

WMCN Q3 Board of Directors Meeting

Executive Minutes

Date: September 21, 2026

Time: 2:00 PM – 3:45 PM

Location: Zoom Virtual Meeting Open to All

Attendees (12): Jessie Schulte (Facilitator), Sue Aagaard, Kenneth McMahon, Ginny Wanty, Emma Waatti, Lea Sevigny, Kelsey Bockelman, Stephanie Dood, Murielle Garbarino, Katie McLaren, Matt Bain

Meeting Purpose

This board meeting was convened to confirm the network's goals and role following the separation of the CISMA, identify priorities for the upcoming year, and assign responsibilities for the November 5th annual meeting.

Summary

West Michigan Conservation Network Update

The meeting focused on confirming the West Michigan Conservation Network's role following the separation of the CISMA and identifying priorities for the upcoming year. Murielle provided a financial update, reporting a current balance of \$2,358.79, with recent deposits coming from various events and workshops. The group discussed donation methods, with Murielle suggesting that checks with clear memos would be more advantageous than online donations due to fees. They also touched on upcoming donations from organizations like Friends of Grand Rapids and the City of Grand Rapids' Bird City USA designation.

Catering Payment and Funding Updates

The group discussed payment logistics for catering at an upcoming event, with Schulte explaining that checks would be processed similar to previous events like Jesse Lincoln's, with invoices needed before the November board meeting on November 10th. Murielle requested that Jessie and Ginny copy her and Annalise on communications about financial matters to ensure better coordination. Murielle also provided updates on CISMA funding, noting that

MISGP funding for CISMAs was reduced from \$3.6 million to \$2.4 million, with individual CISMA requests now limited to \$20,000, and mentioned an ongoing EPA grant for cinnamon vine and stiltgrass work that is nearing completion.

Grant Updates and Conservation Planning

Murielle discussed her experience with a rejected Sustain Our Great Lakes grant pre-proposal and noted that future funding opportunities like MIHDP and Great Lakes Restoration Initiative CWMA grants might be available. Jessie presented updates to the Strategic Management Plan and outlined goals for the West Michigan Conservation Network, including the potential creation of a coordinator role and advocacy efforts. The group discussed the possibility of pushing the state to create a natural areas pesticide applicator category, with West seeking input on whether the West Michigan Conservation Network should support this initiative.

Natural Areas Pesticide Certification Proposal

The group discussed advocating for a new natural areas pesticide certification category in 2027. Schulte proposed writing a letter to MDARD supporting this addition, explaining that other states have similar specialized categories that better serve natural resource management work. Murielle suggested consulting with pesticide applicators or MDARD officials before proceeding, noting potential challenges with how trail systems and natural areas might fit within existing right-of-way categories. Lea expressed support for the initiative, though noted she lacked expertise to write the letter herself. Schulte was thinking this was in place of two categories instead of adding more categories to the current required testing.

CISMA Network Planning Discussion

Schulte discussed exploring opportunities for the West Michigan Conservation Network to complement the CISMA, particularly by advocating for underfunded regions and gathering partner feedback through small focus groups. Murielle planned to create an annual report for the CISMA that would highlight event numbers and participant data, while Schulte suggested leveraging partner volunteers for mapping and data collection to support future grants. The group reviewed a draft coordinator position description but did not complete its review in the transcript.

Regional Coordinator Position Proposal

Schulte presented a proposal for a WMCN regional coordinator position focused on habitat restoration, forest stewardship, and water protection, outlining key responsibilities including facilitating workshops, managing newsletters, and connecting with diverse stakeholders. The position would be part-time and could potentially be hosted by different conservation districts, with the possibility of working from home or shared office space. West sought feedback on whether Ottawa Conservation District would be interested in hosting the position, though Murielle indicated this would be a decision for the Ottawa Conservation District Board.

New Position Funding Discussion

The group discussed a new position and its funding structure, with West explaining they are seeking funding from a local non-profit donor first before finding the right person. Murielle raised questions about the long-term sustainability of the position and how it would be funded, while Stephanie highlighted important considerations around employment benefits and costs depending on whether it's hosted by the current district or another county. The team agreed to refine the position description and seek board approval at their December meeting, with Stephanie noting that having both funding and a position description would be the key next steps to move forward.

Coordinator Role Document Approval

The group reviewed and approved a coordinator role document with minor refinements needed, particularly regarding position descriptions and overlap between roles. Most participants provided feedback and confirmed approval, with Murielle raising concerns about the scope of responsibilities being too restrictive. The team discussed next steps for the position, including potential public posting requirements and timeline considerations, though specific details about the hiring process and funding were left undetermined. The conversation ended with planning for the November 5th annual meeting, confirming attendance and logistics, with participants needing to register and pay for the event.

Event Planning and Speaking Schedule

The meeting focused on planning an upcoming event with discussions about the agenda and speaking schedule. Schulte proposed adding Kenny to speak about wetland regulations and issues, which Kenny agreed to consider for a 10-minute presentation. The group also discussed coordination between presenters to avoid redundancy, particularly regarding invasive species topics where Murielle planned to collaborate with others on HWA and stiltgrass presentations.

CISMA Presentation Planning Meeting

The team discussed plans for an upcoming presentation, with Murielle agreeing to fill the full one-hour slot and present on CISMA projects. They decided to include recognition of strike team members through a slide showing crew locations across different districts, though they noted that Allegan's strike team operates differently as they don't receive CISMA funding. The group agreed to give each presenter, including Kelsey and potentially Matt, 10 minutes to ensure balanced time allocation.

Partnership Presentation Planning Meeting

The team discussed plans for a 10-minute presentation on partnerships focused on restoration, land stewardship, and invasive control within the West Michigan Conservation Network. Matt agreed to present on monitoring activities in the Lower Grand's three major sub-watersheds,

including new Flat River monitoring starting that year and Ottawa County's MICOR grant work. The group also discussed logistics around speaker compensation, with \$400 available from a donor and questions about covering presenter time through various grants and funding sources.

Event Logistics and Presentation Planning

The team discussed logistics for an upcoming event, including assigning roles for timekeeping and backup photography. Melanie was designated as the timekeeper, with Sue and Kelsey offering backup support. The group agreed to limit presentation times to 10 minutes per speaker to avoid the issues experienced in previous years, with Sue and Melanie tasked with enforcing time limits using visual cues. Lea requested a 10-minute slot to present future programming plans, which was scheduled for after lunch, and the team discussed the timing and structure of various presentations throughout the day.

Event Logistics and Coordination Planning

The team discussed logistics for an upcoming event, focusing on photo coordination and venue requirements. West and Ginny agreed that Kelsey would serve as the main host for photo coordination, with Jesse helping to announce breaks, and Patricia would scout the location based on weather conditions. The group also addressed confusion about water bottle policies at the Grand Valley venue, with Sue clarifying that water must be purchased from the caterer but leaving open the possibility of bringing empty containers to be filled there. Matt raised concerns about sustainability requirements at the venue, expressing frustration about waste restrictions while acknowledging the venue's free use.

Annual Meeting Logistics Planning

The team discussed logistics for an upcoming annual meeting, with Lea volunteering to help with registration and West agreeing to handle name tag printing using existing materials. They debated whether to provide pre-made name tags or ask attendees to bring their own, ultimately deciding on a stick-on label approach. The group also discussed potentially nominating someone from Allegan County to join the board, with Sue suggesting they should establish a formal process including interviews or questionnaires before making nominations.

Next Board Meeting is Dec 7th at 2pm 2026