

RGV Chapter Texas Master Naturalist
2024 April Board Meeting
April 2, 2024

Attendance:

Officers

Robin Gelston - President
Dan Martin – Second VP
Evelyn Alpert – Secretary
Emma Gonzalez – First VP
Betsy Hosick – Treasurer

Directors

Joni Gillis - Membership
David Batot - Volunteer Service Projects
Marilyn Lorenz - Outreach
Barbara Peet - New Training Class
Mara Lee Moats - Communication
Eryn Wingert – Communication
Tamie Bulow – Program director
Robert Gaitan – Past President

At large

Joyce Baer Halpern – Winter Texan
Pam Bradley – Coastal
Thomas Butcher – Brownsville
Jose Pamos – Central Cameron County

Others

Robert Cepeda, New Class representative
Volker Imschweile, Member
Amanda Dave - UTHealth
Dave Gordon - members
Karen Weaver – Palo Alto

Agenda

1. Call to order –The meeting was called to order at **5:31pm by Robin Gelston**
2. Approval of Prior Board Meetings Minutes – March minutes were approved, as moved by Joni Gillis and seconded by Robert Cepeda –
3. Reports
 - Treasurer** – Betsy did not yet have the financial statements but reported that as of Mar 31 we had approximately \$23K in our savings account and approximately \$12K in our checking. Betsy noted that after the audit she reviewed the sales tax that had been paid without board approval, and it totaled about \$23 over 7 instances. She offered 2 proposals for avoiding delays in paying our bills while sales tax would await approval:
 - 1) Get approval after the fact up to a certain amount.

- 2) She had prepared business cards identifying the buyer as purchasing on behalf of a non-profit Rio Grande Valley Texas Master Naturalist with for Tax exempt number, so that the merchant could know we are tax exempt.

Discussion followed.

First it was recommended that both the tax exemption form and the reimbursement form be loaded on the website. Then it was suggested that we combine the 2 proposals, having both the business cards and a preapproval up to a certain amount. Barbara Peet made a motion to have the forms loaded on the site, prepare the cards, and authorize the treasurer to pay up to \$10 in sales tax reimbursements without prior board approval. Dan Martin seconded the motion. The motion passed.

It was noted however that these tax related forms must be put into a password protected, membership only area of the website. Also, it was recommended that members who are purchasing anything for the chapter be reminded of our tax-exempt status and how to handle it. Robin said she would address it in April's meeting.

Betsy noted that she has a claim from Alicia. Alicia had a \$2.74 discount from HEB, and the tax was a lesser amount of about \$1. She therefore took the discount and paid the tax, as she could not take both. Robert Cepeda moved to approve the payment, and Joni Gillis seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Leadership

Please let the minutes reflect that Robert Gaitan and Barbara Peet are no longer in their former positions as president and vice president, respectively. Robin Gelston is the new president of the Rio Grande Valley Chapter of Texas Master Naturalist, as of January 2024.

Issue

A member raised an issue about the upcoming field trip, involving not being notified about it. However, it was noted that the trip was posted on the Facebook web page and distributed via email to the list serve. Robin will review the process in the April meeting.

Membership – Joni Gillis reported 151 active members, of whom 94 have paid their dues. We have 34 people in training, 4 of whom are from prior years. Twenty individuals have earned recertification for 2024, 10 have volunteer time but not the AT. Joni recommended we reestablish the celebrations of recertification again. The Celebration will be held during the June meeting @ STEC.

Joni noted that an additional person is needed to approve hours. TMN main office reported that the percentage of members who report hours is 61% compared to prior years. The percentage of members that train and certify has dropped, but the number of entries by our membership has increased. The training conversion rate was 39.7% down from higher rates.

Communication/Outreach –

Mara Lee and Eryn have been tasked with updating the website. They noted they are learning WordPress and other functionality, and they reported that the webpage is currently under construction. They asked all members who have any comments, criticisms, or suggestions to let them know as they are updating the page with those and with input from the survey and meetings. They are also working on a calendar. There was discussion around whether the entire member page should be locked down, however it seems that most folks thought it was beneficial to let outsiders review the page to encourage interest in what we do.

Some of the coming outreach activities are an Earth Day celebration in Los Fresnos, on April 13 and at the Harlingen public library on April 13, and an Earth Day event at STEC, April 22, 2024.

New Class Director – Barbara Peet

Barbara reported that the class of 30 has dropped to 27, with 3 people advising they were overwhelmed at this time, though Barbara did encourage them to try again next year. She expects the 27 to graduate and certify. There are 2 more classes, one with John Yoakum on butterflies, and one with Justin LeClaire about birds. Graduation will be April 14 at STEC between 3 to 6 pm.

Advance Training

Teresa was not present, but Robin reported that TMN Tuesday is on the 9th, and it is the volunteer fair. Also, the chapter meeting is coming up. April 20 is the Coastal Marine field trip available to all chapter members, and Fish printing is an AT opportunity on April 13 that costs \$15 and is limited to 28 members.

Volunteer Service Project

- 1) Coop grant has sufficient volunteers and trainees. Amanda Dave noted that flyers have been created and they are updating their Facebook page. It is being promoted in BISD schools and is being cross promoted by UT and the other organizations involved, including TMN. The trainees are supposed to attend 8 in order to get reimbursed. Barbara asked if they get the \$150 reimbursement whether the hours count as volunteer time. If the trainee get the reimbursement the hours do not count as volunteer time; however if the trainee does not get the reimbursement the hours do count as volunteer hours. The five Team leads per the locations will be advised that they need to print the sign in sheet and have it completed. Once a class is completed the sign in sheet has to be returned to TPWD/ UTH in some way and done weekly.
- 2) A new project recommended by Karen Weaver (a trainee in the current class) from Palo Alto, about a grant she'd like to help with Palo Alto as they have so many school kids coming in. Applying for a grant from the National Parks Foundation for a program called "Open Outdoors for Kids". Grant would pay for school buses and training for teachers. Asking for help with volunteers to cover the field trips. Asking for 3-5 volunteers to be trained, and each would assist with 6 field trips. The training would be 3 hours of training which they will handle. \$500 would be donated to TMN's scholarship fund. Needs approval of the letter by April 4. Discussion ensued about where the funds from the grant should go; the suggestion was the scholarship fund. Barbara moved the same, and Betsy seconded it. Motion passed.
- 3) The grant for the Gulf Coast disadvantaged community health and resilience grant information was submitted to Jaime. Robin submitted her resume as requested. Money would pass through the chapter and go the individual projects that were developed for the grant. Grant will be submitted April 4.
- 4) Bat project. Monitors are received but we need to decide where and when we our put them out on the landscape. We only received 2 so you must move them around, but we have 9 weeks, so we can have up to 18 locations. We have April to figure it out, and then the monitors will be deployed April 29.

Tamie raised several questions about the projects to which we are committing too, when we as a board don't have any control over the people (our members) who might sign up to volunteer. Tamie raised the concern of overcommitting volunteers we do not have control over, ie. Using the phrase "We can lead them to water, but we cannot make them drink." She was also concerned about the grants being written committing us too many projects prior to board agreement. Barbara indicated we should not commit to a project unless we have the volunteers already committed. Betsy also supported the view that we need to know what we are committing to prior to authorizing a project. There was some suggestion that grant type projects are not necessarily what we need to be involved in.

Old/Pending Business

None

New Business

None

Announcements – none

Comments/Presentations none

Adjournment - The meeting was adjourned at 7:27 PM.