



HIGHLANDS BIOLOGICAL FOUNDATION

Annual Membership Meeting Notes, June 24, 2026 at 3:00 PM

Sto Pavilion of the Highlands Biological Station

In attendance: Lindy Harrison, John Helmer, Kent Wittman, Tom Holmes, Gayle Watkins, Lisa Dailey, Joan Matthews, Gage LeQuire, Kathy Ward, Jason Love, Jimmy Bewley, David Martin, Martha Stibbs, Amy Patterson, Suzie Dickinson, Fred halback, Jonnie Swann, Matt McDonald, Jim Landon, Marissa Nieddu

Meeting called to order at 3:03 PM by Tom Holmes

President's Report (Tom Holmes)

Tom Holmes opened by thanking the Board of Trustees, members, Patron Party hosts Elizabeth and David Martin, and the Foundation's committee members and chairs for their ongoing support and service to the organization.

Tom reviewed HBF's financial standing, noting the organization holds \$3.66 million in invested funds that support operations, scholarships, research, and future growth. He explained that HBF follows a prudent spending policy, directing about \$103,500 annually toward its mission while preserving long-term investments.

Tom also shared that HBF's FY26 operating budget is approximately \$700,000, with the majority of funding coming from member giving and events, followed by programs, grants, and investment draws.

Strategic Planning (Gayle Watkins)

Gayle Watkins presented HBF's newly completed 2026–2028 Strategic Plan, highlighting the Foundation's vision of building a community that understands, values, and actively protects the biodiversity of the Southern Blue Ridge ecoregion.

She reviewed HBF's mission and core values, emphasizing nature education, scientific research, community connection, collaboration, and environmental stewardship as the foundation of the organization's work.

Gayle also outlined HBF's three-year strategic priorities, which include clarifying and communicating the Foundation's identity, strengthening organizational sustainability, expanding community presence and accessibility, and championing environmental stewardship across the Plateau.

Staff, Events, Programs & Research Support (Marissa Nieddu)

Marissa Nieddu provided updates on HBF staff, upcoming events, education programs, and research support. She welcomed back Education Specialist Alex Waite, who joined the team in January to lead camps and outreach, as well as the 2026 Summer Naturalists: Jonah, Zoe, Marlow, and Eliza.



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Marissa highlighted several upcoming dates, including the Summer Soirée on July 28 at Flat Mountain Farm, the Nature Center's temporary closure in August for repairs and renovations, and the return of Enchanted Forest in October.

She reviewed HBF's education programming, including summer camp, Nature Center Nights, Nature on the Go! outreach, Zahner Lectures, and daily Nature Center programs, noting that the Nature Center remains open Monday through Saturday throughout the summer with free admission.

Marissa also shared updates on HBF's continued support of scientific research, including six Grants-in-Aid, two research assistantships, MAPS Bird Banding, Macon STEM programming, the BatPack initiative, and ongoing operational support for Highlands Biological Station.

Highlands Biological Station Report (Jason Love - Associate Director)

Jason Love provided an update on Highlands Biological Station's operations, facilities, personnel, and research. He reported that the Station exceeded its revenue target for the year by approximately \$65,000, with summer field courses meeting or exceeding enrollment goals.

Jason shared updates on upcoming campus projects, including renovations to the Nature Center beginning in mid-August, infrastructure improvements such as a new generator and drainage work, and continued planning for the South Gateway Project. He also noted that early conversations are underway with Western Carolina University regarding a future dormitory to replace Valentine House.

He introduced seasonal personnel and highlighted ongoing research initiatives, including MAPS Bird Banding, Caterpillars Count!, Carolina's Butterfly Monitoring Program, and glow worm research. Jason also shared several recent and forthcoming research publications connected to the Station.

Additional updates included the launch of Science on the Rocks, a new public science discussion series held on Wednesdays at 4 p.m., planning for the Station's upcoming Centennial Celebration, and the recent discovery of a 467-year-old hemlock in Coker Forest.

Election of Trustees (Tom Holmes)

Tom acknowledged and thanked all the Board members rolling off in 2026: David Martin, Lisa Armstrong, Carol Stewart, Jennie Stowers, Alex Smith, Frank Langford

Tom called for a motion to approve 2nd term nominees - Lisa Dailey, Lindy Harrison, Jim Landon, Linda Barlow, which were unanimously elected. He called for a motion to approve newly appointed Board members - Pat Gleeson, Matt MacDonald, Gage Lequire, Kathy Ward, Fred Halback, and Joan Matthews which were also unanimously elected.

Adjournment 4:07 PM



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Summer Trustee Meeting, June 24, 2026 (directly following Annual Membership Mtg.)
Sto Pavilion of the Highlands Biological Station

Welcome New and Returning Trustees (Tom) 4:09 PM

Tom opened the meeting by making a motion to approve the meeting minutes from HBF's April Board meeting, motion granted - Jim Landon and Lisa Dailey with all in favor.

Election of Officers (Tom Holmes)

Tom Holmes announced the slate of nominees, and all were elected. Tom will serve as President. Leslie Manning was elected as Vice President. Bob Strickland will continue to serve as Treasurer, and Lindy Harrison will continue as Secretary.

Old/New Business

Amy Patterson requested updates on several board initiatives. In response, Tom Holmes shared that the Executive Director Search Committee has finalized the job description and will meet on Friday to discuss progress and next steps.

Tom also noted that the Executive Committee is still in progress. Current members include Tom Holmes, Leslie Manning, Bob Strickland, Lindy Harrison, Gayle Watkins, Charley Tarver, and Keller Torrey.

Board orientation was also discussed. Tom shared that the Executive Committee will talk more about this on Friday, with the possibility of opening orientation to all board members, especially those who may not have received it in the past.

Adjournment 4:17 PM

Upcoming Meetings and Events:

July 28 – Summer Soiree

August 16 – Nature Center Closed for Renovations

October 4 - Highlands on the Half Shell

October 21 – Fall Trustee Meeting 3 PM

October 27 – Enchanted Forest Halloween (Volunteers Needed)

November 26 & 27 – HBF Office Closed



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December 9 – Winter Trustee Meeting 3 PM (Virtual)

December 21 - January 1 – HBF Office Closed