

Minutes of Grasslands Naturalists Strategic Planning Special Board Meeting

Date: 24 July 2023, 11:00 AM
Police Point Park Nature Centre

Board Attendees: Hugh Armstrong, Linda Fisher, Phil Horch, Martha Maudsley, Sheila McLeod, Paul Thibault (Chair), Angela Turner, and Ian Turner
Guest: Corlaine Gardner

1. Call to order

2. Review the strategic planning process

The previous meeting focused on the Vision and Mission Statements, and the Mandate. This meeting fine-tuned the Vision Statement and entered the Strategy phase of the Strategic Plan.

3. Fine-tune GN's Vision Statement

After comments from GN members at the May General Meeting, the Vision Statement was improved as follows:

'The Society of Grasslands Naturalists is a key organization for nature lovers and a leading voice for nature in Southeastern Alberta'

4. Review MHIP preliminary Strategic Plan

The Chief Interpreter, Alicia Lew, provided an initial strategic plan for MHIP, which was well-received by the Board Members. It included a 'SWOT' table describing MHIP's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats. This inspired the Board to use a similar approach for GN's overall strategic plan.

5. Assess GN's Strengths and Weaknesses

The Strengths and Weaknesses were assessed as follows:

Strengths

- Strong Board. We have a group of committed and loyal board members who support the idea and reality of our Club.
- Excellent management of the Medicine Hat Interpretive Program
- Knowledgeable and interested members are active in the community. We have natural history expertise & commitment among members, as well as community reputation and respect.
- Through the website, we are highly transparent to the members and general public.
- Members like to meet for socializing and for interesting programs.
- Committee structure is outlined.
- Strong programming and field trips.

Weaknesses

- Aging membership.
- Reluctance to assume leadership positions, particularly the presidency.
- Perception among club members is that a position on the board is scary, or that they aren't knowledgeable enough to be part of it.
- Unfilled positions (e.g. Issues Committee Chair). Committees tend to be established with set membership and have not recruited new participants.
- Potential members may think that they have to be an expert to join.
- Our general meetings are often too busy, and it is difficult to wrap up and move to the program without feeling rushed. This can give the guest speaker a feeling of being less important and crowded into the evening.
- We don't always have clearly defined spokespersons on different issues or even a definite position.

6. Assess GN's Opportunities and Threats

The following opportunities and threats were identified:

Opportunities

- More open and straightforward communication about the actual duties of board members may help. More encouragement for members to get involved in the committees might help the committees and the board. Board members can learn to delegate and share responsibility!
- Take advantage of the variety of interests within the club to involve more of our members.
- Seek more opportunities to expand beyond the Medicine Hat area.
- Learn to project a welcoming attitude towards potential members or existing members who feel intimidated by the "experts"!
- General meetings may need a very strict agenda. Ideas included - strict time limits for all reports; not having reports from everyone at every meeting; selecting 1 or 2 topics for discussion involving the members.
- Committees are a great way to include members who are not already heavily involved. Their new ideas and assistance can breathe new life into our whole organization! We need to promote the information that helping out with committees would be a valuable contribution to the club.
- We appreciate and respect a variety of experiences and opinions. We do not wish to "gag" our members. We shall encourage people to express their personal opinions as individuals. We will encourage them to clearly state that they are not representing the club.

Threats

- Not being able to find a president in the future, which is a threat to both the Club and MHIP.
- Board members are overworked.

- There is some attitude that we are a bird-watching club and that only competitive experts belong.
- Members may not attend meetings if they feel that they have heard it all before or there is no real role in the club for them.
- Committee members may burn out if there is not increased and changing involvement from other members.
- Club members have varying opinions and may express them as if they represent the club. Sometimes other people may assume that any club member represents the club.
- Liability issues emerge when not following GN's Policies and Procedures.
- Rising insurance cost.

7. Review the status of each GN committee

The following questions were addressed

- Does the committee have a chair?
- Is the committee holding meetings?
- Do the meetings have minutes?
- Is the committee working as a team?
- Is it communicating with the Board and other relevant committees?
- Is it following the bylaws and relevant GN P&Ps as provided by the Governance Committee
- Is the committee submitting AGM reports?

8. Discuss the general health of GN committees and way ahead

Overall, the committees were functioning well except for the Issues Committee, which is fragmented and without a chair and the Communications Committee, which is productive in publishing the Chronicle, Website and Facebook page but needs to work more as a team to communicate more effectively with members and the general public.

9. Selection of next meeting date

The next meeting will be held at the Nature Centre on August 21^{rst} at 11:00 AM.

10. Adjourn