**Winter EXCOM Business Meeting**

**December 18, 2023 (11:00 am – 2:00 pm)**

**The Brick House Grill**

**801 Central Ave. #24**

**Hot Springs National Park**

President Brie Lusk welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. Brie introduced Erin Thayer, the new Chair of the Environmental Affairs Committee. Others in attendance were Allison Asher**,** Dylan Hann, Kyler Hecke, Sean Lusk, Josh Melton, Jacob Martin, Katie Thomsen, and Tyler Thomsen.

**Officer Reports**

*Secretary’s Report – Allison Asher*

Allison reported that the minutes from the previous meeting were edited by EXCOM and are available online. Tyler motioned to approve the minutes and Sean seconded the motion. Allison provided an update on the Natural State Fisheries Scholarship process. Recipients were notified on December 20, 2023. Allison stated that there was an applicant from University of Arkansas and that the subunit might have new momentum to be more involved with AR AFS. Jacob expressed that seminar attendance was good when he was a student at University of Arkansas and having an AR AFS representative as a guest speaker might boost involvement. The group decided to ask Chelsea to reach out to applicants and other students there to see how EXCOM could support the subunit’s involvement. Additionally, EXCOM could offer to speak to other AFS subunits to boost AFS involvement.

*Treasurer’s Report – Sean Lusk*

Sean reported the scholarship account is growing and has already gained another $500 since a withdraw of $500 earlier in the year to fund this year’s scholarship. To increase the scholarship fund further, the group agreed on a raffle specifically for the scholarship fund. Debits to the account since the last meeting include the cost of lodging and mileage for the instructors of the plant workshop and a $500 donation to the Tennessee Chapter of AFS for seed money for the annual meeting of the Southern Division of AFS. Dylan motioned to approve the treasurer’s report and Tyler seconded the motion.

**ARAFS – 2023 EXCOM Treasurer’s Report**

**Covering 9/1/23 – 12/16/23**

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| --- | --- |
| **Balance Brought Forward (9/1/2023):** | **$13,411.56.05** |
|   |   |
| **INCOME** |  |
| Interest | $15.00 |
| Investment (Scholarship account) | $500.00 |
| Payout | $10.00 |
| **Total Income** | **$525.00** |
| **SUBTOTAL** | **$13,132.25** |
|   |   |
| **DISBURSEMENTS** |   |
| Checks | $709.26 |
| Fees | $23.97 |
| EXCOM Meeting | $96.28 |
| Tennessee Chapter AFS Donation | $500.00 |
| **Total Disbursements** | **$1,329.51** |
| **Balance as of September 1, 2023:** | **$12,607.05** |
|  |  |
| **Investment Account Balance as of December 16, 2023** | **$10,567.55** |
|  |  |

**Appointed Officer Reports**

*Newsletter – Katie Thomsen*

The fall/winter newsletter was emailed to members in early December. Katie is looking into new software to create the newsletters. Additionally, going forward, the newsletter editor will be responsible for emailing the newsletter to members.

*Webmaster – Tyler Thomsen*

Tyler posted the newsletter on the Chapter’s website. Tyler will create a section/tab on the website to house historical documents like meeting programs, minutes, treasurer’s reports, etc. Documents from the last ten years will be available to the public.

**Committee Reports**

*Nominating and Awards Committee – Christy Graham*

Christy sent a report via email. She reported that she received submissions for the Joe Hogan and Robert M Jenkins awards. She reported that she received one nomination for Secretary, but none for President-elect or subunit of the year. She is also working to develop an electronic form for judging talks and posters at the Chapter meeting this year.

*Activities and Raffle Committee – Jacob Martin and Josh Melton*

Jacob reported that Katie Thomsen was the first contestant to post a photo for the virtual fishing challenge. The challenge is hosted on Facebook (#arafsfishingchallenge2024). EXCOM challenged each other to go fishing soon and post a photo of their catch for the virtual fishing challenge. Josh reported that he will update the excel list for donations and share that file and the donation form with the group. He is also working on beverage donations for the banquet. The group discussed items for the raffle, such as a grill and kayak. Jacob asked if the Chapter could raffle a gun and Josh expressed that a photo could be used as a placeholder and that the winner could pick up the gun directly from the donating business. This would remove the burden of securing a firearm at the meeting. Josh said he would look into getting a gun or bow donated. The group also discussed using photos for all silent auction items, but there was concern if photos would generate as much interest as the actual items being displayed. The idea of a mystery item for a raffle was discussed as well. The group also discussed the scholarship raffle and decided on a deck of cards game with a 50/50 split between the winner and the scholarship fund. Another item discussed for the raffle or auction was SCUBA certification and Dylan is going to ask a local scuba instructor to donate classes. Lastly, Josh announced that he will be resigning as the raffle/silent auction coordinator and thus another volunteer will need to be identified soon so he or she can help with the raffle at the upcoming meeting to learn how to collect donations and process payments for items.

*Environmental Affairs Committee – Dr. Erin Thayer*

Erin asked about the structure and responsibilities of the committee. Brie responded that the chair develops position statements representing the Chapter's opinions, recommendations, and advice regarding environmental issues of concern to the Chapter. Brie also described the boom or bust nature of the role since most of the committee’s activities are in response to legislative sessions and activities.

*Education Liaison Committee – Chelsea Gilliland and Will Lancett*

Chelsea reported that many of the student subunits have seen tremendous growth. This is the first year since Chelsea has been serving as the Student Liaison that all five subunits (ATU, UAPB, UCA, ASU; and U of A) have submitted updated officer contact information and seem to have great student engagement during the fall semester. The ASU subunit is officially reactivated by forming a joint society with their wildlife counterpart. This is great news! Chelsea has continued to send out scholarship, internship, and job opportunities. These seem to be well-received by several members and she has been encouraged to continue forwarding to the groups. In November, Chelsea delivered two in-person presentations to Arkansas Tech and the University of Arkansas Pine Bluff sub-units. Topics covered included a roadmap to becoming an early-career professional, general structuring of the AGFC Fisheries Division, and a few on-going projects. This was a great opportunity to directly connect with those two student groups and plug the importance of engagement with AFS at multiple levels. During the presentation at ATU, Chelsea offered the opportunity for students to volunteer with AGFC’s mark-recapture study on Paddlefish in the Arkansas River near Fort Smith, AR and in December, four students volunteered on the project. Feedback from students was highly positive! Chelsea hopes to continue this sort of engagement with student groups that are local to projects. The group discussed a student workshop for the annual meeting and having a mentor lunch with a 1:1 student to mentor ratio. EXCOM decided to poll students and ask if they would prefer to continue the current lunch workshop structure or move to one to one student/mentor lunches. Lastly, EXCOM will also ask Chelsea to create a nomination form for outstanding subunit members.

**Student Subunit Reports -** No reports

**New Business**

*2024 Chapter Meeting*

The contract with the Holiday Inn in Texarkana is secured and the cutoff date to reserve a room is Feb 9th. The reservation block is 50 rooms. The call for abstract and meeting info was sent out the week of Dec 18th. Registration will open with the call for abstracts. Abstract submission and the last day for early registration will be the same date as cutoff date for hotel reservations, Feb 9th. It was previously requested by a member to establish a retirement registration fee. The rate for retired members will be half the difference between the student and regular registration fee ($75). Additionally, the groups discussed late and onsite registration. It is difficult to plan for meals and space when numerous additions are needed due to late and onsite registration. To encourage early registration, late and onsite registration rates will be 1.5 and double the early registration fee, respectively. Early registration fee is $100, while late registration will be $150 and onsite registration will be $200. The student registration fee is $50 and late and onsite registration for students will be $75. Brie clarified that registrants need to be asked if they plan to attend the banquet when registering for the meeting. The group discussed various ways to create a fillable form for abstract submissions and it was decided to use a Google form for abstract submission. Lastly, a corn hole tournament is planned and members will be asked to bring boards for the event. Alternatively, it was suggested that the Chapter purchase a set of boards for the tournament and then raffle them after the tournament.