The Prairie Enthusiasts
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Board of Directors Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, March 31, 2026

Members Present: Jay Rutherford, Peter Fritz, Katie Hahn, Jerry Newman, Jon Rigden, Jim Rogala, Nancy Gloe, Peter Hartman, Addie Theis Paradis, Shawn Kadlec, Rich Henderson, Kay Wienke, and Cheri Salzberg.

Members Not Present: Greg Heberlein, Alice Mirk, Harvey Halvorsen, Gary Eldred

Staff Present: Jessica Bizub, Dan Carter, Mark Van Der Linden, Sarah Barron

Agenda

1. Call to Order/Roll Call
   Board President, Jim Rogala, calls the meeting to order.

2. Adopt Meeting Agenda
   Rich makes a motion to adopt the agenda. Peter Fritz seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

3. Approve Consent Agenda
   Peter Hartman asks a question about the Minnesota Driftless update of the bylaws. Jim contacted Steve Winter, who was going to talk to the Board about it. There weren't any major changes, mostly internal. It will be on the next agenda to get them approved and on the web.

   Peter Hartman makes a motion to approve the consent agenda. Jay seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

4. Treasurer's Report - Jay Rutherford
   A. ACTION ITEM: January 2026 Financial Reports – Dashboard and Details
      Jay reports, as Rob will be joining later.
      The screen shows the dashboard through the end of January.

      Unrestricted contributions were ahead of last year but way under budget. The budget for this last quarter was unrealistic. He says not to worry too much about the budget. It's just really not worth comparing it to. Lower grant revenue, but that is "revving up." Reid is doing great work in that area. Chapter Support was a little bit over budget. There are still some costs carrying through. The new budget will reflect a big difference in Chapter Support. Chapter Support did a great job looking at expenses for the next year and also expected contributions. Chapter budgets have been scrubbed well and are looking good for attainability in the next year. Personnel costs were under budget.

Cash use was driven by fees and services. Contract services were up quite a bit over the last year, and printing costs were up. Both of these issues will be addressed next year.

Budgeted revenues were aggressive and unlikely to happen this quarter. This year's revenues versus the previous year: Unrestricted contributions were up. Restricted contributions were up. Other unrestricted revenue includes releases from restrictions and a mix of things. Jessica clarifies. Unrestricted contributions are general donations. Other unrestricted revenue would include grants.

Kudos to the staff for holding things together through the end of the calendar year. Unrestricted contributions were up throughout the year, but the budget was quite a high target.

The cash analysis is critical for us to review. As of December 31st, the amount of cash was basically the same. The Unrestricted revenues are going down, and the restricted revenues are going up. This is causing problems with funding Chapter Support and their operations. If a Chapter has restricted funds, it's important that those funds are used according to the donor's wishes. It is important to also receive unrestricted funds. Otherwise, we can't run the organization with restricted funds unless they're restricted to funding staff.

It's highly likely we will have to use their line of credit to get through the low point in their cash this next fiscal year. If this trend were to continue, we basically are strangling ourselves of the ability to operate. Unrestricted funds are needed for the operation of the organization.

We are running below budget in terms of cash. There was a drop in January because the budgeted cash donations in the first quarter in January were nowhere near what was budgeted. The budget is not really helpful at this point in time.

Katie asks what the run rate is. Jay says the run rate is approximately $30,000 a month. We have 2 goals:

- Restore financial stability.
- Restore organizational stability.

After that, the goal is to have three to six months of cash in the bank to get through the yearly dip. The budget topics will be discussed later in the meeting.

The Board reviews the cash pages of the Financial Report. Under checking and the central checking show a $571,000 negative balance, which is the deficit built up over the last three years. There is $209,000 in total unrestricted funds. If every Chapter tried to spend what their accounts are showing, there would be no money. In reality, there's only $200,000 of cash left. Restricted funds are for the Chapters to use as per the donor's intention. Spending restricted funds will take pressure off of the unrestricted cash.

Rich makes a motion to accept the Treasurer's Report. Peter Hartman seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

5. President's Report - Jim Rogala
   Jim introduces Cheri Salzberg. Matt stepped down from leadership within the Prairie Sands Chapter. Cheri Salzberg is joining as a replacement. Cheri is catching up and has been provided with all the information.

   Jim gives the President's Report. There are subgroups that are working on things. The Governance Committee is working for the Board on various items, concentrating on succession planning, led by Kay. They are planning to meet next week again. Looking at position descriptions for officers and bylaws. The Finance Committee subgroup is looking at a way to address how to keep information available as to what unrestricted cash at the Chapter level has been over the years. They want to make sure that if the opportunity arises, they can make some amends for that. Scott Fulton is the driver. Jessica added a couple of slides to talk about this later.

   No questions or comments.

6. Acting Executive Director's Report – Jessica Bizub
   Jim announces Jessica being promoted to Executive Director. The decision was made at the executive committee level. Positive feedback was received.

   Jim asks for any questions about Jessica's report.

   Jon asks about membership numbers. One document stated 1853 current members and another stated 1636 donors. Sarah responds. The 1636 in the Member Trends Report excluded special members. The1853 is the current number of actual members. Members and donors are the same thing.

   Jon asks about the Prairie Promoter; 1130 people were receiving the Prairie Promoter without being members. Sarah responds. The Prairie Promoter was previously sent to 2,000-4,000 people as an educational piece. A mailing was sent to non-members who had not given in 13 months, including a letter stating it would be their last and a remit envelope. Current members received the standard Prairie Promoter without the letter. Jon asked if anyone responded. Sarah says they have had a couple donations come in from it.

   Jon asks about planned giving. There are 130 people that have indicated TPE in their will or trust. Is that growing and are we anticipating any amounts? Sarah says the 130 people have told TPE through email or on return envelopes that TPE is in their will. Reid and Jessica are following up with those 130 people to get a letter of intent form completed. The form will reveal how much they're looking to bequest and/or what they're looking to bequest. The letter of intent forms are being sent out in the April 8th newsletter to the 130 people. Reid and Jessica will follow up with phone calls, emails, or in-person visits.

Rich mentions a "legacy something" program from 20 years ago when people signed up. People got shirts that said, "legacy donor". Sarah says it's uncertain if those people are tracked in the new Boomerang system. There are migration files from the old database in the new one. If anyone knows someone who said a long time ago that TPE is in their will, connect with TPE to make sure they are tracked.

Jon says it would be good to know how much income can be expected from bequests over time. This would help with our budget. Jim says the budget does not include bequest income because it's unknown revenue. We don't want our expenses to exceed our revenue again.

No other questions or comments.

7. New Business

Land Management Committee

A. ACTION: Alexander Oak Savanna Management Plan 2026

Rich moves to approve the Alexander Management Plan. Peter Fritz seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

B. ACTION: Brokken Woods Management Plan 2026

Rich moves to approve the Brokken Woods Management Plan. Jay seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

C. ACTION: Iris Drive Management Plan 2026

Peter Fritz moves to approve the Iris Drive Management Plan. Rich seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

D. ACTION: Powell Prairie Management Plan 2026

Kay moves to approve the Powell Prairie Management Plan. Peter Fritz seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

Land Protection Committee

E. ACTION: Brokken Preliminary Project Proposal 2026 and Attachments

Rich moves to give preliminary approval on the Brokken Preliminary Project Proposal. Kay seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

F. ACTION: Powell Prairie Preliminary Project Proposal 2026

Jay moves to give preliminary approval to the Powell Prairie Preliminary Project Proposal. Peter Hartman seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

G. ACTION: Sue Steinmann Property Bequest LOI and Map

Mark presents. Sue Steinman is donating her land to TPE as a bequest. Sue worked with Reid to put together a letter of intent to donate her land to TPE. The project is next to the existing TPE property.

Rich adds that Sue and her deceased husband Bill have built this preserve over time, acquiring land. They've been working at The Prairie Enthusiasts for 20 years. They've been the main supporters of getting Rattlesnake Ridge in place. They have this large 50 some acre property with open black oak savannah barrens and ridges, oak woodlands and ridgetop prairies.

Rich says there is a management agreement already in place. The Board discusses procedures on accepting bequests. Properties need to be assessed before accepting all bequests.

Kay moves to accept the letter of intent for the Sue Steinman Property. Peter Hartman seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

General Board

H. ACTION: Employee Handbook Revision

Jessica presents.

The first item is to stop prorating PTO hours for full-time employees. Full-time employees would receive full PTO. PTO for part-time employees would still be prorated.

The second item is that employees can use PTO before it's accrued. Previously only employees in their first year could use PTO before it's accrued, with any negative balance deducted from their final paycheck if they leave before accruing it. This change extends that practice to employees for their full time with TPE.

Rich moves to accept the 2 changes to the Employee Handbook. Kay seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

I. ACTION: Proposed 2026-2029 Strategic Plan

Jessica presents. At the Board retreat, high-level priorities were identified: Organizational stability, financial strength, Growing membership and volunteer base, Increasing prescribed burn capacity, Increasing educational

offerings, continuing land protection. All fall in either foundational or mission based.
A meeting was held by Sarah, Mark, and Jessica to brainstorm and create objectives.

First Priority: Organizational Structures – Jessica reads through the plan

Questions and Concerns

Katie asks if 2029 is a realistic utopian date? Jessica says it's the difference between the ideal state and the 2029 state addresses this.

Katie asks if the objectives and activities are ranked by priority or sequential? Jessica says that the staff felt comfortable with these goals, which are considered reasonable. Jim adds that some objectives fall on the Board.

Jessica says that the intent is to make a public document to share with funders, donors, and Chapters. The content will remain consistent, but there may be some wordsmithing.

Second Priority: Become Financially Strong – Jessica reads through the plan

Questions and concerns

Katie asks what fee title for investment means. Jessica says fee title for investment means accepting a property with the intent to sell it, not for conservation purposes, but for investment purposes.

Rich asks about the "stewardship reserve funded". Jessica says it refers to the need to determine the funding required to steward properties over time, including land monitoring, monitoring endowments, and legal defense endowments. Currently, there isn't a concrete number, but the calculator could be used. Rich says the amount needed is expected to be large unless volunteers can significantly contribute.

Jon suggests providing a brief explanation to donors and others about past mistakes, how the organization got into its current position, and how future plans will prevent similar errors. The goal is to reassure those who are questioning what happened. There is concern that including this explanation in the strategic plan might dilute its value. Jim suggests addressing it in a separate document. The message needs to be communicated to others in the future. There is a Board agreement that this needs to be addressed.

Third Priority: Growing Membership and Volunteer Base – Jessica reads through the plan
No questions or concerns.

Fourth Priority: Mission Areas – Jessica reads through the plan

No questions or concerns.

Fifth Priority: Increase Educational Offerings – Jessica reads through the plan
No questions or concerns.

Sixth Priority: Improve Land Protection and Stewardship Program – Jessica reads through the plan
No questions or concerns.

Jessica reviews the One Year Plan with the Board.

Jessica asks Sarah and Mark how they feel at this time since this was 2 months ago. Sarah says she is feeling good about progress made in the last two months. Mark agrees. He says the Big Hill project needs immediate attention to ensure completion. He feels optimistic about completing three projects this year.

Jessica adds that the strategic plan addresses work that "we know needs to be done" and "we have wanted to do."
Jon says he has some concern about repeating past issues with Debra's strategy of hiring staff in anticipation of funding. He suggests ensuring funding is secured before hiring additional staff. Jessica says this could be added to the staffing plan.

Jay asks about staff morale. Jessica says that overall staff morale is really good. Positive interactions and collaboration among staff members are observed. Leadership staff is performing well, and there's a strong team in place. Sarah says her annual reviews indicated reduced stress and feeling more connected to the team. She adds that the end-of-year stress needs to be addressed with proactive planning. Kay says the staff often go for walks together at lunchtime, indicating a positive atmosphere.

Jessica says she feels stressed about the financial situation but is confident they can get through it, especially with everyone working together.

Shawn raises the issue of perceptions of Chapter Support among members and donors, particularly regarding overhead costs. He questions how the plan addresses improving the perception and understanding of Chapter Support and solidifying its importance to the organization. He wants to ensure Chapter Support is seen as a valued part of the organization, not the enemy.

Jim says that part of the issue was the idea that Chapter Support is not needed. He says that the organization is at the point where they realize that they need support services centrally. Jessica and Jim will have meetings with each Chapter to discuss this. Jessica says that they are starting a few things to help with this. There is an internal newsletter for Chapter leaders to keep them informed about Chapter Support activities. She encourages Chapter

leaders to share the newsletter with their Chapters. She is resending the video describing Chapter Support staff roles with the next internal newsletter. There are informational newsletters included in mailings to keep everyone updated on what's happening at The Prairie Enthusiasts. The capacity building campaign will emphasize building capacity for operations and stewarding/protecting sites.
Jon asks who the capacity building campaign is focused on. He says the capacity building campaign should focus on individuals or corporations that will give large donations and bequests. We need memberships and small donors but focus on big dollars for actual finances.
Jessica and Reid are doing donor visits with major donors to support relationships. The quiet phase of the campaign involves working with major donors and getting funds before public announcements. Next year is TPE's 40th anniversary, which would be a great time to launch a public capacity building campaign.
Rich says there are sleeper members who have given modestly for years and then make one big donation. We need to keep reaching everyone because there are people capable of making big donations.

Jessica asks for a gut check on the strategic plan to see if it's something the organization can rally around.
Peter Fritz likes that the staff feels there's good alignment with the practical needs of the organization. The language in the strategic plan gives reassurance that the organization is on a path of reality. Rich agrees.
Nancy says the strategic plan looks great, but there's a lot in it, and it may feel overwhelming. Jessica says the bullet points could be better organized and tweaked before being shared publicly. Nancy says highlighting could make it easier to process.

Kay adds that it's important to recognize that implementing the strategic plan is a collective effort, not solely the responsibility of Chapter Support. Individuals should identify areas where their skills can contribute to the strategic plan's success and take action. Task forces are working on updating policies and procedures, and others can contribute in various ways. We need to think that it’s all of our responsibility to make this happen.

Kay makes a motion to approve the strategic plan. Peter Hartman seconds the motion.

Discussion
Nancy suggests including flexibility in the strategic plan for potential resource shifts to align with the collaborative's efforts.

Jon requests to add a bullet point to item number two, emphasizing the Board's commitment to support fundraising, both personally and by cultivating donors. Jessica makes a note.

Dan responds to Nancy and says he doesn't see any tension between the collaborative and TPE's efforts. He sees the collaborative as an opportunity to influence other organizations and improve coordination. Jim believes this aligns with TPE's mission statement and core values.

All in favor. The motion to approve the strategic plan with slight tweaks carries.

J. INFORMATION: Introduction to Fundraising
Sarah reviews the Fundraising Introduction with the Board.
Fundraising involves more than just asking for money; it includes networking, encouraging people to join the organization/Board, thanking donors, and planning/leading donor events. A donor needs to learn about the mission and needs, be convinced to support, be thanked, see how their gift makes a difference, and be asked to renew/increase support. Chapter level initiatives helpful for fundraising include appeals and overall fundraising strategy (meeting with donors). Tabling and Prairie Tours can be fundraising options for Chapters. Prairie Tours show the impact of gifts and bring in new members.

Board members can participate in Chapter leader initiatives. A document from the Board retreat follow-up outlines levels of responsibility for the organization, as presented by an LTA rally consultant.

There are three roles at the Board/Chapter leader level: Advocate: Storyteller for the organization, talking enthusiastically about the mission, Ambassador: Organizes events geared for donors and potential donors, Asker: Asks prospective/current members for donations, event attendance, Board membership, etc.

The goal is for Board members to consider which fundraising role they're most interested in. Chapter Support is creating materials and can provide training.

A fundraising menu (appetizer, entree, dessert options) from LTA rally provides a list of fundraising activities. Chapter Support can help with these activities. Board members should reconnect to discuss how they can contribute to the fundraising strategy.

Sarah will deliver the presentation and include it in the follow-up. A document explaining fundraising rules has already been provided. It would be helpful to know the fundraising rules and menu choices from the Board.

Finance Committee

L. ACTION: Proposed FY26-27 Budget with Narrative
Jessica will run through the slides, skipping some previously seen content. Rob will walk through the budget details.

Jessica reviews the slides. Current staffing is at seven people plus a contract accountant, ideally it should be at 13. We are looking to hire someone part-time to help in operations to alleviate pressure on Sylvie, Mark, and Jessica. There is a heavy workload due to insurance, property taxes, and audits, especially at the end of the fiscal year.

Comparison with Other Land Trusts and their staff numbers.
Rich gives an editorial note: Southern Wisconsin Bird Alliance if sharing.
Jessica notes.

Expenses have increased, while unrestricted cash on hand has decreased. Restricted cash on hand has remained steady or grown. For the next fiscal year, the budget includes just over $1 million in income and just under $1 million in Chapter Support expenses.

Unrestricted revenue is trending upward. Restricted revenue is also increasing and becoming a larger share of the total. Total gifts and donors are on a positive trend, but not at the budgeted level of previous years.

Budget Goals for 2026-2027
A small deficit is anticipated organization-wide, which could be mitigated by releases from restriction and accelerated fundraising. We continue building fundraising efforts to grow revenue, with an emphasis on unrestricted revenue. We need to maintain Chapter Support operations and services without cutting vital services.

Budget Highlights: Revenue projections are more conservative, with no high-risk income included. Flat unrestricted donations are projected this year, which is the largest source of revenue. There is 27% of unrestricted donation revenue in the budget is at medium risk. The Chapter Support expense budget was cut by 16% overall, projecting a small surplus. Personnel expenses are down from $823,405 to $640,460. Savings include no-cost professional development, delayed software purchases, and reduced travel. The Chapter Support budget is significantly challenged by increasing costs of services (insurance, memberships, software, legal, and accounting). The Chapters have projected an 8% increase in costs. Approximately $400,000 in unreleased restricted funds will remain at the end of the next fiscal year. Chapter Support will continue seeking cost-saving opportunities.

The next fiscal year will be tight for managing unrestricted cash due to infrastructure investments. Organization-wide expenses like insurance continue to increase, pressuring cash. We are considering reporting year-to-date against budgets to Chapters in monthly reports and not including unrestricted cash in those reports. A realistic budget, expense cuts, a capacity-building campaign, and encouraging early donations are in place to manage cash on hand.
We aim to build up to three months of cash on hand at all times. Restricted funds are available to support land management and Chapters, as are grants. We're going to submit about 40 grants this year, and that's versus about 10 in previous years. Everyone's help is needed to manage cash flow

this year. Jessica asks everyone to alert Chapter Support before any major expenses or purchases.

Jessica quickly reviews the budget items that have been previously reviewed with the Board.

Questions and Comments

Nancy asks about the conference attendance. Jessica says conference attendance was good this year. Jim says the conference made money, around $30,000 - $35,000.

Katie asked about the monthly run rate, and Jay thought it was about $30,000 a month in cash use. Rob clarifies projections from April 1st to the lowest cash level in October/November: Cash potentially goes from $100,000 to -$160,000. There is a fluctuation of $260,000 over six months. It is approximately $40,000 per month.
Jon says that if total expenses for 26/27 in the budget are $985,000, that is about $80,000 per month. Rob says the $40,000 figure represents how the cash is being used during the first part of the year before the influx at the end. The overall spending is just under $85,000 a month over the course of the year. Jay says income offsets some of the spending. Rob says the negative impact on cash is about $40,000 monthly between now and October/November before year-end giving.

Budget Overview – Rob reviews
Just under 1.7 million in total expenses for 26/27.
Budgeting fewer expenses organization wide but increasing expenditures on Land Management.
About $85,000 of cash per month is being spent. Of the $1,681,000 of expenses, $675,000 is being released from restrictions and grant funding. Net of that is just over a million dollars. That is where you get the $85,000 per month.

Contributions at $675,000 are even with this year, maybe a little down. Significantly down from last year's high-risk revenues that never materialized.

Kay asks if we're continuing to have a deficit. How are we ever going to make up the money that we are already in the hole? She assumes that increased fundraising could offset the deficit for the coming year, but that doesn't address the past deficit.
Rob says the budget shows a $42,000 negative, but there are opportunities to balance it. Increase unrestricted contributions. Activities being funded by restricted donations to tap into the $400,000 expected in restricted funds by the end of the next fiscal year. The Goal: At least have a balanced budget. Stabilize this year with the potential to eat away at some of those deficits, then start building cash on hand amounts.

Jon asks about the current checking account balance. At the end of January 31, it was $209,000. He has concerns about needing to use the Operations Endowment fund ($50,000) or the line of credit. Rob says unrestricted cash was projected to be around $100,000 by the end of the fiscal year, but this has not been achieved yet. The organization has a roughly $40,000 a month burn rate, potentially leading to zero unrestricted cash by July or August. There is a need to accelerate fundraising efforts to avoid a crisis point.

Jon says the Chapters should not use the money currently available, as it could lead to dipping into interest-bearing accounts.

Jessica says this is why we are looking at reporting against the budget is more useful than reporting unrestricted cash on hand. Rob says we will monitor budget usage and estimate budget throughout the year. Chapters will be warned if they are exceeding projected spending amounts. Cash flow will be monitored more tightly on a monthly basis at both Chapter Support and Chapter levels.

Jessica says it has been difficult to get the organization "rowing in the same direction." The Board needs to carry a message about managing cash to the Chapters.
Rich asks about Chapter submitted budgets. The Chapters need to know that that is their budget. Rich uses job codes to track spending, which helps them stay on budget. There is further discussion. No other Chapter is like Rich's Chapter.

Jessica says the budget is conservative and based on reliable revenue projections, even without increased fundraising efforts. The current budget may appear worse on paper than it will be in reality. The organization aims to avoid past issues of high revenue projections leading to overspending and depletion of unrestricted cash. Jay says he feels more comfortable with this budget compared to previous ones. Chapters need to adhere to their budgets and consult with Chapter Support before making significant purchases. The organization might need to use the line of credit, but sticking to the budget will lead to financial stabilization. The organization is stabilizing organizationally and continuing its work through restricted funds. He says addressing past differences in the funding model is important for moving forward together. It will take years to erase the deficit unless a major donation is received.
Stabilizing this year and building a cash reserve are the immediate goals. We're all in this together and we all need to be pulling in the same direction, or it is not going to work. Kay says we need to be encouraging people to become monthly donors as this helps with cash flow because it provides a regular, dependable income. Sarah says the newsletter is expected to go out in mid-to- late April and will include a call for monthly supporters.

Jon says the graph shows an increase in total gifts and donors year over year, except for one year (2023). The expenses are leveling off, with conservative projections for slight increases, avoiding past budget projections.

Shawn asks how the Chapter's hands are tied, specifically regarding potential surpluses from revenue generated through prescribed burns. The Chapter started the year with minimal cash and a $15,000 loan for equipment, projecting $20,000 in revenue for the spring burns. Jim says if a Chapter wants to buy additional equipment, options include budgeting it in advance or securing funding through grants. Restricted funds can be spent, but the issue is the low unrestricted cash on hand. Jessica says Chapters should focus on spending their budget for the current year. The goal is to move away from Chapters simply spending whatever unrestricted funds they have available.

There is more discussion regarding Chapter specific budgets.
There may be nuances regarding spending additional unrestricted funds brought in by a Chapter. A $10,000 overage requires review by the finance committee to determine the source of funds. Grants are another funding mechanism.

Rich asks about Land Management expenses. Rob says all wages are in the salary and benefits line. The Land Management line refers to direct land management expenses, excluding personnel costs. Rich says the actual spending on land management is higher than what the budget document shows. Rob says the budget doesn't break down expenses by function very well, but this is presented in the 990 and audit.

Rich makes a motion to approve the budget. Peter Fritz seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries.

Kay makes a motion to adjourn the meeting. Jay seconds the motion. All in favor. Motion carries. Jim adjourns meeting at 9:15pm.