

Friends of Rogers Refuge
Minutes of the Annual Meeting
49 Maple Street, Princeton, NJ 08542
Saturday, October 28, 2023 3:00-4:45 PM

Present: David Padulo, Chair; Joe Melton, Vice Chair; Lee Varian, Treasurer; Melinda Varian, Winnie Spar, Terry Rogers, David Dorini, Ed Megargee, Manish Sharma, Steve Hiltner; Laurie Larson, minutes.

Welcome

David opened the meeting with a moment of silence in memory of Fred Spar.

Report of Activities in 2023

1. Washington Crossing Audubon Society (WCAS) Holden Grants: The 2022 Holden Grant of \$3000 (received 12/6/2021) was completely expended during 2022-3 for boardwalks and other measures to adapt the refuge to continuing climate change. The 2023 Holden Grant of \$4000 (received 11/6/22) is being expended case by case for invasive species remediation projects; see below. For 2024, a \$4000 Holden Grant has been applied for.
2. Nesting Boxes: Birdhouses were purchased and placed around the marsh. Some older boxes were repositioned. So far, no screech owls have moved in, although the Purple Martin colony is thriving.
3. Press Articles: Favorable coverage in the local press brought much attention, and new volunteers.
 - “Welcome to a Birder’s Paradise,” by Rebekah Schroeder, in US-1 and Community News, January 11, 2023, https://www.communitynews.org/towns/princeton-echo/welcome-to-a-birder-s-paradise-minutes-from-downtown-princeton/article_625898c8-8add-11ed-a3f0-7bf7c2f1477a.html
 - “Princeton, With Its Glittering Emerald Necklace, Attracts Seasonal Migrants,” by Carolyn Jones, in TAPintoPrinceton, October 20, 2023, <https://www.tapinto.net/towns/princeton/sections/green/articles/princeton-with-its-glittering-emerald-necklace-attracts-seasonal-migrants-coming-in-waves-from-canada>
4. Bird Walks: Winnie Spar has conducted bird walks for WCAS, Princeton Senior Resource Center, and Princeton University Reunions, and has walks scheduled for the Princeton Garden Club and the Present Day Club. The Science Day program was rained out this year. She also coordinated the Christmas Bird Count team and kept records of nesting and migrating birds.
5. Financial: David Padulo and Lee Varian worked with the Friends of Princeton Open Space (FOPOS), which hosts our financial activities, to formalize handling of our PNC Bank Account
6. Ash Tree Removal & New Plantings: The New Jersey American Water Company, as grantor of our conservation easement, worked with FORR and the municipality of Princeton to remove trees killed by the Emerald Ash Borer. Taylor Sapudar, Princeton’s arborist, also arranged for planting of several Bald Cypress trees along the edge of the marsh.
7. Falling Tree Signage: Melinda and Lee Varian arranged for signs warning walkers to be careful due to the danger of falling branches and trees.

Birding Update in 2023

The bird walks this year introduced birders of all ages to bird watching. Winnie Spar continues to conduct counts of breeding and migrating birds. Highlights of the year included new or increased nesting by Hooded Warbler, Virginia Rail, Willow Flycatcher, Yellow Warbler, Pileated Woodpecker and Eastern Kingbird. Noteworthy migration records included Mourning Warbler, Sora and a bumper crop of Cape May Warblers.

Christie Reihl gave a talk to FOPOS reporting on her students' work in the Refuge and Woods with nesting Carolina Wrens.

Adoption of Updated Mission Statement

An amendment to The Friends of Rogers Refuge Mission Statement was proposed: to the third listed Mission Priority, add the words "that fosters diversity and inclusion." The amendment was approved unanimously by voice vote. The current text of the Mission Statement now reads:

Mission Statement

The Friends of the Rogers Refuge (FORR) acts as an advocate and steward for the Charles H. Rogers Wildlife Refuge, aiming to preserve and enhance habitat for birds and other wildlife while promoting accessibility to the Refuge for current and future generations.

Mission Priorities

- Manage hydrology, support nesting sites and remediate invasive vegetation
- Maintain and improve trails, viewing platforms and other visitor accommodations
- Promote community engagement and education that fosters diversity and inclusion
- Sustain a strong working partnership with the municipality of Princeton and the New Jersey American Water Company
- Evaluate the success of the group's continuing efforts to serve the Refuge

Election of Officers for 2024

Officers for the coming calendar year were elected by unanimous voice vote: David Padulo, Chair; Joseph Melton, Vice-Chair; Lee Varian, Treasurer.

Treasurer's Report

Lee Varian presented the Treasurer's report. As of Oct. 28, 2023, funds in the bank stood at \$18,910.46. This cash consists of

Unrestricted funds (donations, etc.)	\$11,748.38
Restricted funds	
Wetlands remediation grant	\$ 3106.82
Holden Grants	<u>\$ 4055.26</u>
Total	\$18,910.46

FORR has conducted business under the aegis of the Friends of Princeton Open Space (FOPOS). It was suggested that that incorporation as a separate nonprofit organization under 501(c)(3) would be possible, and might have advantages. Steve Hiltner noted that the process is much easier now than it once was and can be done without hiring a lawyer. David will look into getting a post office box address for FORR and further investigate establishing our own 501(c)(3).

Invasives (Holden grant)

David Padulo noted that this year finding a contractor for invasives control has been problematic. Our former contractor, Lake Solitude, did not submit a quote. David set up a meeting with Jen Rogers of Steward Green but by the time she came it was too late to do the work; she will return next year.

Other than the ongoing *Phragmites* removal, which has been very successful, other invasives that may need attention include Reed Canary Grass, Stilt Grass, various vines. Because the marsh serves as a drinking water source, we are always required to be attentive to permits and a variety of stakeholders.

Discussion of Website Transition

Laurie Larson has been unable to keep up with posting to rogersrefuge.org. The existing website will be frozen, and plans should be developed for a new presence on the web, social media, or wherever seems most appropriate. Manish Sharma is interested in providing web support. Planning will continue.

Planning for the Future

1. Current year

- Holden Grant and Williams projects
 - invasive control: David will meet with Steward Green to continue developing a plan and a quote
 - boardwalk and facilities: new signage on West Drive, fill muddy swales on red trail, expand the boardwalks, add bluebird houses
- Communications and publicity:
 - investigate alternatives to Listserv and web page
 - investigate expanded posting of bird reports (E-bird) and other public information
 - work with Princeton Birding Society, other groups
- Non-profit status
 - investigate a real USPS mailing address
 - explore the process of filing for incorporation

2. Long term

Ash trees: the death of such a large proportion of the surrounding woods forces us to intervene to improve the safety, appearance, and diversity of the forested marsh edges.

Steve Hiltner will walk with David Padulo and Joe Melton, and see what pioneer trees are appearing

Develop a list of trees that should be planted, encouraged, or discouraged

Work with Princeton's incoming Open Space manager and others on reforestation

Open water: Continue discussion of water management in upper and lower marsh

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at about 4:45.

Respectfully submitted,
Laurie Larson