



## WMCN Board of Directors Meeting Minutes

**Date:** Monday, January 26, 2026

**Time:** 2:00–4:00 PM

**Location:** Virtual (Zoom)

**Board of Directors Present:** Ben Jordan, Murielle Garbarino, Jessie Schulte, Stephanie Dood, Katie McLaren, Emma Waatti, Sue Aagaard, Kelsey Bockelman, Kenny McMahan, Ginny Wanty, Matt Bain, Lea Sevigny

**Absent:** none

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### 1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 PM. Board members and partners were welcomed, and opening remarks were provided.

It was shared that Larry Burns has stepped down from the Board due to illness.

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### 2. Zoom Meeting Quick Recap (Executive Summary)

This West Michigan Conservation Network (WMCN) Board meeting focused on governance alignment, annual planning, and coordination between WMCN and the West Michigan Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA). Board members reviewed and clarified board expectations, including attendance requirements and participation in subcommittees, and agreed to refine language distinguishing *required* versus *encouraged* duties.

The Board discussed development of the annual report and agreed to divide responsibility among Board and committee leads, with Ginny Wanty leading website and partner metrics and other members contributing content related to their respective programs. Planning for the 2026 Annual Meeting advanced, including venue selection in downtown Grand Rapids, food and registration logistics, speaker contracts, and recognition of

founding partners—particularly the Stewardship Network and the Fry Foundation—as part of WMCN’s 20th anniversary.

Additional discussion addressed communications and social media management, with consensus that WMCN and CISMA may benefit from clearer separation of social media presence while continuing coordinated messaging through the monthly Mailchimp newsletter.

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### 3. Board Roundtable

Board members shared brief updates on current projects, emerging initiatives, and organizational needs across the Network. Updates reflected active work in invasive species management, watershed protection, education and outreach, seedling distribution, monitoring and restoration projects, and local and regional grant coordination.

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### 4. Invasive Species Policy & Letter Endorsement

The Board reviewed proposed additions to Michigan’s invasive plant species list.

- A formal support letter authored by Jessie Schulte was presented for Board consideration, representing WMCN’s 81 partner organizations.
- Board members discussed strengthening the letter by including a full list of partner names.

**Motion:** Approve and submit the WMCN Board letter in support of the proposed additions to Michigan’s invasive species list.

**Outcome:** Motion approved.

Partners were encouraged to submit individual comments to the State of Michigan to reinforce the Network’s collective support.

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### 5. Committee Reports

#### Habitat & Restoration Committee

**Leads:** Murielle Garbarino, Ben Jordan

- Provided CISMA grant updates, including pending Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) funding with an anticipated amount of approximately \$40,000 via an EGLE subaward.
  - Discussed continued pursuit of funding through the Grand Haven Area Community Foundation to support staffing.
  - Reported progress on recruiting CISMA Steering Committee members across counties.
  - Outlined winter planning activities and upcoming CISMA initiatives.
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## Learning & Engagement Committee

**Lead:** Lea Sevigny

- Previewed the 2026 WMCN program schedule.
- Encouraged Board members and partners to submit events for inclusion in the new unified monthly WMCN Mailchimp newsletter.
- Shared reflections on recent Learning & Engagement programming and upcoming partner-led trainings.

## Structure & Function Committee

**Lead:** Jessie Schulte

- Reviewed progress on updating the WMCN Strategic Plan.
- Provided an overview of preparations and draft schedule for the November 5, 2026 Annual Meeting.
- Reviewed current Board membership and committee roles.

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## 6. Governance Review & Board Expectations

The Board revisited governance decisions approved at the October 6 Steering Committee meeting, including:

- Transition of the WMCN Steering Committee to a formal Board of Directors model (7–15 voting members).
- Establishment of a standalone CISMA Steering Committee.
- Confirmation of Ottawa Conservation District as fiduciary for both WMCN and CISMA.
- Shared representation requirements between WMCN and CISMA leadership.

Attendance expectations were clarified and refined:

- Board members are expected to attend **at least three of four quarterly Board meetings** annually.
- Members are asked to notify the group in advance if unable to attend and to review meeting materials and minutes.
- Voting procedures were clarified, with decisions made by majority vote of members present and proxy input allowed when needed.

**Motion:** Adopt condensed governance amendments into the WMCN Strategic Plan to formalize Board structure, expectations, and decision-making processes.

**Outcome:** Motion approved.

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## 7. Board Appointment

The Board discussed and confirmed the nomination of Matt Bain (LGROW – Lower Grand River Association of Watersheds).

**Motion:** Accept Matt Bain as a voting member of the WMCN Board of Directors.

**Outcome:** Motion approved.

Matt Bain was formally welcomed to the Board.

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## 8. Annual Report & Annual Meeting Planning

- The Board agreed to divide annual report responsibilities among committee leads and Board members.
  - Metrics to be included will cover outreach events, acres treated, sites surveyed, partner participation, and website engagement.
  - A theme-based presentation format was approved for the Annual Meeting to allow efficient representation of multiple organizations.
  - Scholarship options for meal costs will be explored to ensure accessibility.
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## 9. Action Items & Next Steps

### Jessie Schulte

- Update Board commitment language to require attendance at 3 of 4 quarterly meetings and clearly separate expected versus encouraged duties.
- Update and circulate the revised Board Member Expectations document.
- Add a full list of partner names to the invasive species regulation support letter.
- Coordinate compilation of the annual report with committee leads.
- Send save-the-date notices and calendar invites for the Annual Meeting.
- Confirm whether the May 18 Board meeting will be hybrid (in-person/Zoom).
- Clarify or establish separate social media presence for WMCN versus CISMA and set a goal of posting the Mailchimp newsletter link at least once per month.

### Murielle Garbarino

- Resubmit the European Frogbit grant budget reduced to \$40,000.
- Continue forming the CISMA Steering Committee across counties.
- Draft CISMA bylaws and strategic plan.
- Share the Canva annual report template.
- Provide available strike team metrics for the annual report.

### Ginny Wanty

- Provide website analytics and partner event-posting metrics.
- Share GVSU menu options with the Annual Meeting Planning Committee.

### Annual Meeting Planning Committee

- Hold a virtual planning meeting on March 2 at 2:00 PM.
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- Finalize logistics, food options, registration fees, and scholarship availability.

### **Sue Aagaard**

- Contact new Board members to collect shirt size and badge name preferences.
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## **10. Upcoming Meetings**

- **All-Partner Virtual Meeting:** March 12, 2026 | 2:00 PM
  - **Board Meeting (In Person):** May 18, 2026 | 2:00–4:00 PM | Kent County Parks Administrative Building
  - **Additional 2026 Dates:**
    - September 21, 2026 – Q3 Board Meeting (Virtual)
    - November 5, 2026 – WMCN Annual Meeting & 20th Anniversary Celebration
    - December 7, 2026 – Q4 Board Meeting
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## **11. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 4:00 PM. The Board thanked members and partners for their continued leadership, collaboration, and commitment to stewardship across West Michigan.