



National & Chapter Forum

October 2019

INTRODUCTION

Happy Halloween! Neenah, WI is getting its first snowfall of the season this week. All week. Supposedly it won't stick. I hope not, because my snow tires are still in my shed. Most of the prairie has gone to seed, although we have a couple of resilient sweet brown-eyed Susan and a purple coneflower hanging on out there. As we head into winter weather (as in, whether I like it or not), I'm reminded that Wild Ones does not hibernate. There are lots of exciting things happening with the national office, our chapters and members across the country. Keep reading, and hopefully there's enough inspiring information to keep you warm until spring!

In this Forum, see:

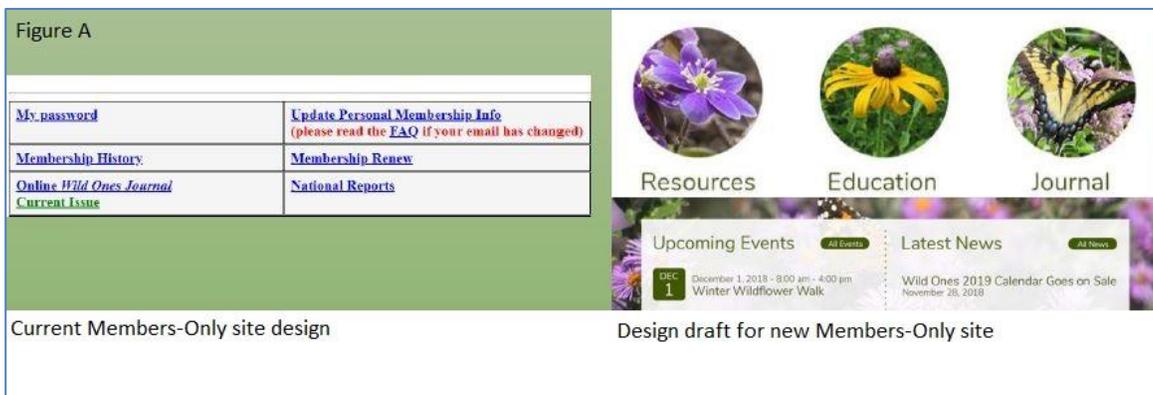
1. Wild Ones Annual Member Meeting
2. New Member Survey Summary
3. National Board of Directors Elections
4. Seeking a Pro Bono CPA
5. What Have You Done for Me Lately?
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*** Remember: The Forum is intended for all members. Please share the Forum with your chapter! ***

1. WILD ONES ANNUAL MEMBER MEETING

The 2019 Annual Meeting was held via webinar on Saturday, October 12. The West Cook Chapter hosted the national board, and it was wonderful to see beautiful Oak Park, IL and to meet some of the chapter officers. 146 people registered for the meeting to learn about our challenges and accomplishments over the past year, including Tech for Tomorrow, Seeds for Education, our Strategic Plan, financials, and going forward into 2020.

The Tech for Tomorrow update included progress toward the creation of a new Membership system (see Figure A) and repopulating the public website with information and resources.



Membership continues to grow, with about 4,000 paid members to date. We currently have 58 Chapters and three Seedlings. In the past year new chapters chartered in Arkansas, Maryland, and Massachusetts.

In 2019, the Seeds for Education grant program received 46 applications from 18 different states. 31 people served as SFE judges, and 10 projects were ultimately funded. For the 2020 grant cycle, 39 applications were received. The next step is judging; judges are members with significant knowledge about native plants. Three judges review each application, and the scores are averaged for the project's final score. If you are interested in serving as a judge, please email SFEapplication@wildones.org. We are also looking for nursery partners across the country to guide SFE grant winners. If you have a native plant nursery and would like more information, please email info@wildones.org.

Wild Ones' 2019-2021 Strategic Plan was approved by the Board of Directors in February. You can read the details by logging in to the Members-Only site and Clicking National_Reports, then PLANS. Highlights of the Plan's goals include providing more native plant resources, increasing the number of Chapters by six, having a 75% member retention rate, and developing strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations.

The most difficult tasks require volunteer time (grant-writing, updating position papers, and developing a fundraising plan) or large amounts of staff time (grant-writing, creating a list of native plant nurseries, public and Members-Only website work, and implementing new programs such as Patio Pollinators and Pocket Prairies). Some tasks were assigned to summer interns: researching nontraditional fundraising and donor recognition best practices, creating a list of schools conducting scientific research on native plants, and compiling a list of current Citizen Science programs.

Progress on completing our strategic goals is perpetually monitored by staff and the national board president. In the past six months, we have made great progress on the huge list of 2019 tasks. While the number of tasks on the 2020 list is smaller, the tasks themselves are larger. Much of our future progress will rely on adequate staffing, coupled with additional assistance from volunteers. If you are interested in helping with any tasks related to our Strategic Plan, please email president@wildones.org.

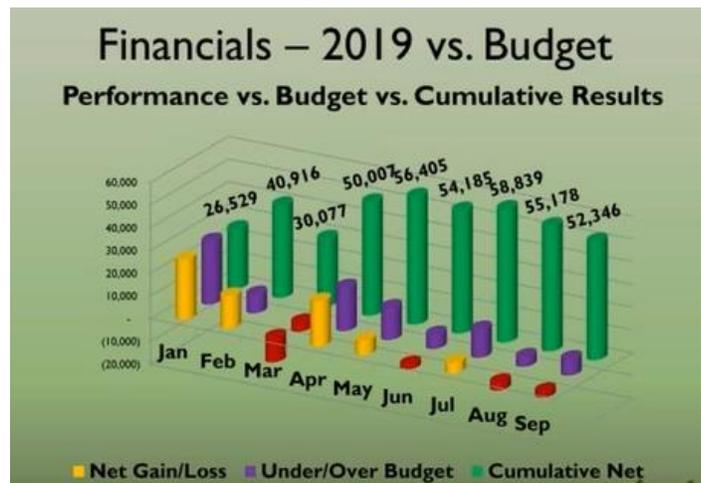
Wild Ones' federal 990 reports not only national information, but a compilation of the entire organization, including all chapters. The financial outlook for 2019 is positive. Wild Ones has been under budget for eight out of the nine months of 2019. Overall, our cumulative net position to date for 2019 is a positive \$52,346 (see Figure B). We expect this number to remain positive through the rest of 2019, as it was in both 2017 and 2018.

From 2015-2018, Wild Ones received between 60% and 70% of its revenue from donations and grants. Mission-related revenue, which includes memberships, is not as large, but has grown from 5% in 2015 to 20-25%. Other revenue, 20% of our total, comes from all the hard work done by chapters to raise funds.

On the Expenses side during the same time period, the focus of Wild Ones has been on our mission-related, educational native plant projects and activities. These accounted for over 80% of all money spent in 2018. Additionally, almost 10% of our expenses were in the

form of grants made to other non-profit organizations. Other expenses have been reduced from over 35% in 2017 to just 8% in 2018. This means we are saving money on a national level and at the WILD Center. For more details about Wild Ones' financials, log in to the Members-Only site and select National_Reports – NATIONAL Financials. Summarized Financial Statements are available for each individual month.

Figure B



2. NEW MEMBER SURVEY SUMMARY

This summer, a short survey was sent to members joining Wild Ones in the past 12 months. The goal was to learn the opinions and insights of new members and understand the positive or negative experiences that occur in the first few months of membership. The 21% response rate was great (a 10%-15% response rate is better than average).

Most people would recommend a membership to a friend or colleague. 63% of respondents scored the likelihood of recommending membership a 9 or 10 out of 10. They are loyal enthusiasts who fuel growth.

New members were equally interested in native plant information and the Wild Ones mission. These reasons for joining play off each other. More information can cause an increase in support for the cause, and support of the mission can develop a hunger for knowledge. The third most common reason for joining was enjoyment of events, meetings, and seminars. This means chapters are doing a great job planning their calendars!

Reasons for negative responses were not being involved in the organization, being unsure of the membership value, and poor communication from the organization. Wild Ones is addressing these issues by better sharing the value of supporting the mission through membership dues, and increasing frequency of communications via the *Forum*, social media, and the public website. The new Members-Only site will be a powerful communication vehicle as well.

When asked how they first heard about Wild Ones, most people said a friend or member introduced them. The next highest-ranking answers were an event and an internet search. Events mentioned were seed swaps, seminars, guest speakers, and garden tours. Another notable result is the impact of a sizeable discount offered to members each year by Johnson's Nursery in Menomonee Falls, WI. Dozens of people join Wild Ones in order to obtain that discount, and the nursery was named in the responses. In the coming months, we will ask our other nursery partners and Business Members to consider offering a member discount, which also results in additional sales and exposure for the nursery.

Promising results were noted regarding Wild Ones meetings and events. Almost 70% of respondents reported attending events or meetings. Of those who attended, the average number was three outings. This means people enjoyed initial events enough to attend others. A possible bias in this response is that people who are more engaged, attending numerous events, are more likely to respond to the survey.

Reasons for not attending meetings or events were skewed toward two main responses: activities are too far away, and scheduling conflicts. In many responses, members said the driving distance plus the time each event took was too much of a time commitment, and that driving 1.5-2 hours to an event was not feasible. These responses mirrored those of our lapsed member survey.

Respondents were asked if they read the quarterly *Journal*. Since this is considered a flagship benefit and a major means of communication with members, a "Yes" response of 70% indicates the *Journal* is still an important benefit to members. Those who did not read the *Journal* were asked why. 39% said they didn't know about the publication, 8% said it's too difficult to access, and 8% said they haven't received one yet. This indicates that Wild Ones needs to do a better job of promoting the *Journal* and how to access it online. We also need to encourage members to add "wildones.org" to their email address safe list to ensure *Journal* and other email notifications are delivered. If they aren't receiving the *Journal* emails, they probably aren't getting the renewal reminder notices either. This may account for our high attrition rate, which reflects members who do not renew.

Finally, respondents were asked what Wild Ones can do to make membership more valuable. More assistance for new members was the number one request. Wild Ones has developed Best Practices for New Member Orientation, and is working on a new member mentoring program. The goal is to engage members from day one and show them they are an important part of the organization. People also requested more outreach via social media, more educational information about native plants (digitally and hard copy), better communication between members and chapters, more information and guides for chapters to use, a forum on the website to ask questions and discuss

topics, a better Members-Only site, and variation in meeting locations. Members may not be aware of the Wild Ones Facebook group. This group is very active, posting photos, asking questions, and sharing advice. Chapter resources were greatly improved with the release of the revamped Chapter Guidebook in 2018, but that information will be even easier to access in the new Members-Only site. Best Practices for Programs encourages chapters to vary meeting topics and locations, and shares program ideas. The new Members-Only site will address many shortcomings of our current system and should provide an enhanced member experience.

3. NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS ELECTIONS

It's time to start nominating people for the national Board of Directors! The election takes place in the summer, but lots of prep work takes place. Anyone interested in serving on the national board can find the Prospectus and application (a fillable PDF – must be downloaded to your computer before completing) in the Members-Only site, under National Reports.

Information can also be requested by emailing nominations@wildones.org. Everyone on the board must be a Wild Ones member. Non-members can be nominated, as long as they commit to joining before the election.

Completed applications should be emailed to nominations@wildones.org. A confirmation email will be sent.

4. SEEKING A PRO BONO CPA

As a 501(c)(3) organization registered in a multitude of states, Wild Ones must comply with IRS and state regulations regarding financial audits. At a minimum, an annual CPA review is required. As Wild Ones continues to grow, regulations require a full audit every year.

An audit, or even a CPA review, is very expensive – several thousand dollars. To add this service to the 2020 budget will take away money that would otherwise be spent on mission-related activities. We are looking for a CPA to do a pro bono or reduced rate review of our 2018 financials. If you, your company, or someone you know would be willing to provide a pro bono or heavily discounted CPA review, please contact elaine@wildones.org or treasurer@wildones.org. Thank you for your help!

5. WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR ME LATELY?

People occasionally ask, “What happens to donations and Annual Appeal funds given to the Wild Ones organization?” or, “Why does my chapter have to be part of the national organization when I don't see any financial benefits?” One task which takes a tremendous amount of both staff time and money is state registrations.

Mandatory registrations must be filed annually in every state where there is a Wild Ones chapter. This registration is called registering as a foreign non-profit doing business in the state. Because it was incorporated in Wisconsin, Wild Ones is considered “foreign” in every other state. Having a chapter in a state constitutes conducting “business”. Initial fees for registering in a new state range from \$40 to \$800. Once registered, Wild Ones must complete an annual renewal for each state, with fees ranging from \$15 to \$55. Completing these registrations takes up a lot of staff time, and time is money, so the true cost of registration is far higher than the sum of all the checks we submit.

Another type of registration is to solicit funds from non-members. This includes requesting donations via the internet, since this message goes to members and non-members alike. Wild Ones is completing its first round of registrations to solicit. In the past, requests for donations were limited to members. As our social media presence grows and we identify nontraditional fundraising venues, we will be soliciting donations from the public; thus, the registration is required. This registration is much more expensive than the one for a foreign non-profit doing business. Because of this, we are limiting our fundraising (and subsequent registrations) to a total of 21 states.

An additional 11 states do not require registration. The initial registration fees are about \$5400. Mandatory annual renewals are even higher, at \$5740. In addition to the registration itself, Wild Ones must have a Registered Agent in every state. This is to ensure we have a local person to receive any future legal documents. Members have generously agreed to volunteer as Registered Agents in most states. For the few states where we do not have someone to serve as Registered Agent, we must pay for one, at an additional \$99/year.

6. REPOPULATING THE PUBLIC WEBSITE

As noted at the Annual Meeting, returning the Wild Ones public website to its status as an information-rich resource for native plant information is a high priority. This is a time-consuming process, and a group of members is revising existing documents and position statements and identifying what additional information should be added to the public website. This group is seeking input on the top priorities for information to include on the public website. Please share your thoughts by emailing info@wildones.org with the subject line "Public Website". The group will use this information to determine priorities.

7. CHAPTER MAILING LISTS

As we move toward the programming phase of our new Membership System, Wild Ones wants to ensure it has the most up-to-date data possible. Many chapters have offline mailing lists they use to communicate with people who support our mission, but have not joined Wild Ones. We would like to share national information with these people in the hope that they will join. If you have a separate mailing list than the one staff uploads to the Members-Only site, please email it to info@wildones.org. An Excel spreadsheet is the easiest for us to import, but a Word doc or PDF would also suffice. Thank you for helping us grow Wild Ones' membership!

8. QUICK REMINDERS

- **Social Media**

Visit the Wild Ones YouTube channel (Wild Ones Native Plants) to see videos from some of our Honorary Directors and our past president. Learn about native plants and great reasons to be Wild!

Who are your native plant heroes? Who are the people who are doing active research and promoting the use of native plants in residential, commercial, and other types of landscapes? Please post about the people across the nation who inspire you to use native plants on the Wild Facebook page (Wild Ones Native Plants Group). This private group is only for Wild Ones members; non-member invitations or requests to join are rejected. It is a great resource if you have questions, need help identifying a plant, or just want to talk about native plants!

- **Thank you!**

As we head into the holiday season, I want to thank all of you for being Wild Ones members. YOU are our greatest resource. YOU have amazing ideas for events, educational materials, and outreach. YOU are educating people across the country, spreading the word about native plants. YOU have the knowledge to help others new to the use of native plants. YOU are making a difference every day. YOU are healing the Earth, one landscape at a time. THANK YOU!

Thank you, as always, for taking the time to read the *Forum*. I know this was a long one, but there is a lot of information that I'm excited to share with our members.

Wildly yours,

Elaine

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