

## MINUTES

### GRAHAM CREEK NATURE PRESERVE ADVISORY BOARD

407 E. LAUREL AVENUE

FOLEY, ALABAMA

CONFERENCE ROOM

JANUARY 7, 2016

5:30 P.M.

#### MEETING

Call to Order/Roll Call

Chairman Zana Price called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. She thanked the board members for serving on the board this past year and giving up their time to make the necessary contributions to this newly established board.

Board members present: Tommy Patterson, Chad Watkins, Greg Knight, Tim Closson, Homer Singleton and Phillip Hinesley. Others present: Vickey Southern, Leslie Gahagan, Jackie Trimble, Janet Ripp (Director of the Wildlife Center), Thomas Ripp, and John Manelos.

#### MINUTES

Approve Minutes of September 3, 2015

Mr. Singleton made a motion to approve the September 3, 2015 minutes and Mr. Knight seconded the motion. The vote passed unanimously.

#### GUESTS

*COASTAL WILDLIFE RESCUE CENTER (Coastal Wildlife) – They will be giving an update*

Mr. John Manelos, Mr. and Mrs. Ripp were present to represent the Coastal Wildlife Rescue Center.

Mr. Manelos thanked Mrs. Gahagan for allowing them to speak to the Board. He retired from the Houston, Texas corporate world approximately three years ago and moved to Fairhope where he owns a small paddle board business called "Fairhope Paddleboard" that keeps him more amused than anything.

Mr. Manelos got involved with the Coastal Wildlife Rescue Center approximately four months ago through the paddle board business. There was an injured seagull in the water that a fisherman wanted him to rescue, which he did and then realized that it needed more care than he could give him. One of his partners in the paddle board business, Terry Kurtts, M.D., who also has a paddle board business in Elberta, told him that he knows a lady that he can take the bird to. Mr. Manelos had called the police and they thought he was crazy for calling them. He also called Fish and Wildlife who also did not know where to

take the seagull. Mr. Manelos took the seagull to Janet and through that experience he got to understand the deficiency in Baldwin County for facilities to take care of injured migratory and indigenous birds. He has helped transport wildlife (aka birds) from Daphne and Fairhope and got to know more about the organization.

The Coastal Wildlife Rescue Center is a rehab and research 501c3 non-profit agency that has been in existence since 2003. Mrs. Ripp and another lady worked out of Mrs. Ripp's house and the past three years they have been working out of the trailer at Graham Creek Nature Preserve. She is not paid; they rely on donations and volunteers. They do have a board that has stood up in earnest in the past six months. He was asked to join the board and is doing that for now.

The reason for the board's existence is because of the benevolence of the donors. They operate off a shoestring. Mrs. Ripp, through the fortune of misfortune being a sea captain's wife and him being away a lot, is able to devote more time to the rescue center than probably anyone. She has spent the night awake caring for injured birds. It is amazing to meet people who are dedicated to these lifelong causes.

The reason they wanted to speak to the board is that they know the interpretive center is on its way up. The skeleton of the center is there and can be seen and at some point they feel sure that the City will ask them to take the trailer away. How soon that will come they don't know but they suspect that they will want to beautify that area more.

The City of Foley allows Coastal Wildlife to inhabit that location. The trailer was donated and they don't supply, that he knows of, any other funding for it. He passed out an information sheet. Over the past three years they have taken in over 1,000 birds and have a rehab rate of 65% release rate back into the environment. If they were not in existence those birds would have died and it is the only place in Baldwin County that currently has a federally licensed rehabilitator. Veterinarians can take them in but they don't have the environment to rehab them and sustain them for any length of time.

In his education Mrs. Ripp has introduced Mr. Manelos to some people at the Environmental Studies Center in Mobile. They have a phenomenal center that is funded by the Mobile County School System. It is primarily an educational center for K through 12. Mr. Manelos recommended the Board take a tour of the Center. They have over 300 acres containing several aviaries. Probably a third of the birds came from Coastal Wildlife through donations because the birds that were donated could not be released. The Environmental Studies Center has a biologist who is a federally licensed rehabilitator.

In Baldwin County there is only one federally licensed rehabilitator. A vet could take in a bird if they are willing to do that but absent that if anyone was to find an injured bird in their yard they can bring them to someone but they can't keep them, handle them or try to rehab them because it is against the law. So in Mr. Manelos' education he had to ask himself, "Why isn't this supported by Baldwin County or the public?" The answer is probably because there isn't a big appetite in this economic environment due to budget constraints. This organization might not exist a year from now unless they find a place to at least share in the cost, sponsor it somehow until it can morph into or become something else.

As kind of a side note the City of Orange Beach is in the process of creating something that Mr. Manelos believes a year or two from now will be the hub for Baldwin County. They are doing some remarkable things through Wade Stevens, a former fire fighter, whose is bringing a lot in the area of wildlife, rescue and rehabilitation in this part of the County. Mr. Manelos spoke with Mr. Stevens to get an update on where they are at. They have some very ambitious plans that make him think will Coastal Wildlife need to exist in its present form. Maybe not if they have a place supported mainly by public funds, which it should be over the long term.

Mr. Manelos thought the City would be interested in helping them because Coastal Wildlife is located at GCNP and the interpretive center is being constructed. Coastal Wildlife is not sure what the City's plans are and if it would even involve rehab, or if it would tie into what Mr. Steven's plans. He isn't even sure if the public is even aware of the problem and isn't sure if the elected officials are even aware of the problem. They are open to suggestions.

Mrs. Ripp reported that 25% of the birds taken in were from Foley and Orange Beach. This area has a lot of wildlife and they are probably missing a lot of wildlife in north Baldwin County.

Mr. Manelos reported that he thought his next step would be to go to the Mayor and talk with him about the problem. Mrs. Southern reported that she has been given strict instructions that if the funds are not in this fiscal year's budget it isn't going to get approved. This is because the Council has set the budget according to the projects currently being worked on that they are trying to complete and that if the funds are not in the budget the answer will be no. Mr. Manelos wants to go before all the cities to educate the elected officials to help with not only the Foley and Orange Beach area but Fairhope and Daphne areas as well. Chairman Price asked if Mr. Manelos had spoken with Representative Steve McMillan for some discretionary funds. He responded negatively.

Mr. Hinesley reported that he might want to talk with Commissioner Skip Gruber and the Mayor and only ask for \$1,000 for the next fiscal year. Mrs. Southern reported that the Council is asking that if anyone has any budgetary requests for the next fiscal year to have them in by March.

Mrs. Southern also stated that in Mr. Manelos' talk he had mentioned getting the word out to the public and asked about their marketing plan on accomplishing this goal. Mr. Manelos reported they don't have a marketing plan because there are only a handful of people doing fundraisers; however, that is a possibility. She further asked if he would be willing to speak with Mrs. LaDonna Hinesley, Marketing Director for the City of Foley, to see if she could get something in the City's quarterly newsletter. The newsletter goes to approximately 28,000 people and that would be one way to get the word out to the public. Mr. Manelos stated that he would get in touch with her and Mr. Hinesley reported he would give her a heads up. City Administrator Mike Thompson would be another good source for other information.

Chairman Price reported there is a Centennial event on January 19, 2016 and there is a Snowbird Reception next Tuesday, January 12, 2016. The art center has a table and Coastal Wildlife could pass out some information during both of these events. Mr. Singleton reported another suggestion would be to do something with Ducks Unlimited or even a token presentation might help. Mr. Manelos thanked the Board for the suggestions.

Mr. Patterson asked what type of budget is needed to operate. Mr. Manelos reported that it takes about \$25,000 just supporting it and some funds out of pocket.

Mrs. Gahagan reported the City of Foley entered into a partnership proposal with the City of Orange Beach for some of the Restore Funds to build the Orange Beach Center. Orange Beach starts the satellite location to just be the face and then Graham Creek would have the official raptor center, which would be the bulk of the actual rehab and is still in the works.

During Thanksgiving Aliska, from the Department of Conservation and who knows about all of the BP funds had a pelican at Dauphin Island that no one would come get. The Department of Conservation knows how important this project is and hopefully this will also help. Mrs. Ripp did not have the outreach to go to Dauphin Island but did speak with Aliska about the pelican as Mrs. Ripp already had two pelicans that she was taking care of. They thanked the Board for listening and providing them with suggestions. At this point they left the meeting.

Mr. Hinesley asked about the Master Plan and where they would be located. Mrs. Gahagan reported they would be located where they are currently located. The original plan when they brought it to Council was for them to locate there but then there were a lot of bills that had to be paid. If it wasn't for Flora Bama's owner, Joe Gilchrist, who is a huge supporter, they probably wouldn't be in existence. He has been able to come up with money and fundraisers to sustain them. There volunteers have come and gone, and now they have some snowbirds here to help out. Councilman Ebert got leery so instead of renewing the lease they just carry it month to month. Technically they have a lease for that acre as long as they are operating.

Mrs. Southern reported they had a very difficult time coming up with a business plan, and a goal somewhere along the line of what they want to achieve and how they were going to keep the money coming in and that has not been shown throughout the whole process. This was what made the Council a little nervous about their whole business.

Mrs. Gahagan reported that she attended the board meeting with their new officers. There is a retired principle, someone who worked with Patti Hall at the zoo and they are all good business people. She thinks that the Board will see a shift in the Coastal Wildlife board. Mr. Hinesley personally thinks it is a good fit for the GCNP because of the educational component and it is a good thing to do. It's in the project but if the center is going to get built it won't go to the non-profit. Mrs. Gahagan reported that it was worded Auburn University with a tri-city partnership and going to Orange Beach, Gulf Shores and Foley. Auburn University would be the spearhead of the program. Coastal Wildlife would just go to work under Auburn University. Someone had complained about the laundry thinking that someone lived there but the pelicans do make a mess and they have to do the laundry.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### *Events for the first Quarter of 2016*

The biggest event coming up is the ASA (American Shooters Association) Archery Tournament. The site visit is tomorrow, January 8, 2016, to inspect the ranges, rain or shine. People will come in on February 22nd and the tournament will run from the 25th through the 28th. They are looking at 1500 archers from all over the world. There are no RV lots available, the hotels are almost completely booked, and archers are calling trying to find accommodations. Organizers will be staying at the Wolf Bay Condominiums.

The week of February 22nd staff will be setting up 240 3-D very expensive targets, not counting the 20 3-D practice targets. There are 12 competition ranges and each range has 20 targets. There is also a limb saver range.

Staff has cut the ranges 25' wide to drop the targets off and then each of those has 20 very narrow lanes at 55 yards deep. The trees must remain. This event comes at a good time because all the plants will come back out and bloom in the spring. All the ranges will be south of the interpretive center and south of the creek. They will all be along the Philomene Holmes Blvd. and two cut off a new trail.

Coastal Wildlife Center Site - Since the interpretive center is not completed they will be putting up a 5,000 sq. ft. tent on the existing parking area for the vendors and also parking for the handicapped, VIP and sponsors. Access will be through the Coastal Wildlife Center entrance. There will be approximately 15 vendor trucks that will need temporary power. Three will be vendor trucks; one will be a practice site truck for purchasing equipment, etc. Mrs. Gahagan will also have 20+ port-a-lets set up at this site. They will begin Monday and Tuesday and limit access to the back side of the park.

Archery Park – On Friday, Saturday and Sunday they will close the archery park side of the park and use it for parking because there will be a lot of competitors. She is putting ten sponsors up by the pavilion and by the outdoor classroom because there are electrical power outlets they can use.

The park will be shut down with the exception of the pavilion or the boat launch. Mr. Patterson expressed his concerns about the RV's because at the beginning they did not want Graham Creek Nature Park turning into a camp ground. Mrs. Gahagan reported they have to be self contained RV's and it won't be for a long period of time. It won't be for the competitors just the sponsors.

Chairman Price asked about off-site parking. Mrs. Gahagan reported that she didn't see traffic being a concern because the competitors will be coming in early and staying all day. They can't do off-site parking because of their equipment. Where they have to park for this event they had to figure out a way to shuttle the competitors with their equipment.

Mrs. Gahagan reported there is an archery league that is a home schooled based group that comes out to use the archery park. They have 16 children on their waiting list to join and they can only accommodate so many at a time. They will be out each day during this event to bring snacks to sell as a fundraising project.

There are some smaller disc golf events throughout and Rachel's Run is the week before the ASA tournament. That is a race for a former Foley High School student who was a former runner at GCNP that passed away. This will be the first year GCNP will be hosting the scholarship race.

Also in January there is a fishing tournament hosted by the Elberta Raiders Fishing Club (Adam Crandall is the person in charge of the group) with Elberta Middle School and the Wolf Bay Watershed Watch. Most of the schools have fishing clubs and the middle schools have some nice clubs. They will be working with WBWW on their Rodeo and also use Wolf Creek Park as a service day and a kayak fishing tournament. The fishing tournament includes a requirement of picking up garbage prior to fishing time and ending up back at Wolf Creek Park pavillion for the award ceremonies. They are also working with Coach Jared Gillam of Foley High School. In the future they are looking at having a day of fishing at Graham Creek limited to certain areas of fishing. They really want to have a county wide fishing tournament hosted at Graham Creek.

There will be fewer events this year because: 1) the interpretive center construction; 2) the ASA tournament zapped this year's budget; and 3) they purchased a lot of items for the haunted forest. There are a few field trips on the calendar for March.

The Easter Egg hunt stays on the calendar, as well as Earth Day. The center should be completed in May so that in June the facility should be set up so that they can have Pioneer Camp all day. Jackie Trimble will keep the older kids (10-14 year olds) the week of June 13<sup>th</sup> and they will have the smaller kids (5-9 year olds) the week of June 20<sup>th</sup> half a day.

Due to the interest the Castalina children would like to tag into the Pioneer Camp to hold a disc golf clinic for children. If so, there might be a slight increase in cost but the children would get a starter disc golf set. The Castalina children, ages 12, 11 and 7, are better than most adults when it comes to playing disc golf. Mr. Closson reported they are from the Milton/Pensacola area. The oldest child played very well last weekend in the open division in Fairhope. The middle child plays and wins in the intermediate division. Nick, the youngest, wins every junior tournament that he participates.

International Mud Day was so popular last year that it will be held again this year on June 29, 2016. Last year staff got some of the best photos.

### Construction Updates

The metal frame is up, which had to be up prior to the first of February which is the anticipated date of pouring the foundation because it is a polished foundation. This foundation cannot have anything on it because it will ruin the finish. They have to diaper the machine that works on it to ensure that it doesn't get any dirt or clay on it. The Center should be completed in May.

Philomene Holmes Blvd. should get the Corp.'s approval in March, which will get only two sides completed. The actual bridge won't be constructed until next

year because there is not enough money in the budget to cover the cost because the bridge will cost as much as the whole road.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### Discuss October Events

October will be another busy month. GCNP is one of the stops for Bird fest. They will do the cross country meet, whether or not the Cross Country Team wants to do it because it doesn't cost a lot of money. They will keep the Corpse Crawl because it is a great event and they have everything to do that event. The Haunted Forest did cost money, and they had two days that were rain out days and the last day they couldn't run them fast enough through the course. It was approximately one hour, which was a little bit too long. They did scare a lot of children and adults. It was well received and they did get a lot of good feedback. The first night was a little tough because they needed more volunteers. They didn't have any issues. They did have some adults come just to listen to the tales.

Jackie is already working on next year's Haunted Forest event. The ADA trail will be in by then and that is a third of a mile course. The gravel road (Philomene Holmes Blvd.) will be completed. We want to keep it fresh so that we aren't doing the same thing. Mrs. Gahagan thought that the turnout was good and that it was a good fundraiser. The Coastal Wildlife Rescue Center had a station for a fundraiser whereby they did some type of warping of a video that was creepy.

The first weekend in March the boy scouts will have seven troops doing a service weekend. The new area for them is where they have the creek crossing that people walk across in the back field where the rope wall field is located. This is primitive camping and they will have to pack in/pack out. The Eagle Scout project is to build a mock amphitheatre with benches and areas where they can camp. They will be doing service projects throughout the park January 4, 5 and 6, 2016. The Board was fine with them and they do allow them to have "leave no trace behind" fire rings just for the scouts. Mrs. Gahagan will have some port a potties out there for them. The boy scouts are the only ones that are allowed to do overnight camping.

Mrs. Gahagan did report that she was approached by the Girl Scouts but they require shower houses, and the 4-H group talked about the same things. Since there are no shower houses GCNP can't accommodate them. The Girl Scouts "Gold Project", which is the equivalent of the Boy Scout's Eagle Project, is coordinating volunteer days to help with landscaping, signage, etc. on the ADA trail.



Discuss November Events

They had a big disc golf course tournament with 120 people. Ten of the participants' car tags showed they traveled over four hours away. It was a very successful event. Mrs. Gahagan reported they did cancel the PowerMan event.

Discuss FY16 Meeting Dates

Mrs. Gahagan reported Council approved the Board could meet as needed and asked the Board for their opinion. Mr. Hinesley recommended quarterly meetings. Mr. Singleton agreed. There was a consensus to hold the meetings quarterly. The next meeting will be held April 7, 2016.

Mrs. Gahagan requested that as the center gets closer to being completed that she may ask the Board to meet in May as she wants them to be involved in planning the ribbon cutting.

VISITOR COMMENTS

There were no visitor comments.

ADJOURN

Hearing no further comments Mr. Hinesley made a motion to adjourn and Mr. Knight seconded the motion. The vote passed unanimously and the meeting adjourned at 6:40 p.m.

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Victoria Southern, CMC  
City Clerk/Recording Secretary