

NWTF Tennessee Board Meeting January 2026

Meeting Summary – January 17, 2026

Attendance & Opening Remarks

Attendance

- Roll Call: Lee Keys, Chris Romines, Keith Hickman, Melissa Orton, Cody Agee, Skeeter Clinton, Jason Noe, Jeremy Odom, Jeff Jackson, Pupp Westfall, Lindsey Silvy, Jason Craig, Tim Capps, Patrick Pasinger, Josh Painter, Scotty Phillips (absent: Sherri Lettner – excused)
 - Recording: Meeting recorded for minute-keeping due to secretary’s absence (family emergency with her father).
 - Approval of Previous Minutes and to excuse Sherri Lettner: - Virtual meeting minutes from October reviewed and approved. - Motion by Jason Noe, seconded by Melissa Orton.
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Main Topics Discussed

1. ****Treasurer’s Report****

- Presenter: Lee Keys, supported by Mark.
 - Transition of Funds: **Ongoing complications transferring “plate money” quarterly deposit account from the State to Synovus bank — numerous unresponsive submissions, repeated lack of communication from the relevant agencies.** - Action: Escalation planned; will reach out once more before involving a State Representative (Jeremy Faison suggested as a contact).
 - Financial Summary (July 1-Jan 15): - Initial Balances (June 10): **\$100 general fund, \$1,000 in money market “plate fund”.** - Plate Fund Details: - **\$25,000 deposit from Doc Agee (to build buffer and avoid service charges).** - **Service charges incurred due to account regulations now adjusted.** - **Lunch for governor’s event accounted for.** - **Opened new "Fallen Water" chapter.** - **\$97,000 account closed by Doc Agee; awaiting transfer of new funds once the state switches payment.** - **Some confusion regarding the nature and timing of deposits from Edgefield; lack of notifications, need for improved communication.** - General Fund: - **\$16,500 checks for event/payments.** - **\$18,710 from state chapter rebate processed ahead of schedule for liquidity reasons (Smith & Wesson gun program needs anticipated).** - Procedural Changes: - Treasurer’s reports now distributed via email to reduce paper usage. - Offer to continue digital distribution; no objections raised. - Motion to adopt report format and approve treasurer's report passed (Motion: Keith Hickman, Second: Jeff Jackson).
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2. ****Committee & Officer Updates****

- Nominating Committee & Hall of Fame Chair: - **Josh Painter appointed to oversee both.** - **Officer elections set for July 2026 in-person meeting.** - Submission Policy: Letters and bios from chapters must be turned in 30 days prior to July meeting.
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3. ****Healing Kids Outdoors (formerly “Hunting the Cure”)****

- Presenter: Keith Hickman
 - Event Change: Name changed to “Healing Kids Outdoors” due to 501(c)3 legal issue; mission and format remain identical.
 - Board Support History: Board has supported this for 20 years (including gun donation and event participation). Raised approximately \$1.9 million to date for St. Jude, with \$80,000 last year.
 - Event Details: Scheduled for youth weekend, which this year coincides with Easter (exact dates not specified).
 - Board Action: Motion passed to donate a gun (max \$800 value) for the 2026 event. (Motion: Melissa Orton, Second: Skeeter Clinton.)
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4. ****State Calling Contest****

- Presenter: Jeff Jackson

- 2025 Event Recap: Held in September 2025; well-attended, positive feedback with small improvements made.
- Leadership Transition: **Jeff stepping down as contest chair; seeking other board members to take over by June 2026.** - Succession Plan: **Interested individuals advised to consult with Jeff for logistics/advice; aiming for a decision before June.** - Timeline: Contest typically in September, considerable planning required by summer.
- Note: Pupp Westfall, Lindsey Silvey, and Jason Craig expressed interest, but need more information.
- Action: Decision/volunteer selection needed by June meeting.

5. ****Vendor Opportunity: Hoss Straps****

- Presenter: Chris Romines
- Product: Utility straps (giant zip tie-style) for outdoor use; also available as branded dog collars and keychains.
- Partnership: Manufacturer (Josh Landry, Hoss Straps, Round Rock, TX) offers branding and custom orders — \$12 per sponsor set (24" strap + floating keychain).
- Bulk Order Info: Chris's chapter ordering up to 100 as sponsor gifts for next banquet; benefits include customization and multi-use for outdoor activities.
- Retail Pricing: 24" straps retail ~\$15 each.
- Board Guidance: Suggestion to display samples at state banquet for visibility; no minimum order quantity.
- Contact: Chris Romines is point of contact; information available on state website.

6. ****TWRA Update & Turkey Research Report****

- Presenter: Roger Shields (TWRA)
- Summer Survey (2025): - Participation Down: **Fewer public and staff observations this year (purposefully less outreach to gauge natural engagement).** - Data Collected: **1,000+ observations from public, covering 88 counties (missing 1 county, not specified).** - Findings: - **Poults per hen index lower than desired/statewide average = 2.2. - 3.3 poults per brood. - ~60% of hens observed with broods. - Trend: Productivity somewhat higher in northeast (possible boost from cicada hatch, Brood 17), lower in west/central due to heavy rainfall.** - Call for Observations: Especially needed in West and Midwest units.
- Hunter Postseason Survey (2025): - Responses: **Increased to 4,000+ (now conducted internally at TWRA).** - Success Rates: **Adults – 45% harvested at least one bird (down from >50% in previous years); Youth – 41% harvested at least one.** - Average Days Hunted: **Slightly up, likely due to lower success, requiring prolonged effort.** - Harvest Rate: **0.11 birds/day (11 per 100 days), down from previous years' rate (0.15).** - Hunter Satisfaction: **Majority (>50%) satisfied or very satisfied. Most dissatisfaction from those hunting BOTH public and private lands.** - Perceived Population Trends: - **Sentiment has shifted from stability/increase to decrease across most units. - West Tennessee previously saw population recovery but is now reversed. - Rainfall cited as major factor reducing production/hunter success.** - Nonresident Data: Nonresidents included and weighted appropriately.
- Hatchie River WMA Update: - **Officially designated as WMA at recent commission meeting. - Size: 7,400 acres (Haywood, Hardiman, Madison counties). - Regulations: WMA follows standard West TN rules—4-week season, 1 bird limit per WMA.** - Board Recognition: NWTF's financial contribution acknowledged publicly.
- National Wild Turkey Symposium: - 13th symposium held December 2025. - All presentations/research now publicly available online via Wildlife Society Bulletin (link to be shared with board).
- Discussion: - High rainfall in west resulted in poor nesting/hunting conditions in 2025. - Questions about permit allocation for highly sought WMAs (e.g., charging "toll" access fees): Requires legislative change, not within TWRA authority. - Nonresident hunting restriction discussions ongoing but unlikely soon due to related economic benefits and legislative opposition. - Sex-ratio research in hunted vs. unhunted populations (UGA/Savannah River Site studies) discussed—recent research shows more hens produced in hunted areas, causation unclear.

7. ****NWTF "Superfund"/Habitat & Conservation Program Updates****

- Presenter: Derek Alkire (Board/NWTF coordinator)
- Cherokee National Forest Project: Officially complete; next steps in discussion.
- Superfund Status: All allocated dollars out; new cycle in progress. Reporting covers overlap in fiscal years.
- Project Highlights: - **Prentice Cooper WMA: Savannah restoration project (good management = increased turkey response).** - **Private Land: NWTF foresters (Knoxville/Nashville) assist in NRCS program enrollment; loaner sprayers for landowner use managed by conservation districts.** - Habitat for the Hatch: - Year 3: Over 150,000 acres enhanced, plus ~500,000 burn team acres and 100,000 in new equipment use. - QR code for article provided; 58:1 matching rate in recent year (noted: Hatchie project was major contributor). - Placemats at banquets highlight conservation work; chapters should use at their events.
- TWRA Funding Crisis: - Agency operating at a deficit due to unfunded state mandates. - Awaiting possible solution in Governor's State of the State (late January). - No immediate action requested, but board should be ready to sign advocacy letters or take public stance as needed. - Rumors of structural changes to TWRA (to DNR/State Park status) unsubstantiated; high internal concern.
- Legislative Engagement: - March 11, 2026: Sportsman's Day on Capitol Hill, Nashville (NWTF to host a booth; volunteers needed). - Recognition: NWTF and board recognized by TWRA at recent commission meeting.
- Youth Conservation Events: - **Chapters eligible for special funding for NEW conservation outreach events (not Jake's Days).** - Requirements: **Application with budget, photos, and post-event proof; local chapters should coordinate applications with Derek.** - Funding Source: Anonymous donor/company.
- NWTF Research: Hired Dr. Patrick Whiteman (Univ. of Georgia) as National Director of Research (to begin Jan. 21-22, 2026).
- Impact Measurement: - Opportunity to better link NWTF projects with regional turkey data—current process is informal (feedback from WMA managers/landowners). - Nearly all Superfund projects in Tennessee count toward "Habitat for the Hatch" goals. - Partner RFPs out through January for additional habitat projects.
- TWRA R3 Coordinator: Mac Flary's replacement is in place; name to be shared with the board.

8. ****Other Announcements & Discussion****

- Time Goal: Darnell reminded members to keep pace to finish by 3 PM (past live meetings have been briefer than virtual).
- Expressed Gratitude: Chair acknowledged members' service, recognized those with family/life hardships (Sherry Lettner, Lindsay's father, chair's own bereavement).
- Next Steps: 5-minute break called before final agenda items (RD reports, etc.).

9. Marketing & Media Initiatives-Kolbie Jackson (NWTF)

- License Plate Story Video - Shown to attendees as the main promotional video for the NWTF Tennessee specialty plate program. - Feedback: "Powerful," "short, sweet," and features a NWTF volunteer. - Funding: Video cost \$2,000, fair market value cited at \$8,000, representing significant ROI. - Plan to boost video posts on social media; \$30 per month was budgeted and approved for boosting posts for a year.

10. New Chapter Development & Expansion

- New Chapter Announcements - Crooked Creek Chapter (Huntington, Carroll County). - Bedford County Longbeards (Bedford County). - Exploring a Shin Gear/Memphis chapter (discussions ongoing, not official yet).
- Discussion of Bedford County's Past Issues - Historical drama between NWTF and the previous "Southern Longbeards" committee leading to a loss of NWTF presence; attempts ongoing to rebuild. - Proposal to do a Jakes Day FIRST, followed by a banquet, to re-engage the community and rebuild trust. - Funding: Preference to utilize Super Fund request for Jakes Day, requiring board approval via email vote after more details are gathered regarding cost and logistics.

11. Fundraising, Banquet, and Membership Updates

- License Plate & Banquet Fundraisers - Reporting on the ROI and future plans for promotional efforts.

- MTSU Collegiate Chapter Recognition - Event announced for February 20. - MTSU chapter awarded 3rd best collegiate chapter nationwide, aiming for top spot next year.
- Banquet Supplies Purchase - Centralized \$11,968 purchase of supplies (table covers, tickets, auction sheets) to save chapters money and increase net fundraising dollars.

12. Major Event Announcement: Kentucky Concert – Charlie Tollett (NWTF)

- Craig Morgan Benefit Concert - Date: August 22, 2026 at the Log Still Distillery, New Haven, KY. - Venue: Outdoor amphitheater, 2,400 seats, luxury seating and general admission options (\$30–\$1,000 per ticket/table). - Full NWTF benefit, accommodation & camping available. - Ticketmaster handling ticket sales, QR code and promotion planned pre-convention.

13. Statewide Accomplishments & Awards – Tim Yates (NWTF)

- National Rankings - Tennessee #1 in NWTF nationwide membership (20,190 members; 18,350 adults, next closest PA at 13,400). - 4th in net dollars raised nationally: \$1,284,779.27. - Recognition presented to chapter president and the state board.
- Placemats - Membership and goal summaries, info on projects and QR codes for easy access/distribution.

14. Calendar Raffle Program: Discussion & Strategy Shift

- Financial Results - 2024: Sold ~1,920 of 2,000 (\$38,400 net). - 2025: Sold 1,579 of 2,000 at \$60 each, net \$47,370. - Separate set added \$30,000 (total \$77,000+ state).
- Discussion on Enhancements - Proposal for a new “Gun-a-Day” calendar at \$250 per calendar (365 guns; chance of winning 36.5%). - Logistics: Only 1,000 calendars, \$125 per calendar back to chapters (\$125,000 net if sold out). - Concern about potential inability to sell all high-priced calendars; suggestion to offer both \$60 (weekly) and \$250 (daily) calendars in parallel for one year as a test. – Motion made by Jereme Odom Seconded by Jeff Jackson and carried to pursue both, pending logistics and agreement with Reeds (gun supplier and fulfillment).
- Membership Implications - Concerns expressed about the impact of higher calendar prices on membership totals, as \$60 calendars include a membership, but \$250 calendars may not. Suggestion to explore alternative membership benefits.

15. Unique Fundraising Item: Custom Smith & Wesson Gun

- Special Edition Gun - Limited run of 72, custom engraved NWTF feather logo, consecutive serial numbers. - Cost: \$1,047 per gun, raising ~\$2,000 net per banquet via special raffles. - State board pre-funding the purchase and handling logistics of distribution to FFL dealers and chapters. - Reminder to chapters to remit payments for guns to the state promptly.

16. Wheelin’ Sportsmen State Program Update

- Program Activities - Active since January; seven meetings, engagement with chapters. - September 20, 2025 Dove Hunt: 140 attendees (38 hunters, 88 guides, 14 volunteers, with cross-chapter support). - Success: High turnout, strong feedback, increased future interest. - Fishing Rodeo planned for June 2026: Crappie fishing venue secured, aiming for 10-15 wheelchair users. Seeking \$1,000 support, though actual needs higher (~\$7,500 granted after discussion). - Prentice Cooper: Two additional accessible hunting blinds pending; improvements at Kaspas Lake underway due to \$13M infrastructure grant. - Funding and resource discussion: Multiple sources of donation, request to coordinate chapter wheeling programs with Doug Rye. - Motion carried to appropriate \$7,500 from general/state fund to Wheelin’ Sportsman program.

17. Trailer Inventory, Usage, and Allocation- Mark Darnell (State President)

- State Trailer Management - State owns multiple trailers for equipment storage and event support; some underused or aging (~14 years or more). - Discussion: Reduce quantity, update fleet, repurpose surplus (e.g., for Wheelin’ Sportsman or chapters), or sell to chapters via sealed bid. - Motion made and approved to retain one trailer specifically for Wheelin’ Sportsmen. Old RD trailers to be made available for bid by all chapters; proceeds to fund new trailer(s) or modernization. - Action: Chapter list with emails to be compiled by RDs for fair notification and bidding.

18. National Board Election Results & NWTF Elections Process

- Outcome - Tennessee delivered most votes of any state. - Joe Schultz received the highest votes. - Discussion on the importance of member voting and the influence it brings to national-level decisions for Tennessee.

19. State Website & Communications

- Website Upkeep - All board and committee members are listed; chapters can request updates. - Importance of keeping contact info/email addresses current for accurate chapter/member communication. - Website now posts event schedules, chapter contacts by county, minutes, and will host media (plans to add video/filming of meetings). - Ongoing effort to add or update chapter Facebook links for public engagement.

20. Special Fundraisers and Donations

- 50th Anniversary Gun - Special limited-edition Browning Instinct gun, net proceeds split 50/50 between event general fund and state super fund. - Immediate interest and competitive bidding at the event.
- Isaiah House Call Donations - Donation opportunity: electronic crow and gobble calls at \$2/each to benefit children's shelter for use at Jakes events. - All proceeds to Isaiah House; contact Joe Schultz for inventory.

21. Other Notes

- Appreciation for Support - Tim thanked the board for supporting after recent health issues.
- Guest Visit - Paul Thomas (KY board) attended to observe and take ideas back to Kentucky.
- State Banquet Supplies - Annual restocking and purchasing to continue for efficiency.

22. Adjournment

- Meeting adjourned with reminders to reset for banquet/dinner and to see Darnell for orange shirt/vests if needed.
- Next scheduled meeting: April 16, 2026 (virtual).
- Board members to notify for any corrections or additions to notes, and follow-up items assigned as above.

Action Items

1. Treasurer's Account Transfer: Lee Keys/Mark to escalate to state agency again, contact named State Representative if necessary, and report back.
2. State Calling Contest: Board members interested in taking over from Jeff Jackson to consult with him before June 2026 for hand-off/planning.
3. Vendor Product Promotion: Leave Hoss Straps samples at state banquet; chapters contact Chris Romines for orders/information.
4. Habitat Survey Participation: Board members requested to increase reporting, especially in under-represented counties (West, Midwest units).
5. Youth Conservation Funding: - Chapters to forward new youth conservation event proposals to Derek. - Derek to submit to NWTF/coordinate with Teresa Carroll and Mandy for approval.
6. Sportsman's Day Representation: Volunteers needed for March 11 booth in Nashville—interested parties to contact Derek.
7. TWRA Funding Advocacy: Remain prepared to draft and send an official support letter or take a formal position if/when legislative action arises after Governor's announcement.
8. Research Access: Roger Shields to email links for the National Wild Turkey Symposium publications, board to disseminate to interested members.
9. R3 Coordinator Contact: Share new TWRA R3 coordinator's name/contact with board.
10. Election Cycle Prep: Board and chapters prepare officer nominations (letters and bios) 30 days ahead of the July 2026 meeting—Josh Painter as point of contact.
11. Social Media Boost Approved - \$30/month for one year allocated to Facebook post boosting, with targeting to Tennessee audiences (Social Media Manager to oversee).
12. Jakes Day—Bedford County/Longbeards - Chapter representative to clarify event needs, then request an email vote for Super Fund approval once full details and costs are known.
13. 2026 Benefit Concert - Save-the-date: August 22, 2026. Ticketmaster to go live before NWTF National Convention. - Volunteers and board to aid in promotion; QR code distribution planned.

14. Calendar Sales/Prize Program - Tim to negotiate with Reeds for both \$60 and \$250 calendars for 2026 cycle; logistically plan for fulfillment and daily/weekly draws. - Action: Board to revisit in April (virtual meeting) if Reeds cannot fulfill as planned.
15. State Chapter & Equipment Trailer Inventory - RDs to compile updated email/contact lists for all chapter presidents. - Mark to circulate bid instructions and fair notice for two (possibly three) surplus RD trailers. - Wheelin' Sportsmen to receive one retired trailer; remaining to be sold to chapters. - Proceeds earmarked for new trailer(s) or fleet modernization.
16. Wheelin' Sportsmen Funding - Immediate \$7,500 appropriated; additional funding possible upon future request/needs. - Chapters with accessible events to contact Doug Rye for cooperation and coordination.
17. Banquet Supplies & Fund Management - Continue centralized supply model to maximize fundraising net at banquets; emphasize timely remittance of funds for central/specialty guns.
18. Website Updates - Board/committee members to promptly notify of email or contact changes. - Chapters to inform Skeeter or web admin for Facebook or contact info updates. - Continue exploring video archiving/streaming of meetings for increased transparency.
19. Membership & Election Awareness - Encourage chapter/member participation in NWTf board elections. - Communicate importance of voting and influence at national level.
20. Special Fundraiser Management - Split 50/50 proceeds from anniversary gun between event and state fund. - RDs/board to coordinate sales and ensure proper accounting.
21. Isaiah House Call Distribution - Chapters hosting Jake's Days or youth events to contact Joe Schultz for calls. - Proceeds/donations go directly to Isaiah House.
22. Event RSVPs & Participation - Members wishing to sit at Tennessee table for national convention events to email Mark within one week. - Open slots for "Governor's One Shot" dinner/event—contact Mark for a spot.
23. Future Meeting Dates - Next virtual meeting: April 16, 2026. - Summer meeting: July 10–11, 2026. - Fall meeting: October 15, 2026.
24. Board Candidacy—June 1 "Qualifying" - Letters of intent and bios to Josh Painter by June 1 for board candidates.
25. Super Fund Requests - Chapter Super Fund requests to be submitted in April/May.

Follow-Up

- Next Meetings: - April 2026: Virtual board meeting - June 2026: Deadline to select new State Calling Contest chair. - July 2026: In-person meeting (elections)
 - Pending Reports/Documents: - State calling contest logistics guide/transition notes (Jeff Jackson to update/provide). - Habitat survey statistical breakdowns by project (Roger Shields/Derek to consider future collaboration). - R3 coordinator name and contact info (to be provided). - Link for Wild Turkey Symposium Proceedings (Roger Shields).
 - Member Support: Continue to support members facing hardship; acknowledge in prayers and correspondence as appropriate.
 - Finalize Bedford County Super Fund Event Request - Awaiting details, followed by email vote.
 - Reeds Calendar Program Negotiation - Tim to finalize calendar logistics by April; reconsider if not possible.
 - State Trailer Sale - Action pending compilation of current chapter president contact list. - Communicate bid process equitably and transparently.
 - Planned Webcast/Radio Spot with TWRRY - Broadcast scheduled for January 24 (radio), January 26 (YouTube).
 - TWRA Advertising Partnership - Ad campaign for turkey regulations page—pending final approval and board input by April.
 - Chapter/Volunteer Recognition - MTSU to be supported for national recognition at upcoming event.
 - Maintain Up-to-date Contact Lists - Effort ongoing with board/committee and chapter contacts for clear communications.
 - Explore Annual Special Event Fundraisers - Board encouraged to plan at least one unique annual fundraising activity (e.g., whiskey barrel raffle, custom gun).
-