



Florida Native Plant Society

Council of Chapters Meeting Minutes 2/26/2023

Online Zoom Meeting

taken by Melanie Simon – CoC Chair

Melanie Simon called the meeting to order at 06:33 PM

In attendance (25) – 19 of 33 Chapters

*** indicates proxy or guest**

Citrus – Jeffrey Bippert
Coccoloba - Lucy Breitung
Conradina - Martha Steuart
Cuplet Fern – Sandy Boylston
Dade – Megan Prats*
Eugenia – David Martin
Ixia – Cate Hurlbut
Lake Beautyberry – Tina Mertz
Lake Beautyberry – Patricia Burgos*
Magnolia – Maddie Snuggs
Mangrove – Kate Borduas
Marion Big Scrub – Deborah Curry

Martin County - Dianna Wentink
Passionflower – Melanie Simon - **Chair**
Pawpaw – Karen Walter
Pawpaw – Sande Habali
Pinellas – David Perkey
Pine Lily – Tayler Figueroa
Sarracenia – Lynn Artz
Serenoa - Pamela Callender
Tarflower – Jennifer Ferngren
The Villages – Bob Keyes*
Member Pkg. Committee - Gail Taylor*
FNPS Executive Director – Lynda Davis*

Regular Agenda Items

- **Welcomed New Chapter Reps**
 - Kim Gibbs – Sea Rocket (Jill Whitson alternate)
 - Maddie Snuggs - Magnolia
 - Tina Mertz – Lake Beautyberry.
- **Minutes from 11/27/22 meeting**
 - Lynn A. noted there was a spelling error.
 - Kate B. motioned to approve the November 27, 2022 meeting minutes with the noted change. Gail T. seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
- **Next Meeting March 26th at 6:30pm**
 - Do not expect to have an April meeting

News/Announcements/Reminders

- **FNPS Executive Director Report (Lynda Davis)**

- 2022 Financials
 - 2022 Revenue - Budget and Actual totals tracked fairly closely. Actual revenue (about \$374K) was half a percent less than forecast. Largest revenue source is Membership Dues followed by Contributions and Grants.
 - 2022 Expenses - Actual expenses (about \$424K) were about 2% slightly less than forecast. Largest expenses are Payroll (3 employees), followed by Professional Services (Interim ED, Admin, Bookkeeper, Lobbyist), IT and Office Expenses.
 - Net operating loss was about \$50K.
 - Lynda started tracking expenses by class to show where FNPS spends its money. Largest class is Education followed by Management, Conservation, and Fundraising. Strategically we want to be able to show we are spending the largest proportion of money on mission-related work.
 - Donations are still coming in, but we had a very successful Annual Appeal in 2022. Gross revenue (income less costs of sending out the appeal letter) is currently about \$49K. Lynda thanked everyone who donated.
- Memberships
 - In 2022 FNPS gained 159 memberships. Total new memberships totaled 1539, but 1380 did not renew.
 - Lynda wants to do more work to better understand members and who is joining – people who are being active and volunteering, people who are just paying the membership fee, etc. – and why people aren't renewing.
 - The membership committee has made some improvements in terms of communications (contact) and is looking at doing more, such as an exit survey and talking to chapters about what else will help retain members and what other support from FNPS will help.
 - Jeffrey B. noted that membership has been discussed with the Citrus board. He noted that this year when his membership lapsed he did not receive a physical reminder letter.
 - Jeffrey also noted that it is not easy for the chapter membership chair to get a list of who has lapsed so the chapter can reach out. An email to the chapter listing lapsed members would help with follow-up. Multiple chapters noted (in chat) that they email or contact lapsed members.
 - Lynn A. noted that programs and field trips are open to the public, so there may not be an incentive to join FNPS. Why do people join? How do chapters persuade people to join?
 - Lynn also brought up membership levels. She noted that \$35 a year is a little on the high side compared with other organizations. Some thought should be given to lower-cost membership levels and special benefits for members (such as reduced conference fee) and how they would affect total revenue.
 - Patricia B. brought up the idea of encouraging members to upgrade to sustaining memberships – these automatically charge credit card each month. Can we encourage current and long-time members who have the financial resources to raise their membership fees by providing some kind of special benefit (special event, field trip, yard survey, etc.)?
 - Tayler F. suggested an annual “how are we doing?” survey in lieu of or in addition to an exit survey.
 - Cate H. mentioned that there are some issues with sustaining memberships with respect to frequent verification of credit card information (she receives notification her membership has lapsed and has to sort it out with staff). Could cut down on precious staff time if this glitch is fixed.
 - Kate B. noted an annual survey would encourage retention.

- **Annual Conference** (Lynda D.)
 - Lynda noted that Conference registration is now open for both the April 28-30 virtual conference and the three regional in-person gatherings. Field Day weekends are selling fast.
 - Gifts for the silent auction are needed! Chapters are encouraged to donate something.
 - Sponsorship page is also now open, so chapters and other persons/groups can support the conference that way. Contact Lynda (executivedirector@fnps.org) with any sponsorship questions.
- **2022 Volunteer Hours** (Melanie S.)
 - The report is being revised to include chapter hours reported after the deadline. Total volunteer hours for 2022 will exceed 60,000 and \$1.7 million (compared to about 37,000 hours in 2021). Even more impressive, mission-related hours (excludes Operations/Management) will exceed \$1.2 million.
 - One key take-away is that chapters with Volunteer Hours Coordinators reported substantially more hours than chapters who rely on individual reporting. Chapters are encouraged to assign a coordinator if they don't already have one to support an even higher hours total in 2023.
- **Additional Items to mention at Chapter Meetings**
 - **UF Graduate Student** sent an email to Chapter Presidents requesting research help to identify large-scale residential communities using sustainable landscaping practices and native plants. Send information to info@fnps.org
 - **April National Native Plant Month** resolution has been supported by FNPS. More information on progress will be provided when available – chapters should think about activities. *Clarification: October is Florida Native Plant Month.*
 - **FNPS Annual Membership Meeting** will not be held with the conference this year. Tentative date is June 17.
- **Chapter Rep Gatherings at Conference Regional Field Days**
 - Melanie will poll Chapter Reps at the next meeting to see if there is interest in organizing some sort of in-person gatherings for those attending the Regional Field Days.

Council Initiatives and Ongoing Business

- **Council Vice Chair and Secretary Vacancies**
 - Introduced Megan Prats, a Dade Chapter member who owns a nursery and will be on the ballot for Council Secretary.
 - We also have a candidate for the Vice Chair position.
 - Melanie proposed changing the voting dates from March 15-30 to March 11-25 so we can announce election results at the next meeting.
 - Gail T. motioned to approve the proposed voting date change. Kate B seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.
- **New Member Packages**
 - Moving forward slowly on the New Member Packages. Once completed the package will be another tool to welcome and help retain members.
- **Speakers List (Speakers Bureau)**
 - Please remember to add speakers to the list after your program meetings – other chapters may be looking for speakers on particular topics.
 - https://drive.google.com/file/d/19_bl5HkzKnjMdNoTv9AJk4emR052guyq/view

New Business

- **GEL (Group Exemption Letter)**

- GEL is a way for chapters to have non-profit status with the IRS without getting a 501c(3) designation.
- Melanie will continue trying to get information from the FNPS accountant about which Chapters are included under GEL and how that affects reporting to the IRS.
- Please mention this to Chapter Treasurers and have them contact Melanie if they need (or want) to be included in the discussion.

- **Brochure Printing**

- It's time to order printed brochures for the coming year. The form, process, and available brochures are the same as last year .
- Form link is <https://forms.gle/LPCRLvDfgdqjHzS8>
- **Please complete the form by March 17** even if you aren't requesting any brochures. Let Melanie know if you will not be able to complete the form by the deadline or need to know what your chapter requested last year.

- **Member Survey**

- Some chapters brought previous surveys to the meeting. These surveys and some previously emailed will be posted on the Council website home page (<https://council.fnpschapters.org/>).
- Questions/Suggestions discussed:
 - Include a question about becoming a sustaining member (Patricia)
 - Citrus got poor response rate from emailed surveys and good response rate when done on paper in meetings (Gail)
 - Offer entry for a prize drawing to all who complete the survey (Melanie)
 - Start with Thank You (Gail)
 - Guest/New Member/Current Member (Gail)
 - Citrus – 3 sections: Meetings/Improvements, Activities, and Participation (Gail)
 - Responses should be confidential unless respondent provides name (Gail)
 - Ask for names/other information at the end of the survey – can turn people off (Gail)
 - Time to complete should be tested and noted – 5 minutes or less ideal (Melanie)
 - Survey should be no more than 10 questions - if administered on paper, should be one page
 - Include some “demographics”? (Melanie)
 - Different surveys for new members handed out at meetings? (Tayler)
 - New member survey would allow a question about why they joined (Jeffrey)
 - Survey to hand out to non-members at meetings? (Kate)
 - How far willing to travel? (Gail)
 - Ask about reasons for renewing and anything that would change the mind of someone not planning to renew (Lynn)
 - Include and open-ended question for suggestions/feedback (Melanie)
 - Invite survey participation with link and QR code – will report back on participation (Sande)
 - Leave room for one Chapter-specific question (Melanie)
 - Easier for some chapters to do a simple discussion/focus group? (Lynn)
- Propose using Google Forms for survey
 - Unless using a paid version of Survey Monkey you can't easily download results
 - Issue with downloading results if you don't have Excel
 - Can set up Forms so you don't need a Gmail account to respond
 - Survey responses on paper can be easily entered into Forms

Open Floor/Other Topics

- **Libraries**
 - Some chapters maintain libraries
 - Sande H. - Pawpaw has an extensive online library which members can reserve.
 - Cate H. - Ixia book displays get a lot of interest – good educational tool for guests/new members
 - Patricia B. - Lake Beautyberry library floundered due to books that were not returned and having to transport books to each meeting
- **Member Directories**
 - Pawpaw survey asks about participation in a directory – look forward to getting results because other chapters have thought about this, but some people don't want their information published
 - Useful for field trips when car-pooling is an option
- **Sustaining Memberships**
 - Website shows different rates: \$65/month, \$45/month, \$30/month, \$20/month, \$10/month
 - So lowest rate adds up to \$120/year – too high for people on a budget
 - Lower rate (\$3 or \$4/month) would be \$36 or \$48/year (Jeffrey)
 - Do we need an Auto-Renewal option for \$35? (Tayler)
- **Non-Plant Sales**
 - Kate B. asked if there was any policy about selling non-plant items at plant sales and events. Other chapters noted they have sold plant books. Some clarifications may be needed about donations vs. sales and other rules that will keep chapters legal.
- **Insurance**
 - Gail T. mentioned that event (including plant sales) locations should get a liability insurance certificate.
 - Karen W. asked who to ask for a certificate – Gail T. said she would email info@fnps.org
 - Karen W. mentioned the feasibility, as a single chapter, of getting Director & Officer insurance
- **Report New Officers to FNPS**
 - Gail reminded new chapter reps that new officers need to be reported to info@fnps.org
- **Training**
 - Gail T. suggested some of the difficulties using the membership database could be helped if there were training
 - Tayler F. suggested Chapter training would be a good idea. Training should cover all the requirements for a chapter including bylaws, insurance, tax ID, FDACS, registering as a charity, plant sale requirements (state resale certificate, plant inspections, permits to sell plants or work-around), required language, non-profit status, resale certificates, waivers, GEL, reporting to FNPS, etc.

Motion to Adjourn

Cate H. motioned to adjourn. Tayler F. seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned at 8:26 PM