on anyone else's data.

### **White Lake Shoreline Management**

Mr. Dartez reported that he has recently been working on a restoration project with Ducks Unlimited for the Intracoastal Waterway. Mr. Dartez stated this is a partnership and that Ducks Unlimited is going to develop a plan for stabilizing the eroding shoreline of the Intracoastal Waterway that passes through the White Lake property. Mr. Dartez said we assessed the primary areas during the past few months. Mr. Dartez stated that Mr. Sweeney was instrumental in establishing the priority areas, and in the past couple of months we have gone back to check more and more sites to insure that these are still the priority areas. Mr. Dartez reported that the northern shoreline has most of the priority areas. Mr. Dartez said Ducks Unlimited plans to have this project rolling in August. Mr. Dartez hopes we have a great outcome with this project.

Mr. Sweeney reported the Florence Canal, which is the canal everyone traveled down to get here today, has faced erosion for years. Mr. Sweeney stated we have addressed some of the erosion over the years but the important aspect of the Florence Canal is the protection levees that we have to protect our farm, agriculture lands and impounded marshes located west of the Florence Canal. Mr. Sweeney said south of the Intracoastal, the protection levees that are important to us are the one along the west shoreline of the Florence Canal which has the two impounded marshes and also our refuge area. Mr.

Sweeney stated there are levees along the Florence Canal on the east side, but they are not continuous levees and we are not really that concerned about the east side right now because it is not an impounded marsh. Mr. Sweeney said our main goal is to address erosion on the western banks of the Florence Canal and both banks north of the Intracoastal. Mr. Sweeney stated that roughly ten years ago, Hilcorp was operating the oil and gas production facilities adjacent to the Florence Canal and they helped address the areas north of the Intracoastal that were having serious erosion problems. Mr. Sweeney reported that Hilcorp rebuilt some of the levee system on either side of the Florence Canal north of the GIWW. They were responsible for putting the rock along the shore of the Intracoastal where the Florence Canal meets the Intracoastal, and they also rebuilt the stretch of levees along the eastern side of our fish pond down to the skeet range. Mr. Sweeney said part of Hilcorp's obligation as being the oil and gas operator on the property, is that they are responsible for any damage that they cause along their routes (of) ingress and egress to the field. Mr. Sweeney reported that Hilcorp has a boathouse facility just south of our boathouse so they travel the Florence Canal daily to get back to their production facility along the Florence Canal. Mr. Sweeney said we are fortunate and lucky that we have operators out there that are willing to help us out and work with us.

### **White Lake Mineral Development**

Mr. Sweeney reported that Texas Petroleum is the only operator that we currently have on the property. Mr. Sweeney stated Texas Petroleum has three producing fields on the property, which are the West White Lake Field, the Florence Field and north of the Intracoastal is the Kaplan Field. Mr. Sweeney reported that BP has retained the mineral rights on all of the other areas that are not under lease to Texas Petroleum. Mr. Sweeney stated that the Texas Petroleum lease sites only encompass 2,000 to 3,000 acres of the property, so the mineral rights of the remaining 60,000 plus acres belong to BP. Mr. Sweeney reported in the last few years there have been several wells drilled on the property by different companies. Mr. Sweeney stated that our obligation is to negotiate with these people and we give them a surface lease for the drill site and they have the right to come in and drill the well, but they do have to coordinate with White Lake on surface activities. Mr. Sweeney reported they require a five year surface agreement with us, which is paid up front and is usually \$1,000 per acre per drill site and we monitor their operations. Mr. Sweeney said that we also charge them \$1.00 per foot for servitude to get back to their sites. Mr. Sweeney reported that there is an environmental protocol attached to the agreement to insure that they are operating on the property without damaging the property. Mr. Sweeney stated we meet with the producers regularly. Mr. Sweeney stated that we have the right to restrict drilling operations during the waterfowl season if it is determined that such operations would negatively impact the waterfowl and hunters utilizing the property during this time.

### **White Lake Facilities Master Plan**

Mr. Sweeney reported that we closed in the garage to the house and now utilizes that space as office space. Mr. Sweeney stated they converted the three bedrooms into

offices; one for himself, one for Schuyler and one for Carrie. Mr. Sweeney reported that phone lines and computers have been installed a few weeks ago. Mr. Sweeney stated we do have plans to extend the roof line by roughly eight feet on the end of the house and we are going to put storage rooms on each side of the extension. Mr. Sweeney reported we are awaiting Capital Outlay approval for the dorm and shop. Mr. Sweeney stated there is a possible issue with the flood plain and Buddy is working to resolve that issue. Mr. Sweeney said we were told we may possibly have to elevate these two structures by six or seven feet. Mr. Sweeney stated the design work is complete for the shop, but we have not yet put it out for bid because we are waiting on the Capital Outlay approval for that. Mr. Sweeney reported the design for the boathouse is complete. Mr. Sweeney stated that we are going to have the Rockefeller staff come over in the next couple of weeks to begin construction on that. Mr. Sweeney said the plans are to extend the south end of the boathouse by approximately 60 to 70 feet and incorporate two more boat stalls there. Mr. Sweeney reported we obtained the Corps of Engineers permit last fall. Mr. Sweeney stated we have FEMA funds to assist with the funding of that project. Mr. Sweeney said that we hope to have that structure completed by June 1.

### **Safety Planning**

Mr. Sweeney reported that we are complying with the Office of Risk Management in relations to safety guidelines. Mr. Sweeney stated we are audited annually by the Office of Risk Management. Mr. Sweeney reported that we are also conducting quarterly safety meetings. Mr. Sweeney stated we have CPR and first aid training scheduled for the entire staff later this month. Mr. Sweeney reported everyone is up to date on the defensive driving. Mr. Sweeney said we are making sure the running lights are working on all of the boats being operated during nighttime hours. Mr. Sweeney reported that all visiting hunters and staff are required to wear life jackets. Mr. Sweeney stated that we will soon be putting up signs on the nature trail asking visitors to not feed any wildlife or alligators. Mr. Sweeney said that anyone going out for several hours must fill out a float plan stating where they will be so that nobody gets stranded out there at night. Mr. Sweeney reported that all employees who drive airboats recently completed a three day airboat certification course at Rockefeller. Mr. Sweeney reported that all visiting guests must sign a hold harmless agreement prior to getting on one of our boats. Mr. Sweeney said we are also developing a new gun safety video. Mr. Sweeney reported that all guns that visiting hunters use are inspected annually by the Hunter Education staff. Mr. Sweeney stated we also developed a hunter safety card which is given out to each hunter to carry with them after they have viewed the gun safety video.

### **Whooping Crane Project Assistance**

Ms. Salyers reported that we received the second group of whooping cranes on December 1, 2011. Ms. Salyers stated that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service donated their planes and pilots and had a water landing. Ms. Salyers reported this saved a lot of time because the birds arrived at the property rather than the airport in Jennings. Ms. Salyers reported we received 16 birds with this cohort, which include nine females and seven males. Ms. Salyers reported the first cohort only had the satellite transmitters on their legs, but this

year Sara decided to place a VHF transmitter in addition on half of the birds. Ms. Salyers said there is a certain battery life on these transmitters so they do have to be changed out. Ms. Salyers reported the cranes were released from the acclimation pen on December 27. Ms. Salyers stated a slightly different approach was taken for the release this year versus last year. Ms. Salyers reported that one of the birds from the first cohort returned to the pen on New Year's Eve.

### **Alligator Management**

Mr. Dartez reported that we refunded \$14,600 because all eggs were not able to be collected due to the drought conditions. Mr. Dartez reported with the deteriorating habitat due to lower rainfall, we have less nesting alligators and less egg production. Mr. Dartez reported that for the wild alligator harvest there were 486 tags issued for our property and of those all 486 were filled. Mr. Dartez stated that in the past, we have seen alligator average size around 6' to 7' and we had a 6' 2" average this year. Mr. Dartez reported that the minimum was 4 feet. Mr. Dartez reported that we saw a lot of 4' to 5' alligators this year, and we had one very large 11' long alligator. Mr. Dartez reported with that came a harvest income of \$40,141. Mr. Dartez stated that we received a 40% share of that income and our share was slightly over \$16,000. Mr. Dartez reported that for our average alligator of 6' 2" we received \$14.00 per foot for that alligator. Mr. Dartez reported that the egg collection and wild harvest contracts will be bid out once again in 2012. Mr. Dartez reported that due to habitat changes we have had a reduction in the number of alligators and that the quota for 2012 was reduced to 373 tags from 486 tags. Mr. Dartez stated that we are not seeing as many alligators on the property and therefore not having as much egg production. Mr. Dartez reported that this number may be down this year but will not be down forever.

### **Public Waterfowl Hunts 2011-2012 and Expansion of Public Hunts**

Mr. Sweeney reported the waterfowl hunting results for the 2011-2012 hunts will be short because we did not have many hunts due to the severe drought we were in this year. Mr. Sweeney reported we had to cancel a lot of the marsh hunts, we canceled the teal lottery hunts in September, and we had to cancel the youth hunts. Mr. Sweeney reported we had nine hunts scheduled for the teal hunt but did not conduct any hunts. Mr. Sweeney reported it was the same for the youth lottery except we only had two hunts scheduled, but were unable to conduct any of those hunts. Mr. Sweeney reported we had 10 hunts scheduled for the marsh lottery hunt, but only held two hunts the last week of the season. Mr. Sweeney reported we had 120 potential hunters for the marsh hunt, but were only able to accommodate 12. Mr. Sweeney reported we had 23 scheduled rice field hunts and were able to conduct these hunts. Mr. Sweeney we have three blinds and we informed the hunters the area around the blinds would probably not be flooded due to the salinity levels and we were not able to pump water onto the area. Mr. Sweeney reported as a result we only had 98 people select to attend. Mr. Sweeney reported there were 13 group lottery hunts scheduled and we were able to conduct the last hunt which was held the last weekend of the season. Mr. Sweeney reported we only had 12 participants in the group hunt we conducted. Mr. Sweeney reported the results from the marsh in the previous five

years average were 4.51 ducks per hunter but that went down to 3.94 this year. Mr. Sweeney stated the previous five years average of geese in the marsh was .33 geese per hunter and dropped to .28 this year. Mr. Sweeney reported of the rice field hunts that were conducted, the results from the previous five years average was 2.28 ducks per hunter, but this season dropped to .35. Mr. Sweeney reported that the geese in the rice field stayed pretty close to the same. Mr. Sweeney stated the geese average for the previous five years average was .45 geese per hunter and was .41 this year. Mr. Sweeney reported that we do plan to add three additional rice field blinds in the area west of the Florence Canal and north of the Intracoastal area. Mr. Sweeney reported this will double the number of rice field hunts next year. Mr. Sweeney stated their plans are to hunt six days per week. Mr. Sweeney reported we are going to research alternatives for dealing with drought conditions.

### **Reconstruction of 700 Acre Impoundment**

Mr. Dartez reported we are in the process of getting levees built around the 700 acres. Mr. Dartez stated this may be the next site for the whooping crane pen and we must manage the 700 acre impoundment for whooping cranes and also for waterfowl. Mr. Dartez reported that for whooping cranes we must maintain a four to ten inch flood throughout the year and that will provide whooping crane, waterfowl, and shorebird habitat.

### **Non-Consumptive Activities**

Ms. Salyers reported that five non-consumptive days have been sold this year. Ms. Salyers stated that the cranes have received the most interest from the public. Ms. Salyers reported that we had a large group from Lake Charles here yesterday. Ms. Salyers stated they were disappointed that they could not see the cranes, but she still took them to see the pen and she gave them the whooping crane spiel and they were very excited they were able to learn about the cranes. Ms. Salyers said it is really nice to have the public out on the property. Mr. Salyers reported that word is getting out and she expects to have continued interest from the public. Ms. Salyers stated that due to staffing restrictions, we try to only accommodate one group per week. Ms. Salyers reported that these are only day trips and the guests arrive by 9:00 a.m. and they generally pack their lunch and eat in the lodge.

### **Other Business**

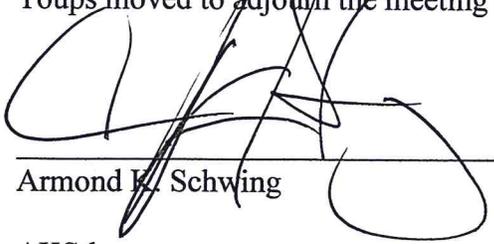
There was no other business.

### **Public Comment**

Ms. Sara Simmonds commended the staff on the progress that has been made on the property.

## Adjournment

There being no further business, Chairman Schwing asked for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Toups moved to adjourn the meeting and it was seconded by Mr. Duhon.



Armond K. Schwing

AKS:lg

(The preceding constitute minutes of the Advisory Board Meeting and are not a verbatim transcript of the proceedings.)