

FINAL MINUTES

Bird Conservation Network ExComm Meeting Thursday, April 7, 2022 Online Video Conference

In Attendance: Tim Balassie, Diann Bilderback, Sonny Cohen, Vera Leopold, Charlotte Pavelka, Eric Secker

President Secker called the meeting to order at 7:25 p.m.

Administrative:

- **Membership and Treasurer's Report**

Charlotte Pavelka reported that all member organizations have now paid their dues, and this was completed promptly. Dues are outstanding for one at-large member, who will get a reminder.

Charlotte reviewed BCN income and expenses so far in 2022 (attached). McHenry Audubon gave another donation on top of their membership dues, and we received two other donations. She has made the annual transfer of \$500 to the Trends Analysis Reserve from general funds. There have been no other significant expenses to date.

BCN's year-to-date balance is at \$9,726. If we follow the 2022 budget, we will end the year at \$4,800.

Charlotte has filed all legal documents for the year.

Eric Secker noted that Jim Herkert emailed that he is retiring and will no longer be a rep to BCN from Illinois Audubon Society. The committee discussed that we would like to keep him engaged with BCN as an at-large member if he is willing. He has been a great supporter of the Trends Analysis. Eric said he hopes to talk with Jim soon.

- **Robert (Bob) Kusel – At-Large Member**

Bob Kusel has been vocal with advocacy efforts for bird conservation, including the Carvana issue. Eric said that Bob Fisher recommended Bob as a possible at-large member for BCN, and Eric has talked with him. He has an interesting background and has worked as a professional photographer. Bob has not been involved with BCN before and said he was interested in joining.

- **Ted Wolff – At-Large ExCom Member**

Ted was nominated as an at-large member at the BCN January meeting, and the next step is for BCN to vote him in at the April quarterly meeting. Eric would then like to add him to the Executive Committee. Vera will double-check that he received the January minutes, and Eric will connect with Ted to see if he can attend in April.

Research:

- **BCN Survey**

1) Coordinator Position Opening

This will be Tim Balassie's last year as BCN Survey Coordinator, and he is looking for a replacement. Tim will be reaching out to monitors to see if anyone has an interest; let him know if you know of anyone who is interested, and he can talk to them about what is involved. Tim will upload a description of the role to Box soon.

We are also looking for Survey coordinators for specific counties. There is an opening in Will County, which only has about five properties surveyed. There is also an opening for City of Chicago.

We are seeing the results of reps spreading the word for new monitor recruitment. Tim reported there have been some new, qualified people interested in becoming a monitor in Kane, Lake, and DuPage counties. This is an ongoing process as some people move away or can no longer participate, so we need to keep regularly finding new monitors.

Charlotte suggested asking every BCN rep to try and recruit one person to be a monitor at the next meeting. Most of the people she has convinced to participate are people she sees regularly in the field. Face-to-face recruitment is often the most effective.

2) Data issues with agency partners

Tim said that he encountered an issue with BCN Survey data when he tried to provide agency partners in Kane County with some results from the past monitoring season. He worked with Chris Monaghan to extract data, but about half the data was missing when he pulled it. Tim can view individual records in the system, but something is being lost when pulling from the eBird database, or data fields are not being uniformly filled out.

Charlotte said she has also experienced issues with accessing data. Is there a way to automate data extraction?

Tim suggested that we look at dataflows and how data coming in and going out is being handled. He would like to talk with Aubrey Sirman about this. We need an established method and procedure mapped out.

Eric said he would like to work directly with eBird about establishing a protocol for the BCN Survey. We still have to create our own point-count locations in the system. There has been some conversation with them around the Trends Analysis, so the door is being opened. eBird also communicated that BCN is really a pioneer for this type of survey work at scale. Mapping out the dataflows could be a project for the summer. We will circle back to this at the next ExCom meeting.

3) BCN Trends Analysis and RFP Updates

Diann Bilderback reported that the Trends Analysis team (which includes Sonny Cohen, Judy Pollock, Bob Fisher, Eric, and Diann) now has a working PR/messaging document

developed. It is 13 pages and provides a habitat-by-habitat summary of Trends Analysis findings. This was circulated to a broader group for review, but she has not yet received any feedback. Her first two deliverables, the slide presentation and Trends Analysis narrative, are now done.

The timeline has been pushed back somewhat. We are now starting the media push in May. This will hopefully allow interested media contacts to see monitoring work in the field in June.

Two RFPs have been completed and are ready for sharing. One is a request for a media relations contractor to manage the media outreach and coordination component of the project. The budget is \$2,000 to \$3,000. The second is a photo/videography RFP for a contractor to shoot and produce a short promotional video to help tell the TA story. This budget is \$1,500 to \$2,500. Sonny asked for clarification on the photo/video RFP. Eric said Mary Bernat had offered to shoot and produce video footage for BCN for free; she has a lot of past experience through WTTW and other work. However, he had talked with Mary and the team felt they wanted to pursue a different type of product.

The original deadline for the RFPs was April 5th, but we did not get any submissions. It turned out a miscommunication happened and only a few contacts received it. We need to extend the deadline and cast a wider net.

Vera said that we should make sure to provide enough time for people to respond after they receive the RFP. She suggested end of April as a deadline. The committee discussed that we would like to stay on schedule with May plans if possible. The new deadline will be Monday, April 25th, or close to that date.

Diann said she will shortly send the RFPs to the full ExCom and the Trends Analysis/PR team for dissemination. Eric said the photo/videography RFP should be discussed further with the PR team before it is shared with the full BCN membership. It will be on the agenda for the quarterly meeting, and Vera will circulate the RFPs to all BCN reps afterward.

The committee also discussed potential dates for beginning the rollout of the Trends Analysis findings/messaging. BCN monitors and reps are the first target audience. A target date of Monday, April 25, was set for a presentation that will be announced at the quarterly meeting.

Conservation & Advocacy Issues:

- **Illinois 30x30 Initiative**

Over the next few months, the Conservation Task Force for the Illinois 30x30 campaign will hold listening sessions across the state to discuss and hear testimony on strategies to "conserve and protect" 30% of land and water by 2030. Bob Fisher attended one of the listening sessions and gave a brief talk on behalf of BCN.

- **Montrose Dunes**

Leslie Borns, long-time steward of Montrose Beach Dunes in Chicago, was going to have to end her role due to a lack of funding. A new source of funding was found and, happily, Leslie can now continue her stewardship work.

- **Challenge Grant – Caldwell Woods**

The Cook County Forest Preserves has a big grant for Caldwell Woods and Bunker Hill, preserves on the northwest side of Chicago, and is soliciting input on what improvements should look like. They have public meeting dates set, but not much information is yet available on what is being proposed.

- **IL HB Nighttime Lighting**

Bob Fisher is following a state House Bill (HB 5204) that would require that lights be turned out at night on any structures located within migratory flyways or close to natural areas that are built after March 1, 2022.

- **Bell Bowl Prairie**

ExCom members were concerned given the symbolic nature of this proposed destruction of extremely rare, high-quality habitat near the Rockford Airport, even though it is not of major significance to bird conservation. A public meeting is coming up on April 12th to learn the latest info on the effort to save the prairie (<https://www.savebellbowlprairie.org/>). Tim said one thing BCN could do is urge all member organizations to sign on to the action alert asking elected officials to advocate for a conservation solution.

- **Carvana**

We were not aware of new updates on this issue.

- **Lakefront Casino**

It appears this proposed casino is moving forward one way or the other, despite the concerns about harm to migratory birds. There was discussion about the current status of various proposed locations, including McCormick Place. It illustrates that significant threats to the lakefront habitat corridor continue to arise.

- **Sierra Club – offshore wind energy**

Bob Fisher raised concerns about an amendment to a state bill that was proposed at the last minute to support offshore wind energy on Lake Michigan.

Marketing:

- **Branding and Website Redesign Updates**

Sonny and Eric shared that some additional work has been accomplished on the website project since the last BCN meeting, but they are anxious to make greater strides forward. They will soon be sharing with 1-2 more people for feedback. Eric shared a draft logo and template colors for the website with ExCom, and committee members were enthusiastic about them.

- **Bylaws: Adding General Members**

Eric said that former BCN president Terry Schilling had worked on this issue to update the BCN bylaws a few years ago. Eric is interested in seeing the change successfully completed. The goal is to allow individuals to join BCN the same way they join other conservation groups as general members, to receive communications from us, news, solicitations for donations, etc. Current “members” really act as the BCN board of directors and are voting members.

Eric proposed changing anywhere in the bylaws that currently says “members” to “representatives,” meaning the current individuals who are part of BCN. A few paragraphs would then be added to talk about general members. He would target to complete this project next year. Between now and then, we can start developing a quarterly brief communication to send out that would add value for members.

Diann said that the appeal for general members is to be part of a group that’s advocating for positive conservation change. BCN fills a unique niche in our region. Eric said this change could open up BCN more so that more people can join and get involved, rather than BCN remaining “siloe” with only the existing member groups involved. BCN could receive more donations this way as well.

Charlotte suggested we discuss increasing the organizational dues (for voting members). They have not been changed since 2016, when they were raised to \$100. In 2015 the dues were \$75. The amount for a general membership level would be lower and would need to be discussed. Eric said he thought this should be a low bar. ExCom will take this issue up again before the June quarterly meeting.

- **Other Announcements**

Diann said that she received feedback in the course of her Trends Analysis interviews that land managers may be looking for funding to help with some of the habitat changes/improvements that BCN recommends. She asked how BCN might be able to enlist some corporate sponsors or other funding sources. Tim said that this might lead to conflicts with member groups depending on who is donating. Eric said this is a larger conversation for the future with many aspects to consider.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:13 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Vera Leopold
BCN Secretary