

**Bird Conservation Network Meeting**  
**January 28, 2017**  
**Garfield Park Conservatory, Community Room, Chicago**

Present: Mary Bernat, Thorn Creek Aud.; Suzanne Checchia, ENSBC; Lloyd Davidson, ENSBC; Dean Engel, Lake-Cook Aud; Emma England, Lake County Aud; Bob Fisher, IAS; Nat Miller, Audubon Great Lakes; Judy Pollock, IOS; Rita Renwick, Will County – IAS; Diane Rosenberg, Lake County Aud.; Ron Skleney, DBC; Gary Sullivan, Wetlands Initiative; Nancy Tikalsky, COS; Chris Van Wassenhove, CAS; Dave Willard, CAS; Christine Williamson, COS

**Annual Meeting**

President Dave Willard called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. A quorum was established.

**INTRODUCTIONS**

**Election of BCN officers** – In the absence of the Nominating Committee (Bobbi Asher and Mary Lou Mellon), Emma England presented the following slate of officers for approval. President – David Willard; Vice President – Nancy Tikalsky; Secretary – Suzanne Checchia; Treasurer – Glenn Gabanski

Motion: Bird Conservation Network appoints the following officers: Motion: Approve slate of officers as presented.

Moved: Renwick

Second: Engel

Action: Passed

**Quarterly Meeting**

**ADMINISTRATION**

**1. Approval of minutes** of Oct. 29, 2016 meeting at Crabtree Nature Center

Motion: The Bird Conservation Network approves minutes of the Oct. 29, 2016 meeting.

Moved: Rosenberg

Second: Van Wassenhove

Action: Passed

**2. Treasurer's Report - Glenn Gabanski**

**2016 year-end budget update (as of Dec. 31, 2016)**

*Total income:* \$18,466

*Dues:* \$2,070

*NFWF grant:* \$16,396

*Total expenses* \$19,676

*NFWF Grant:* \$18,377 (pass-through)

*BCN operating expenses:* \$1,299

*Net income:* **-\$1,210**

*BCN funds balances as of Dec. 31, 2016 were \$5,395.*

*Trends Analysis reserve Fund Balance:* \$1,000

***Projected 2017 budget***

Total income: \$2,070

Total expenses: \$16,376

Net total expenses: **-\$14,306** (note, deficit results from NFWF grant expenses that will be paid in 2017 but will be covered by 2015 and 2016 grant income not yet paid out.)

Motion: The Bird Conservation Network approves the 2017 budget as presented.

Moved: Pollock

Second: England

Action: Passed

**3. Membership report – Glenn Gabanski**

12 of the 21 BCN member organizations and individuals have so far paid 2017 dues.

**PROJECTS AND INITIATIVES**

**1. Audubon Great Lakes Monitoring Initiatives – Nat Miller**

As part of the Calumet wetland working group, a partnership of land managers, scientists and conservationists working to restore the valuable wetlands of Calumet, Audubon is leading secretive marsh bird monitoring at 35 sites from Southeast Chicago to the Indiana Dunes. The aim of this monitoring, that began in 2014, is to document marsh bird breeding bird response to changes in habitat condition and management, as well as provide long-term trends on regional breeding populations of 16 species of concern. Data are also critical in stimulating restoration and improved management, feeding back into recovery goals set by the coalition. This massive effort hinges on the support of dedicated volunteers who monitor marshes from May - June. Training will be provided for the visual and vocal identification of target species as well as survey methods.

In partnership with Cornell Lab of Ornithology and other Midwest bird monitors, Audubon is launching a land bird migration monitoring program across the Great Lakes region. Pilot projects in Buffalo, Chicago and Erie will seek to document changes in stopover habitat value where restoration work is underway. Bird abundance, richness and diversity, documented through transects, will be combined with additional data fields such as vegetation, invertebrates and radar to provide insight to stopover condition. Because of the complex nature of migration, there remains much to be understood regionally about the timing, geography and landscape effects on the full annual life cycle of Great Lakes migratory birds. Working with broad partnerships to harmonize survey efforts we expect this program to also contribute to this broader understanding of land bird migration. Training will be provided on survey methods, but volunteers should already have solid identification skills of migratory land birds.

If you are interested in learning more or participating in these efforts please contact Stephanie Beilke at [sbeilke@audubon.org](mailto:sbeilke@audubon.org) or 312-453-0230 ext. 2009.

**2. Urban Treaty Grant – Judy Pollock**

Monitoring under the UTC will be done at Montrose, LaBagh and Burnham Wildlife Corridor. More monitors are needed for each site. Classes will be taught by local birders for beginning monitors.

International Migratory Bird Day, May 20, LaBagh Woods, will feature live raptors, birding events and educational activities.

## **CONSERVATION**

### **1. Advocacy Report – Donnie Dann**

Here are many of the activities BCN was involved in since the end of October 2016. I encourage others among us to be individual advocates, whenever possible, signing petitions, contacting legislators, and otherwise speaking up for birds. They obviously cannot do it for themselves.

- 10/27/16 The whack-a-mole game continues as BCN signed on yet again to an Openlands letter to CMAP opposing the Illiana Highway.
- 10/28/16 BCN signed on to an Environment America call for President Obama to declare a National Monument in a large area near the Grand Canyon.
- 11/5/16 Personally appeared before a public meeting of the Evanston Human Services Committee and showed a 15 minutes PPT opposing the permitting of feral cat colonies to control rat populations. ABC and Bob Fisher were of great help in its preparation. The presentation can be viewed [here](#).
- 11/8/16 BCN signed on to an ABC letter urging a permitting system to clarify what constitutes an “incidental take” under the MBTA.
- 11/14/16 BCN was a sign-on to another ABC promoted letter calling on EPA to fix its ineffectual incident reporting system for wildlife and pets sickened and killed by pesticides.
- 11/15/16 BCN signed a “witness slip” to the Illinois House committee opposing Senate Joint Resolution 53 establishing a feral cat Task Force. At the upcoming BCN meeting on 1-29-17 Bob Fisher and/or Terry Shilling, both of whom were named to this group, will report on the farce that this turned out to be. Accordingly I’m copying Bob and Terry on this report to give them a heads-up.
- 1/11/17 Signed a petition telling the incoming Administration and Congress that we oppose scuttling or impairing the effectiveness of bedrock laws like the Endangered Species Act, NEPA, etc., and allowing public lands of critical importance to birds be developed.
- 1/22/17 Submitted comments to the USF&WS strongly commending the proposed Draft Conservation Opportunities Map for the Kankakee National Wildlife Refuge and Conservation Area.

Concluded: Regarding bird-friendly building legislation in Highland Park, the City prepared a terrific brochure accessible on their website <https://www.cityhpil.com/index.aspx?nid=281> Scroll to the last bullet point in the opening section. Short of making this a requirement it is a model for communities everywhere. Dann continues to offer advice and to recommend additional resources to BCN member organizations that wish to pursue bird-friendly building legislation or guidelines in their communities.

### **2. SJR 53 Feral Cat Task Force – Bob Fisher**

The task force created under SJR 53 met for the first time in mid January, and heard public comments. There will be one more meeting of the task force in Marion, IL in late February.

The task force is chaired by Terry Schilling; Bob Fisher also is on the task force. SJR 53 charges the task force to find ways to maintain (not decrease) the feral cat population in Illinois. Fisher

reported SB 641 has already been introduced that would explicitly permit taxpayer funding for feral cat colonies. SB 641, if passed, would override local or county ordinances.

Introduction of SB 641 before the task force's 1st meeting suggests to both Schilling and Fisher that the task force's creation was a diversionary tactic only.

**3. Calumet Region Issues – Dave Willard and Mary Bernat**

Willard said there's a huge need to get more information about the Chicago Park District's plans for the Lake Calumet area. Williamson suggested that a BCN Task Force be created to work through these issues and present recommendations to BCN.

**OTHER**

**1. Bird the Preserves – Judy Pollock**

There will be a celebration of the 2016 Bird the Preserves campaign on Jan. 31. Another grant has been received for 2017 and will be used to solidify the preserve birding program with the Cook County Forest Preserve District. Pollock is seeking ideas about how to accomplish the goal.

**2. Evanston new bird habitat – Judy Pollock**

City of Evanston has a grant to create and enhance bird habitats at four locations in the city.

**3. Wild Things Conference on Feb. 18 – Judy Pollock**

The conference is sold out.

**4. DuPage County Forest Preserve closed landfills project – Bob Fisher**

The county will begin major restoration and removal of invasive plants at all of the county's closed landfills. Fisher said the changes will likely impact the grassland breeding bird composition at these sites, but also increase the overall numbers of breeding grassland birds.

**5. BCN Work Days – Williamson and Willard**

Williamson and Willard will work on setting up a spring and fall work days. Dates and locations are to be determined.

**6. Partners in Flight Award – Bob Fisher**

Partners in Flight is a voluntary network of more than 150 partner organizations throughout the Western Hemisphere that engages in all aspects of land bird conservation, from research, planning, and policy development, to land management, monitoring, education, and outreach. Partners in Flight Awards recognize exceptional contributions to the field of land bird conservation. Nominees who furthered the goal of protecting migratory and resident land birds and their habitats are evaluated in the categories of leadership, investigations, public awareness, stewardship and lifetime achievement.

BCN has been nominated for the PIF Award in three of these five categories –investigations, public awareness, and stewardship. The results will be announced when they are known.

**Next Meeting – Dave Willard**

The next BCN meeting is scheduled for April 15, 2017, location to be determined.

**Adjourn**

Motion: The Bird Conservation Network approved meeting adjournment at 2:30.

Moved: Fisher  
Second: Sullivan  
Action: Passed

**Chicago Park District Presentation - 2:45 p.m.**  
**Building on Burnham: Meaningful Natural Areas Expansion**  
**Matthew Freer, Assistant Director of Landscape - Natural Areas, CPD**

Approximately 45 people attended this presentation by Matt Freer.

Chicago Park District has a goal of increasing natural areas within the city to 2,020 acres by the end of 2020.

There now are 76 natural areas totaling 1,535 acres or 16% of total Chicago Park District holdings. Of these properties, 1,001 acres were acquired or converted in 2012 or later. The CPD's plan is to acquire or convert 500 additional acres to natural areas over the next three years.

Those new areas likely will be along the shore of Lake Michigan to extend wildlife corridors between separated natural areas. With community approval, existing parkland may be converted to natural areas.

Freer moved on to discuss the activities planned for the Big Marsh (Park 564) in the Lake Calumet area.

Freer said the development of the (35-acre) bike park on the south side of the 300-acre Big Marsh parcel was necessary in order to provide funding for remediation of the site. Friends of Big Marsh raised \$2 million to go toward creation of the bike park. Federal grants were obtained by CPD for remediation and habitat restoration.

The northwestern corner of the property is being reserved for passive activities such as birdwatching and hiking.

Public access to the site required that a "clean-cap" (earth with a barrier beneath it for natural areas and a clay cap for the bike park) be laid over most of the parcel. The soil around the Big Marsh has been contaminated by years of fly dumping, Freer said.

All planting on the Big Marsh site will be with native species. A water-control management system has been installed to control flow between the interconnected marshes on the parcel and in the general area.

Freer said trails in Park 564 will be closed to bike and pedestrian traffic if necessary. Bike trails will be closed as needed if the activity will disturb birds, Freer said. Bike races may be prohibited during spring and fall migration. The CPD will monitor breeding bird activity at the parcel and act accordingly regarding bike races. Freer did not say that races during the breeding season would be postponed or canceled if they interfered with bird activity.

An environmental center will be built using bird-friendly design practices.

Freer said staff will be hired soon to be present on the site which will help to deter prohibited activities such as boating and dog walking.

Problems with natural areas should be directed to the CPD Stewardship Coordinator at [stewardship@chicoparkdistrict.com](mailto:stewardship@chicoparkdistrict.com)

Submitted by Christine Williamson, Recording Secretary