
Meeting Minutes

Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch – Leadership Meeting

Date: 12/17/2025

Time: 6:00 P.M.

Location: Frog Level Brewing Co

Prepared by: Tesslynn, Secretary

1. Chapter Email Setup

Early in the meeting, the group discussed the importance of transitioning from personal email use to **chapter-specific email accounts** to support professional communication and internal coordination.

All attendees were tasked with **setting up and using their Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch email accounts** for chapter correspondence. Instructions for IMAP email setup were provided to members to support this transition.

2. Next Meeting Date, Chapter Establishment & Fundraising Goal

The next meeting was scheduled for **January 7**.

Two critical goals were identified to be completed prior to this meeting:

- Submission of the **application to become an officially recognized NCWF chapter**
- Raising **\$500 in donations** as part of chapter establishment requirements

3. Meeting Locations & Accessibility

It was agreed that meetings will **rotate across counties** to ensure accessibility for this multi-county chapter. Counties referenced include **Haywood, Jackson, and Swain**.

4. Meeting Format & Frequency

All **regularly scheduled meetings will be held in person**.

Following chapter approval, **Zoom meeting capability** will be established for:

- **Emergency meetings**
- **Hybrid access** for members unable to attend in person when appropriate

Meeting cadence was agreed upon as:

- **Monthly in-person meetings for the first six months**
- Transitioning to **quarterly meetings thereafter**

5. Social Media & Communications

Platforms discussed included:

- Facebook
- Instagram
- BlueSky (noted by Roy as a platform he uses regularly)

Delegations:

- **Beth** – Facebook management
- No additional social media or newsletter roles were assigned at this time
- **Vishnu** – Outreach to potential venues
- **Claire** – Accepted position on the board as a Chapter Lea

6. Branding & Logo

Claire was delegated responsibility for logo redesign and refinement.

The chapter will continue using the **current AI-generated logo** temporarily to maintain momentum.

7. Financial Setup & Banking

The chapter will open a bank account on **January 1** with **Mountain Credit Union**.

- **Beth**, Treasurer – primary account management
- **Tesslynn** – second authorized signer

8. Project Opportunities Presented

Luke presented several potential conservation and outreach projects for future consideration:

a. Elk Management – Southern Appalachian Highlands Conservancy (SAHC)

- Focus: invasive species removal (e.g., tulip poplar) and native planting beneficial to elk
- Timeline: **Fall 2026**
- Duration: **3-4 days**
- Concerns discussed:
 - Disturbed soil following invasive removal
 - Importance of immediate native replanting and leaf mulching to prevent invasive seed spread
- Identified as a strong education and outreach opportunity

b. Elk Research & Tracking – NC Wildlife Resources Commission (WRC)

- Elk collaring and monitoring activities scheduled for **August**
- Opportunity for educational documentation
- Suggested that a chapter leader attend and record the process

c. Safe Passage Coalition

- Regional coalition addressing wildlife–vehicle collisions and habitat connectivity
- Includes partner organizations such as **NCWF and NPCA**
- Hosts **quarterly virtual meetings**
- **Jeff Connor** offered tours and educational lectures with one month's notice

d. Dam Removal Coalition

The Dam Removal Coalition was discussed as an organization focused on restoring river ecosystems through the removal of obsolete or harmful dams.

Concerns raised during discussion included:

- Potential release of contaminated sediment following dam removal
- Risk of invasive species spreading downstream after removal

These concerns were noted as having been raised from **Cherokee perspectives** and were acknowledged as important considerations for any future involvement.

Mike Leroux, a representative of the coalition, offered opportunities for:

- Educational tours of the dam
- Historical and ecological context regarding dam removal
- Outreach related to species that may benefit from restoration efforts

e. Raven & Basin Plant Management

- Specializes in **chemical-free invasive plant removal**
- Offered an in-person educational lecture (requires 3–4 proposed dates)

f. James Estate Habitat Project

- Potential habitat management and restoration opportunity
- Anticipated activities include invasive species removal and native replanting
- **Golden-winged warbler** identified as a focal species
- Timeline: **Fall 2026 / Spring**

9. General Chapter Support & Peer Learning

Luke recommended participation in **Virtual Chapter Coalition meetings** as a resource for chapter leaders.

These meetings provide opportunities to:

- Learn how other chapters navigate early-stage development
- Ask questions about project readiness and capacity
- Gain insight into best practices before initiating complex or resource-intensive projects

This recommendation was discussed as a **general support resource** for chapter development and long-term planning.

10. Fundraising Strategy Discussion

A document titled “**Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch Fundraising Strategy**” was reviewed.

Core strategies discussed included:

- Website donation button and recurring donations
- Asking for donations and memberships at chapter activities
- Merchandise (t-shirts, caps, mugs)
- Booths at local street fairs and festivals (low or no cost)
- Sponsorships for chapter activities and projects
- Yearly fundraising event
- Youth-focused EcoFest

Additional **brainstormed ideas** (not formal commitments):

- Organized hikes with educational interpretation and suggested donations
- Trailhead outreach using QR codes
- Photo-based donations (e.g., Polaroid photos for a suggested donation)
- Dog pack walk concept focused on pets and wildlife coexistence
- **Brewfest Challenge** (high interest):
 - Inspired by a Washington State model
 - Potential collaboration with other chapters
 - Not currently offered in North Carolina
- Photo contests and short film festival concepts were also noted

11. Website Development – Phase Two

The website has completed **Phase One** and is entering **Phase Two**.

- **Roy**, President, will oversee Phase Two tasks
- All **team leaders were tasked with writing their own bios** for inclusion on the website
- Phase Two includes:
 - Bios
 - Search engine validation
 - Legal and compliance elements
- Privacy policy and disclaimers are already complete

12. Partner Organizations & Events

Trout Unlimited / Jackson Parks & Recreation

A Trout Unlimited meeting in **Dillsboro** was observed by Roy.

The group expressed interest in rebuilding post-COVID and offered **free access to Jackson Parks & Recreation facilities** for events and educational programming.

Watershed Association of the Tuckasegee River (WATR)

Interest was expressed in potentially reviving **EcoFest**, previously co-hosted with Trout Unlimited.

- No dates established
- Emphasis on youth and school involvement
- Viewed as a strong community outreach opportunity

13. Kickoff Event Planning

A kickoff event targeting **40–50 attendees** was discussed.

Potential venues included:

- Park Street Pub House (Canton)
- Balsam Mountain Inn (Waynesville)
- Sylva Social (Sylva)
- The Jarrett House (Dillsboro) – capacity approximately 100

Additional considerations included a cash bar, sponsorship opportunities, and branded merchandise.

A music-based fundraising event and radio outreach were briefly mentioned as ideas, with **Trish** identified as a potential contact for radio promotion.

14. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned following completion of all agenda items.

Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch Minutes
December 3, 2025

Roy DuVerger called the board meeting to order at 6:15pm at Frog Level Brewing, Waynesville.

After introductions, the following Chapter Leaders were proposed and positions accepted:

Roy DuVerger – President
Visnu Ravisangar – Vice President
Tesslynn Escamilla – Secretary
Beth Hayes – Treasurer
Tricia Montague – Head of Education / Community Outreach Committee

Vacancies still exist for the following proposed positions:

Project Sponsorship / Fundraising Committee Head
Political Liaison Committee Head
Social Media Coordinator*
Newsletter Designer*

Present Chapter Leaders approved the following agenda items:

- Area of Interest as being Haywood, Jackson and Swain Counties, to include the Qualla Boundary
- Chapter name as Smoky Mountains Wilderness Watch; URL for website to be smwwnc.org
- Mission Statement as:
 - Our mission is to rewild, protect and conserve habitat creating a more livable landscape for humans and wildlife.
- Chapter Bylaws – to be posted online
- Chapter Project List as:
 - Ela Dam Removal, in support of Mainspring Conservation Trust
 - Native Brook Trout Project
 - Elk Management Project

The following agenda items are still open, pending update and later approval:

- Chapter Objectives – Roy to edit text adding educational component
- Chapter Logo – Vishnu to update artwork based on attendee suggestions

New Business

- Luke Bennett, NCWF Conservation Coordinator, will:
 - Submit required data to obtain the Chapter's EIN (Employer Identification Number) and NC Secretary of State recognition as a nonprofit organization
 - Contact Justin McVey of the Wildlife Resources Commission regarding our Elk Management Project
 - Obtain contact information for NCWF members within our chapter's area of interest

- Fundraising strategies were discussed including: sustaining memberships, local business sponsorships / gift card donations, photo contests, mailers – Tricia & Beth
- Potential kickoff venues were proposed in: Waynesville, Sylva, Dillsboro, Cherokee, Cashiers, Canton, Clyde, Bryson City – everyone
- Educational program opportunities – Vishnu & Tricia
- Meeting notices, with an RSVP component, were proposed to increase interest and membership within our Area of Interest to include: The Mountaineer newspaper, WPTL radio, meeting venue bulletin boards, social media – everyone
- *Position vacancies could be filled by recruiting WCU or SCC interns who would receive a letter of recognition and would benefit from the experience for their resume

Next meeting is scheduled for 6pm December 17th at Frog Level Brewing, Waynesville.

Meeting adjourned at 8:05pm.

Submitted by:
Beth Hayes, Treasurer