SCP Annual Meeting, March 11, 2024, 7 pm via zoom

Meeting Minutes

Attending: José Maroquin presiding Board Members: Gina Auel, Marcia Carlson, Jane Furchgott, Linda Gentes, Stein Goering, Marilyn Rinehart, Linda Stadler, Aaron Wunnicke.

Guests: Alma Susana Chavez, Tom Jackson, Maria Vento, Dennis and Betty Keeney.

Welcome and Introductions - José Maroquin, President

Approval of minutes from 2023 Annual meeting - Marilyn Rinehart, Secretary - Referred to website. Stein moved, Jane seconded to approve. Motion carried.

Treasurer’s Annual Report - Stein Goering, Treasurer - Total Income: $73,463.60 ($51,072 in donations and $20,000 in grants) Total Expenses: $92,118.43 (mainly projects and coordinator salary) Moved from Long Term Savings: $18,655. Net Assets: $106,439 96.8% of total expenses go toward our work in Nicaragua. Marcia moved, Linda G. seconded, to approve. Motion carried.

Annual Report on Conditions in Nicaragua - José Marroquin  - Poverty persists due to food insecurity, weather patterns, and political turmoil. 25% of the population live on $3.65/day. Approximately 300,000 people emigrate each year, mostly to Costa Rica and US.  The economic outlook is improving, but political unrest persists since the uprising in 2018. In 2023 government censorship continued related to NGOs, Catholic clergy, university students and staff, and citizens.

Committee Reports

Health - Linda Stadler  - Many accomplishments in the health field for this past year, including: 35 Latrines, 10 Wells that serve 20 families, $900 of medicine donated per request of the local MD, 40 H2O filters, 29 Rope pumps for wells, 16 Well covers, $500 donated for dental supplies, Healthcare team for the rural clinic receives a monthly stipend for visits to the villages, H2O projects for 3 schools, Education for the Health Promoters from the villages, A project in one additional village named El Quinal for 22 latrines, and a project in La Pitilla for a community well that serves 120 families.

Education - Marilyn Rinehart  -   Approximately 200 grade school students received notebooks, pencils, colors and protractors, plus food for afternoon snacks which is prepared by the parents in each community. Transporting these supplies has become more expensive. We had 54 scholarship students at the high school level last year. The norm is changing from just completing sixth grade to completing high school and beyond. There were also 8 post- secondary scholarship students last year. We are pleased to see that some of these young people are returning to their villages to work in construction, healthcare, businesses, and schools. We are grateful to Bader Philanthropies for the 2023 grant that supported education via scholarships, school supplies, and art supplies. Their support has been increased for 2024. Also we are grateful to Laurel Lee for working with Alma to deliver art supplies to the schools and to connect children in Nicaragua with the Forest School at the Kickapoo Reserve.

 Agriculture - Aaron Wunnicke -   Early in the year, community meetings are organized to assess the needs and wishes of farmers. Provision of supplies and materials is appreciated and more help is always welcome. There was noted interest among some of the farmers in reforestation incentives, particular for marginal areas or fields with exhausted fertility. Mango trees were provided to plant in fields and patio gardens in the community of Escalante. Reforestation projects took place in La Chota, Terrero, Poma y Escalante. 260 producers are seeking assistance for 2024.

The year began with concerns of drought. The first harvest (primera) report noted a good yield of beans in Papalon and some decent corn harvests but overall production was diminished due to lack of rain. Going into the second season (postura) concerns of drought remained and reforestation efforts were delayed due to conditions of low soil moisture. Fortunately they received timely rain for plantings of basic grains along with some sesame.

 Environment - Jane Furchgott -  SCP funded field supplies for the community rangers working for MARENA (Nicaragua’s DNR) at the main olive ridley sea turtle nesting beach, such as rain ponchos, backpacks. field clipboards, and flashlight batteries. The rangers, with the Nicaragua army and the police, did a good job protecting and taking data on the turtles during the arribadas. Our scholarship students helped clean the beach to remove obstacles to the nesting turtles.

In the 2022-3 season, the Sister City Project helped fund the community rangers at the FFI leatherback hatchery, where four nests of this critically endangered sea turtle were protected.

The Sister City Project did not directly help FFI in the current season. Instead, because of FFI cutbacks, we used our funds separately to support these local men with sufficient food.

Throughout the year, Alma Susana gave environmental classes in the Chacocente schools, focusing on sea turtles, migratory birds, and the forest itself, sometimes with MARENA rangers’ collaboration. The schoolchildren were able to visit the MARENA outpost at the *arribada* beach and helped release the baby olive ridley turtles raised in its educational hatchery. One focus of environmental classes was how some of our food habits are detrimental to the environment.

The MoSI station was active, with five “pulses” in the year, monitoring and banding migratory and resident birds. The SCP had good coordination with MARENA, which gave us a permit focused on training the local villagers to do the monitoring and increase their bird knowledge for purposes of conservation and future tourism income. A local woman is now part of the MoSI team, and two teenagers are also apprentices. A wood thrush t-shirt is now the team uniform. Members of the MoSI team lead in bird walks for the schools.

Women Entrepreneurs - Jane Furchgott- In 2023 we continued our women’s entrepreneurial grant program with the Chacocente community of La Poma. Each of the 12 women applicants received about $420 in cash. These women are all doing well with new or expanded businesses: 3 raising or butchering hogs, 1 raising chickens, 3 bakers, 2 fast food providers, a small grocery store, a fish seller and one woman selling nightwear. 90% of the women in the 3 previous grant villages are continuing with their businesses.

Outreach Activities - In February Laurel taught art classes focused on migratory birds and Nicaragua at the Forest School. Linda Stadler and Jane gave a presentation to Hillsboro high school students. Barb Duerksen was the head of our team to raise money for bird projects in the NRCS  Great Wisconsin Birdathon, and let people know about  the SCP. Sloppy joe and Ice Cream event in July replaced our Burrito Supper, with Jane Furchgott and Marcia Carlson promoting the event and SCP on WRCO. I

Nominations and election for new board members and officers - Jane nominated José Maroquin, President; Marcia Carlson, Vice President; Marilyn Rinehart, Secretary; Stein Goering, Treasurer

Members: Gina Auel, Jane Furchgott, Linda Gentes, Linda Stadler, Aaron Wunnicke. Laurel Lee has decided to step down from the board, but she will continue to work on a pen pal exchange and will have an art show in April about this work.

Adjourned at 8 p.m.

Zoom with Alma and Social time followed.