

TPE GOVERNANCE MODEL

Background

The Prairie Enthusiasts, Inc. (TPE) is a 501(c) non-profit organization with the following mission:

*We seek to ensure the perpetuation and recovery of prairie, oak savanna, and other associated ecosystems of the Upper Midwest through protection, management, restoration, and education.
In doing so, we strive to work openly and cooperatively with private landowners and other private and public conservation groups.*

There are several entities within the organization that perform the activities required to achieve the mission, and responsibilities are often shared across these entities. At the highest level, entities operate across the entire organization (Central) and within the geographically aligned chapters. While there is some additional structure within all entities, we recognize four primary entities: the Board of Directors, committees formed by the Board and Central volunteers, the Staff, and local Chapters. Below is a general description of these entities (More details are provided in the TPE Articles of Incorporation and TPE Bylaws), the activities of the organization and how the activities are divided between the entities.

Organizational Entities

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The TPE Board of Directors (hereafter referred to as the “Board”) generally oversee the affairs of the corporation. To do this, the Board approves policies developed by committees, approves budgets and assures financial soundness, reviews and approves major contracts and agreements, and generally assures activities in the organization fit the TPE mission. Members consist of volunteers from Illinois, Minnesota and Wisconsin, with a combination of chapter directors and at-large directors. The Board meets seven times each year, with additional email votes as needed.

COMMITTEES AND VOLUNTEERS (Central)

Committees are formed by the Board, to serve the Board. There are many standing committees, with the primary ones being: Land Protection Committee, Land Management Committee, Fundraising and Endowment Committee, Education/Outreach Committee, and Finance Committee. Committees are often given specific tasks from the Board, but operate under a more general charter to support the organization. Committees generally consist of Board members and chapter volunteers, with staff participation at nearly all meetings. In addition to committees, there are several volunteer positions that serve Central. Some examples are the volunteer webmaster for the TPE website and volunteer newsletter editor. These volunteers often receive guidance from committees and staff in performing their duties.

TPE STAFF (Central)

Currently, TPE staff includes an Executive Director (ED), a Communication Coordinator (CC), and an outside accountant. Duties of the ED and CC include those typically handled more formally in other organizations by staff positions that work specifically on duties associated with development, conservation, outreach, and land protection. TPE will consider additional staff as needs become apparent and funding allows the hiring of additional staff.

TPE CHAPTERS

TPE has eleven geographically-defined chapters across Illinois, Wisconsin and Minnesota. There are various structures utilized within chapters to complete our mission. Chapters have a variety of officers, such as Chair, Vice Chair, Treasurer, and Secretary. Chapters may form a chapter board for governing. Chapters may form committees to work on specific program area needs within their respective chapter. In total, the members within a chapter provide networking and programming at the grassroots level.

Organizational Activities

Given this complex structure of TPE, some guidance on how these different entities function to fulfill the TPE mission is advantageous. Specific activities have been identified that cover most TPE's core functions. The activities are grouped into three goal areas within the mission, with an additional two areas for activities required for a viable organization:

LAND PROTECTION

Land protection includes purchase or easements of lands as a land trust, and activities leading to acquisition and required after protection is attained. Formal or informal land management agreements may lead to land protection, but are not considered part of this component. Not all chapters are currently active in land protection.

LAND MANAGEMENT

Land management is the largest component within TPE, and all chapters are active in land management. Land management not only includes direct, on-the-ground activities (e.g., burning), but also activities that guide the management such as developing management plans and policies to assure management is conducted properly and safely. While management is primarily carried out by volunteers, TPE also hires contractors, which are often hired through grants.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Education and outreach is needed within the organization, as well as to persons outside of TPE and other organizations. Methods of disseminating information are varied, ranging from face-to-face communication to written and audiovisual materials designed specifically for a purpose. These activities can lead to more

successful land protection and land management. Additionally, a strong education and outreach component can indirectly lead to a more successful membership and fundraising component.

MEMBERSHIP AND FUNDRAISING

This component is essential to the viability of TPE. Membership growth assures a steady increase in potential volunteers to carry out the TPE mission. Membership growth also provides a strong source of funding for TPE, both through dues and donations. Other fundraising activities may target large donors outside the organization. Funding needs are related to land protection, land management, and education and outreach. Funds are needed for specific activities such as land purchase, purchase of management equipment, and production of educational materials. Funds are also needed for staff for activities performed centrally. Developing marketing materials is part of the strategy for both membership growth and fundraising.

FINANCES AND OPERATIONS

Activities related to finances and operations are not only in the best interest of the organization, but some of these activities are legally required (e.g, audits). Staff is primarily responsible for most activities in this component, with major oversight from the Board and the Finance Committee.

Division of activities between organizational entities

Across these five areas of activities, duties are shared in many cases, in other cases specific sub-duties are assigned, and in yet other cases the activity is led by a single entity. In general, as stated above, the Board of Directors oversees all affairs of the organization. However, clearly many duties fall under the umbrella of a larger organizational objective, and therefore entities (e.g., chapters) may perform some duties with little oversight from the Board.

The table that follows generally clarifies how these entities participate in a wide range of activities that are needed to meet our mission. The table is a matrix of entities (e.g. chapters) as columns and activities (e.g., controlled burning) grouped by areas (e.g. land management) as rows. The primary purpose of this document is to foster better communication and understanding across the various entities within TPE. These improved communications should lead to a more effective organization.

A second version of the same table has also been developed as a tool for budgeting and prioritizing the activities of TPE. In this version, the descriptions of the activities are replaced by symbols indicating the levels of money and time (both volunteer and staff) devoted to each activity by each organizational entity. Note that staff time requires money for support.

While the list of entities and activities is relatively static, the assignment of our financial and time resources is highly dynamic, and needs to reflect a healthy debate about the priorities of the organization and how to best carry out its mission. An example is provided (in a separate file), but the intent is that the Finance Committee and the Board use this as a tool to carry out that debate in a productive way on a regular basis.

TPE Governance Model - Responsibilities

	Chapters	Staff	Board Committees & Volunteers	Board
Land Protection				
Identify remnants & conservation opportunities	Primary responsibility	Support		
Develop landowner relationships	Primary responsibility	Support		
Conservation easements	Project initiation	Support & review ED signatory	LPC review & recommend	Initial & final approval
Strategy & development of proposal for purchase (by TPE or outside group)	Primary responsibility	Support	LPC support	
Project review & approval	Review & approval	Review	LPC review & recommend	Initial & final approval
Project funding	Fundraising campaign	Grant applications Fundraising support		Approval of grants >\$5k Approval of mortgage or debt
Project completion & closing	Support	Financial & legal documentation Legal ownership of property ED signatory	LPC review & support	Oversight responsibility
Easement monitoring	Primary responsibility (volunteer or contractor)	Maintain proper documentation	LPC oversight responsibility	Oversight responsibility
Land Management				
Identify opportunities	Primary responsibility			
Informal & formal management agreements	Primary responsibility	Review & approval (formal agreements)	LMC review & recommend (formal agreements)	Review & approval (formal agreements)
Management plans	Primary responsibility	Administrative support	LMC review & approve	Approve when required
Vegetation management (weeding, brush, etc.)	Primary responsibility	Tax & HR compliance for contractors		
Seed purchase, collection, processing & planting	Primary responsibility			
Buildings, signs, fencing, roads, etc.	Primary responsibility	Tax & HR compliance for contractors		
Burn plans & documentation	Primary responsibility	Administrative support	LMC review & approve	
Training & volunteer record-keeping	Responsible for providing training	Provide resources	LMC primary responsibility for program development	
Controlled burns	Primary responsibility	Tax & HR compliance for contractors		
Equipment purchase & maintenance	Primary responsibility	Maintain inventory		
Grants for management	Proposal writing	Write & sign proposals Manage funds, reporting		Approval of grants >\$5k
Volunteer recruitment & development	Primary responsibility	Volunteer coordinator (ESC experiment)	EOC committee oversight	
Contractors (all) & interns	Hiring & management	Oversight Payroll, worker's comp, 1099s, etc.		

	Chapters	Staff	Board Committees & Volunteers	Board
Education & Outreach				
TPE "branding message" & outreach strategy development		Development	EOC development & recommendation	Final approval
<i>Prairie Promoter</i>	Content	Content	Volunteer editor	
TPE website, social media, photo library	Chapter pages Content Chapter social media	Content Support for use of website tools	EOC oversight Volunteer webmaster	
Annual conference	Host chapter organization	Organization, support, registration		
Annual picnic	Host chapter organization			
Prairie Days	Develop & execute local programs	Promotion	EOC promotion	
Chapter meetings & educational programs	Primary responsibility	Support		
Field trips	Primary responsibility for organization	Field trip brochure Publicity		
Educational publications	Development & distribution		EOC development	
Public relations	Local implementation	Regional implementation		
Relationships with other conservation organizations	Local responsibility	Primary responsibility		
Membership & Fundraising				
Membership recruitment	Primary responsibility	Secondary responsibility	EOC oversight	
Website-based membership recruitment	Support	Primary responsibility (future)	Support	
New member welcome & engagement	Primary responsibility	Support (future)		
Membership tracking & renewal transactions	Information & contact support	Primary responsibility	Volunteer database manager	
TPE brochure & marketing materials		Oversight & production	EOC, FEC oversight	
Annual Appeal	Outreach letters	Organization & collection of funds	FEC oversight	
Major donors & bequests, Compass Club	Donor identification & relationships	ED primary responsibility	FEC oversight	Primary responsibility
TPE store	Prairie Bluff Parsnip Predator production	Primary responsibility	Volunteer shipment	
501(c)3 tax exempt status		Primary responsibility		Oversight

	Chapters	Staff	Board Committees & Volunteers	Board
Finances & Operations				
Maintain bank accounts	Some chapters (Prairie Smoke, NW Illinois)	Primary responsibility	Treasurer, FC oversight	
Expenditures & transactions	Proper procedures for expenditures	Primary responsibility	Treasurer, FC oversight	
Budgets	Annual chapter budgets	Preparation & review	Treasurer, FC preparation & review	Review & approval
Manage endowment & fund investments			FC primary responsibility	Oversight
Accounting & reporting	Review & oversight of chapter reports	Primary responsibility	Treasurer, FC review & oversight	Review & oversight
Annual audit		Primary responsibility	Treasurer, FC review & oversight	Approval
Insurance		Primary responsibility		Oversight
Staff supervision	Interns & part-time chapter staff	ED supervises other staff		Supervises ED
Formal policies & procedures		Review	Committees develop for specific areas	Approval
Maintain records & archives	Land management records	Primary responsibility		
Chapter start-up	Local assistance	Primary responsibility		Approval
Communications between chapters, staff, committees & Board	Primary responsibility	Primary responsibility	Primary responsibility	Primary responsibility
Resolution of issues between chapters & Central	Primary responsibility of chapters involved	Support		Primary responsibility
New Board member orientation		Primary responsibility		Primary responsibility
LTA accreditation		Primary responsibility	Committees for specific policy & procedure areas	Oversight responsibility