

MINUTES OF THE MEETING
OF
WHITE LAKE PROPERTY ADVISORY BOARD

Thursday, August 10, 2011

Chairman Armond Schwing opened the White Lake Property Advisory Board meeting held at the Louisiana Department of Wildlife and Fisheries in Baton Rouge, LA and asked Ms. Laura McCoy to call the roll. The following members were present:

Armond Schwing
Brandan Duhon
Charles Toups
Steve Linscombe
Karl Connor
Miriam Davey
R. Martin Guidry
Eddie Lyons
Sara Simmonds

The following members were absent:

Sean Gayle
Steven Mansour
Larry Thomas
Sherman Wilson

For the record, due to miscommunications, Mr. Steven Mansour arrived for the meeting on Wednesday, August 9, 2011 and was unable to return the next day due to other commitments.

Approval of Minutes of March 24, 2011 Meeting

Chairman Schwing called for a motion for approval of the minutes of the March 24, 2011 meeting. Mr. Marty Guidry moved to accept the minutes and Dr. Eddie Lyons seconded the motion. The motion passed with no opposition.

Department Financial Report

Ms. Wynnette Kees presented the board members with a financial report as of June 30, 2011. Ms. Kees reported that the current year to date figures for Fiscal Year 2010 – 2011 which ended June 30, 2011 should be final, and within the next few weeks they will be closing all of the books. Ms. Kees stated that at the next meeting a total final report

will be provided. Ms. Kees reported that the main thing she believes Mr. Sean Gayle has a concern about is that all the expenditures located at the bottom of the report are what it takes to manage White Lake. Ms. Kees said those expenditures are funded out of the White Lake Property Fund and are not funded by anything else. Ms. Kees reported that the salaries listed on the report are more than just Wayne and his staff, because when employees from other sections perform work at White Lake they are paid from the White Lake Property Fund. Ms. Kees stated that wages listed on the report are for temporary employees that are hired for the hunts and other issues.

Update on White Lake Leases

Mr. Buddy Baker addressed the Board and reported they are approaching the deadline for receiving bids, which is August 18, 2011. Mr. Baker stated in order to insure that we receive the best value for these leases, we have established minimum bids. Mr. Baker said the minimum bids were based on fair market value determined contractually by Dr. Richardson of LSU, who is a very well-known economist. Mr. Baker reported that we are now accepting bids that are equal to or greater than the minimum bid established. Mr. Baker stated that at the recommendation of the staff, they have combined the agricultural leases and the hunting leases into eight common leases. Mr. Baker reported that at one time we had 22 leases and now we have eight leases. Mr. Baker stated that bid packages had been distributed to everyone who had requested them, and additionally, bid packages were distributed to all of the current tenants. Mr. Baker said in addition to this, they have met with the farmers on at least two occasions to make sure their questions were answered and that they know exactly what they have to do to stay on the landscape. Mr. Baker reported that the leases are for a ten year period, with the right to extend those leases for up to two more terms, provided they meet certain conditions. Mr. Baker reported that the Secretary, at his discretion, has the right if he deems it is in the best interest of the state or the property to continue with the leases.

Proposal for New Biologists and Technician Staff

Mr. Baker informed the Board that the Department has great ambitions and desires for White Lake. Mr. Baker stated that we would like to see more than quality duck hunting occur at White Lake. Mr. Baker said they would like to have full-time biological presence on White Lake. Mr. Baker stated they are proposing to initiate biological activities on White Lake and begin managing from a scientific perspective. Mr. Baker said the Deed of Donation requires that we have a management plan in place for White Lake and we have not done that. Mr. Baker stated we have not had the time or staff to put a management plan in place. Mr. Baker said we cannot own or manage the property by the seat of our pants and we need to put together a plan and have it approved by this Board, and by the administrators in Baton Rouge, and that it needs to be a well thought out plan. Mr. Baker stated we need to assess the critical habitat types, endangered plants, determine impacts of hurricanes, determine impacts of drought, and we also need to determine the impacts of the salinity. Mr. Baker stated that he believes that the Department also needs to be involved in the Mermentau Basin hydrological management and have a voice whenever there is activity like there was this past year about whether or

not to open the locks up to flush some freshwater from the flood of the Mississippi to drive out some of the salinity in the Mermentau Basin. Mr. Baker said that almost all of the private landowners and many of our farmers weigh in on that decision. Mr. Baker stated that we need to be a party to those decisions; he said we need to be driving those processes and not following those processes. Mr. Baker said additional manpower is essential for proper coordination of our land leases. Mr. Baker stated that we need someone on the ground on a regular basis working with the landowners. Mr. Baker said the Deed of Donation requires the farmers to perform certain activities if they do not plant rice. Mr. Baker stated that if they do not or cannot plant rice we intend for them to sit down with the White Lake land manager annually to come up with an alternative conservation plan. Mr. Baker said that the Department needs to do a better job of insuring compliance with farm services requirements in order to protect our rice base. Mr. Baker said that staff needs to be out there on the landscape because we do not need to find out five years down the road we should have been enforcing and requiring some pumping activity. Mr. Baker said if our tenants do not have the infrastructure to pump then we need to be working with those farmers/landowners to make sure they get that resource. Mr. Baker stated that if the tallow trees have not been removed we do not want to find out about it when they have 6 or 8 inch DBH and they are difficult and expensive to remove, we want to catch it when they can still be managed. Mr. Baker said we need to insure compliance with permit obligations. Mr. Baker said we need to insure compliance with all of the terms of the Deed of Donation as it relates to structures and improvements. Mr. Baker said the new tenants are going to be required to request our permission before installing improvements. We will come up with an agreed upon value and we will keep a record of the value of their improvements. Mr. Baker said we need to work on installing infrastructures to facilitate activities that we now have going on. Mr. Baker said the Department plans to convert the Florence Canal house into office space for the whooping crane staff. Mr. Baker stated we need to restore levees. Mr. Baker said the Florence Canal is in a state of desuetude. Mr. Baker stated that anytime you have oilfield activity, crew boats and barges going up and down the canal you are going to get erosion. Mr. Baker said we need to have a system in place where any permit that we issue or renew need to be coupled with an obligation to restore or maintain the integrity of that levee. Mr. Baker said we have got to figure out right now how to hold them accountable to fix the levees that are already falling apart. Mr. Baker stated that we have a very weak system of levees on the Florence Canal. Mr. Baker said another thing we need to address is White Lake shoreline stabilization. Mr. Baker stated we are getting erosion there, but not as fast as the rate of some other places, but it certainly is eroding on the north shore of White Lake. Mr. Baker said we are proposing to have a greater research emphasis and would like to conduct research not only to facilitate the management of the property, but for management of the greater Mermentau Basin as well. Mr. Baker said our staff, particularly our technicians, will be needed to assist with whooping crane restoration efforts. Mr. Baker said we need to continue to develop public youth plans and appropriate public uses. Mr. Baker stated we need to identify what public uses are appropriate and inappropriate on White Lake. Mr. Baker said we also need to insure that there is an adequate amount of non-consumptive activities. Mr. Baker said we are currently initiating that right now by implementing the birding trail. Mr. Baker said we need to coordinate educational efforts, as we have not had an education coordinator there,

but I think that could be assigned to a new staff person. Mr. Baker said we are in the process right now of developing a kiosk for the birding trail which will also serve as an informational location on the whooping crane restoration project. Mr. Baker said finally from a public use standpoint, we need to continue to have youth and educational opportunities available. Mr. Baker stated they are proposing to hire two biologists and two technicians. Mr. Baker said the positions are: Biologist Manager, who would supervise a Biologist Supervisor; a Biologist Supervisor, who would supervise two technicians. Mr. Baker said these individuals activities would not be related to the day to day activities that manage the lodge and the hunts, as we have staff in place already to do that. Mr. Baker said that these positions would be responsible for biological assessments, management, and research that we are proposing to do at White Lake. Mr. Baker gave the floor to Mr. Jimmy Anthony to explain where the positions come from, the funding of the positions, and to answer any questions relating to that.

Mr. Anthony addressed the Board and said he believes that White Lake has been neglected for too long. Mr. Anthony stated that we are not depending on new revenue to come in from the leases to pay for the positions, as we have the budget authority already to do this. Mr. Anthony said he has a lot of different funding sources to put into this if need be. Mr. Anthony stated he is committed to putting the needed resources at White Lake. Mr. Anthony said the Biologist Manager position would report to Wayne Sweeney. Mr. Anthony stated that the two technician positions will be job appointments. Mr. Anthony said we want a marsh management expert but they do not come cheap, nor do they come inexperienced. Mr. Anthony said in order to get that qualified person we have to offer a Biologist Manager position, which Civil Service requires that position to have staff under them, and one staff member must be a supervisory position (Biologist Supervisor). Mr. Anthony stated that Civil Service requires the Biologist Supervisor position to have two staff members under that position. Mr. Anthony said we must have these four positions in place or the whole thing goes out. Mr. Anthony reported they will not hire an entry-level biologist to try and manage the White Lake property.

There was much discussion among the board members regarding the proposed hiring of these new positions. Mr. Charles Toups requested the Department to keep all board members up-to-date on the new positions and any and all progress made on the property. Mr. Baker reported that the truth of the matter is we probably need to hire a hydrologist, an engineer, an architect, and a farm manager; however, we are only going to get to hire two people and they will have to be a jack of all trades. Mr. Baker said in his experience a biologist with a Master degree will be needed. The thing they learned most in college was not ecology or biology, rather it is how to develop proposals and find resources. If they come to us with that expertise, they can be that jack of all trades. Mr. Baker reported that Mr. Sweeney has attempted to do this with limited staff, but now Mr. Sweeney will be managing these new employees. Mr. Baker said that everyone agrees that all of this is more than Mr. Sweeney can do alone so we are going to hire a Biologist Manager and all work performed by him will not be biological. Mr. Baker stated that while not all of the duties will be biological, he thinks the best fit to drive that process is a Biologist Manager because hopefully that individual will have supervisory experience, management experience, and biological experience. Mr. Baker reported that after

searching through the list of positions the Department of Civil Service offers, he feels the Biologist Manager and the Biologist Supervisor are the two that fit the bill and this is his recommendation. Mr. Baker reported that some duties will be removed from Mr. Sweeney's job description and placed in the responsibility of these new positions. Mr. Baker stated that Mr. Sweeney will perform the administrative duties and the new biologists will handle the on-the-ground activities with the tenants. Mr. Baker stated that he expects to be able to come back to you a year from now and say "now by having the men on the ground I can assure you we no longer have Corps violations whenever our tenants are out there restoring the levees or digging ditches". Mr. Baker said he thinks he will be able to come to you and say "you know those properties that were in a state of desuetude and were growing chicken trees and had not been pumped off, we now have a plan in place to pump that off and the tenants understand what they must do to remove those trees". Mr. Baker said that he would like to come back to you in two years and say "guess what, that property is manageable now". Mr. Baker said he would like to come back and say "because we have people on the ground, we now have completed those hurricane PWs, we have a shop in place and we have a shed roof on the boathouse". Mr. Baker stated he thinks they will be able to come back to you, if given these positions, and show you tremendous progress and where that money was spent.

Ms. Miriam Davey requested the Department provide board members with regular written reports of what the biologists are doing, the progress made to the property, etc.

Chairman Schwing thanked Mr. Anthony, Mr. Love, and Mr. Baker for answering all of the questions asked by the board members. Chairman Schwing stated that he does not know what the next step is for the Board. Chairman Schwing asked if the Department is requesting the Board to sign off on this, or if they are asking the Board if they agree or if they do not agree and do not want the Department to hire more employees. Mr. Anthony responded that the Department does not want to do things the Board does not wish. Mr. Anthony stated that he was informed several board members had contacted Secretary Barham requesting the Department not hire these people until they are given an explanation.

Ms. Sara Simmonds asked to hear more about the overtime because she has heard there is an overtime problem. Mr. Sweeney reported that 99% of the overtime is made during the waterfowl season due to the lottery and corporate hunts. Mr. Sweeney said they have tried to decrease the overtime but due to the number of holidays that occur during the hunting season, it is impossible to prevent staff from working overtime and also be able to accommodate the lottery and group hunters. Mr. Sweeney said they have tried to cut it down to a minimum but the overtime will not go away as long as we are having group hunts. Mr. Sweeney reported his staff begins assisting the hunters at 4:00 a.m. and are with the hunters until 7:00 p.m. or 8:00 p.m. Mr. Sweeney reported that we generate revenue from the hunts totaling approximately \$400,000 and most of the overtime is centered on the group hunt activities because the hunters are there for two days and nights. Mr. Sweeney reported his technicians are full-time employees and their plates are full. Mr. Anthony reported that this overtime is time and half and is compensatory leave, and they may only carryover 300 hours per year. Mr. Anthony said most of the

technicians are carrying a lot more hours than that. Mr. Anthony stated the Department is required to pay the balance off at the end of the fiscal year which is on June 30 or the employee is forced to go on leave. Mr. Baker reported that the whooping crane project began without enough employees and now that we are getting more birds, we will need more technicians to help follow them around, check pens, etc. Mr. Baker said he is proposing that the technicians have dual responsibilities. Mr. Baker stated if they are co-supervised by Sara Zimorski they can charge their time to Rockefeller while doing whooping crane work or charge their time to White Lake while doing White Lake work. Mr. Baker said that will free up Mr. Sweeney's current technicians to not have to perform those duties. Mr. Baker said they were trying to get the Rockefeller staff up to White Lake, but it is a three hour round trip drive for them. If we pay a member of the Rockefeller staff for five hours, three of those hours are solely for driving. Therefore, we would only have to pay an employee of Mr. Sweeney's staff for two hours. Mr. Baker reported even with the new positions they will still incur overtime.

Mr. Marty Guidry moved to accept the Department's proposal to hire four new positions to work at White Lake. The motion was seconded by Dr. Eddie Lyons. Dr. Steve Linscombe moved to amend the motion to change the position description to include a clearer delineation of job responsibilities for the Biologist Manager position and the current Manager position of the White Lake Wetlands Conservation Area. Mr. Guidry seconded the amendment. The amended motion carried with no opposition.

Update on Whooping Crane Project

Mr. Love addressed the Board and informed them that to date we have lost three of the whooping cranes. Mr. Love reported that bird number six was lost between Henderson and Breaux Bridge in St. Martin Parish in June 2011 from an unknown mortality. Mr. Love stated that there are crawfish ponds in that area, but it was not a good neighborhood for the bird to be in due to a lot of houses, power lines, and dogs. Mr. Love said we have not been able to recover the satellite transmitter so we really have no known cause of mortality. Mr. Love reported that bird number nine went up to Turnbull Island and we also lost that bird in June 2011. Mr. Love stated that we subsequently determined, from evidence of finding the transmitter and feathers, the bird got into a cornfield and was taken by predation. Mr. Love reported that bird number seven was recaptured above the Intracostal Canal, not far from Roger's house, and was emaciated and sick. Mr. Love stated they put the bird back in the pen and treated it with medication for ten days, but eventually had to take it back to the vet school and have it euthanized. Mr. Love reported it was suffering from pulmonary and tracheal infections. Mr. Love reported we now have seven cranes that remain on the landscape. Mr. Love reported that bird number five, who we call Clotile, was the first bird to stray off by herself after the birds initially did their exploratory flights all around the Acadiana area of Louisiana. Mr. Love reported that birds number 1, 3, 8 and 10 stayed up in Evangeline Parish for six to eight weeks in rice country and then came back down to Jeff Davis, and that is where they are currently located. Mr. Love said staff is currently monitoring these locations and performing habitat assessments, behavioral assessments, and analyzing landowner data that is collected. Mr. Love stated they provide reports to various entities, including LSU,

LDWF, as well as the recovery team. Mr. Love said they are continuing with education and outreach efforts so presentations are still ongoing. Mr. Love said they have been fundraising solicitations to try to raise money to pay for part of this program. Mr. Love reported that we have plans to construct a second pen in the 700 acre impoundment when necessary. Mr. Love stated that projections for this fall are that the cohort will contain 16 to 19 juvenile cranes, and these birds will be five months of age which are younger than the nine month old birds we received this past February. Mr. Love said that these first three years are experimental, so we are trying to incorporate different monitoring methodologies. Mr. Love stated he believes the cranes should arrive sometime after Thanksgiving, perhaps even as late as the first of December. Mr. Love reported that visitor viewing requests are expected to be higher this coming year and it is going to take staff to carry people down the canal and let them see what is going on. Mr. Love stated that the 70% success rate at this point is very encouraging and is better than the other reintroduction projects that have been started around the country. Mr. Love said that so far the project is working and he appreciates the Board's support on this project. Mr. Love reported the birds seem to be adapting well to our landscape and are using a lot of agricultural habitats.

Update on Intracoastal Canal/DU NAWCA Project

Mr. Buddy Baker addressed the Board and reported that in May he met with all members of our congressional delegation except Senator Vitter who was back here dealing with floodwaters, but he met with his staff. Mr. Baker stated the message he heard over and over is they understand the problem and realize you need help, but do not look for earmarked. Mr. Baker reported there will not be any congressional money and worse than that is we have been watching the federal budget and if NAWCA is funded, it will be funded at a lower level. Mr. Baker stated that is the doom and gloom, but the good news is that we have been successful in getting some grant money and we already can come back and report that we are making progress on the Intracoastal. On the restoration of the 700 acre impoundment, Mr. Baker reported that we were able to get a \$620,000 grant from the Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Mr. Baker reported that money was not a matching fund and we may use the money now to match the NAWCA grant or any future request related to shore stabilization, so what we are proposing to do is put up \$1,000,000 of White Lake money because in order to get a NAWCA grant you must go through a competitive process. Mr. Baker said we applied for a NAWCA grant in March but we did not make the cut. Mr. Baker stated the reason why we did not make the cut is because our match amount was not high enough and they prefer to see something very close to two to one and we were only about 1 ½ to 1. Mr. Baker said we must come up with some additional match money. Mr. Baker said another thing they told us about our grant application was they like to see more partnership, so we realized we not only have to get more money but we have to get more money from more different types of partners. Mr. Baker stated he is happy to report that we just now submitted our second NAWCA grant. Mr. Baker reported that we now have approximately eight partners. Mr. Baker said we received \$100,000 from Shell Oil, another \$100,000 combined from three family foundations, and we were able to use the \$620,000 we received from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation. Mr. Baker reported that we now have what we think is a very

healthy application because we have twice the partners than we had before and we have the 2 to 1 match and he believes our chances are real good, but there is no guarantee.

Update on Birding Trail and 700 Acre Impoundment

Mr. Sweeney addressed the Board and reported they had to apply for a permit because they decided they wanted to impound roughly 20 acres so we could flood it for shorebirds. Mr. Sweeney stated a permit was required to build a levee that was there 30 years ago but had subsided. Mr. Sweeney said the permit was granted and that levee was constructed a little over a month and a half ago. Mr. Sweeney reported all other infrastructures are in place except for the kiosk. Mr. Sweeney reported they received a donation of trees and 12 kids came out and planted approximately 300 trees. Mr. Sweeney said a gate was put up just beyond the first bridge which we will be able to close off during the waterfowl season. This will prevent visitors from getting too close to an adjoining landowners waterfowl hunting blind. Mr. Sweeney anticipates the trail being open year round with that particular section being closed during the hunting season. Ms. Davey commended the staff on all of the progress made on the birding trail.

Mr. Sweeney reported they have applied for a permit to rebuild the levee system and install a new pumping system. Mr. Sweeney stated the levee around the 40 acres has been constructed. Mr. Sweeney said they were going to separate these 40 acres from the other 660 acres but have decided not to do this right now. Mr. Sweeney reported that one of the interior ditches has been cleaned out and right now the excavator is working. Mr. Sweeney said they are in the process of constructing the northwestern border of the 700 acre and has maybe another ¼ mile to go before it is complete. Once this is done, that particular phase of the project will be done. Mr. Sweeney reported they did receive funding from Ducks Unlimited to build the pumping station and that is also completed and is up and running.

Upcoming Hunting Season Plan/Changes

Mr. Sweeney reported that we are in the process right now of advertising the teal lottery hunts. Mr. Sweeney said no changes made have been made to that hunt. Mr. Sweeney stated the only change being made is to the application, as we are no longer requiring applicants to list who their guest will be. Mr. Sweeney reported he is informing the applicants that they are only allowed to submit one application per hunt, and the applicant and their guest can only attend once per type lottery hunt. Mr. Sweeney said they will be able to determine that once they check their license. Mr. Sweeney reported the applications for the teal hunt are due August 18. Mr. Sweeney stated that they are going to begin advertising the group hunts beginning tomorrow. Mr. Sweeney reported that they are proposing to sell 13 hunts. Mr. Sweeney said the applications and advertisements should be on the website tomorrow. Mr. Sweeney reported the deadline to submit applications for the group hunt will be August 31. Mr. Sweeney reported they will start advertising the youth hunt next week and they are in the process of developing the application for the two youth morning hunts they will have. Mr. Sweeney reported

that they will advertise the ricefield and marsh lottery hunts in September and they are proposing to expand the ricefield activities and double what we have been doing.

Other Business

Ms. Simmonds commented on the non-consumptive days that were purchased this past spring when the cranes were still in the pens and for a short while once they were out of the pens and flying back. Ms. Simmonds informed everyone that you may purchase a non-consumptive day for \$300 and up to ten people can attend. Ms. Simmonds stated you need to arrive by 9:00 a.m. and the tour ends around 3:00 p.m. Ms. Simmonds said the people who participated were thrilled and everyone came back happy and applauded the staff. Ms. Simmonds stated it was really wonderful to hear all the nice comments. Ms. Simmonds said she had the good fortune to go on an overnight fundraiser and stated it was a five star experience. Ms. Simmonds said the staff was very attentive, the food was absolutely wonderful, and the beds were good. Ms. Simmonds said once everyone saw the cranes they were a very happy crowd. Ms. Simmonds reported that a number of thousands of dollars was raised but she wished more money would have been raised. Ms. Simmonds reported that even more non-consumptive days and nights will be sold next year. Ms. Simmonds stated they have been in talks regarding what type of gift they should be giving to high end donors and she reported Dr. Archibald suggested a painting by a very renowned Canadian nature artist, Mr. Bob Bateman. Ms. Simmonds showed a painting made by Mr. Bateman. Ms. Simmonds reported that Mr. Bateman donated 10 prints and these prints will be given to the \$100,000 donors. Ms. Simmonds reported that approximately \$150,000 in private funds is needed each year for the care of the cranes and we are alright for this year but we need money raised for next year.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Adjournment

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



Armond K. Schwing

AKS:lg

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