

Minutes of the TNPS Board Meeting held on September 9, 2025

Zoom meeting

The meeting commenced at 7:00 pm Eastern time. Mitchell Kent, President, presiding. In attendance: Karen Hill, Tim Kaltenbach, Shelley King, Bart Jones, Kim Sadler, Mary Priestley, Lesley Gunn, Larry Pounds, Allen Trently, Anne Ballentine, and Sue Bible.

Mitchell welcomed everyone and introductory remarks were made.

The minutes of the June 10, 2025 meeting were presented. There were no questions, additions or deletions asked or made. Karen Hill moved to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Bart Jones. Motion carried. The minutes were approved.

(1:18)

TREASURER'S REPORT

Kim Sadler presented the updated Treasurer's report as of August 31, 2025. A copy is made a part of these minutes.

The Conference registrations show an additional 18 or 19 people added since Aug. 27th. Kim discusses Book Royalties, Donations, Memberships Dues received, Book Sales, Total Income.

Expenses reflect putting a deposit down on the hotel rooms for the Conference, the purchase of several of Mary Priestly's Children Book for re-sale, the cost of shipping the Wildflower Book, and TNPS subsidizing 50% of the printing of the Limestone Glades book. We have already made 25% of our money back in the Limestone Glades book sales. With the next printing, the rights to, and ownership of, the Limestone Glades book will pass to TNPS.

Kim continues with discussion of expenses for the newsletter and communications. Kim explained that the figure for Education Outreach includes the honorarium for the speakers for the Conference.

The Government Fees and Reports figure includes the amounts for the accountant and our Webmaster. When TNPS pays a vendor more than \$600 that vendor must complete a W-9 form for us, and TNPS must file a Form 1099, which she has done.

Kim explained that Neon has helped her and our organization a lot. It costs TNPS \$286.40 a month and Kim feels it is worth the expense. Our expenses total \$7,021 since January. Kim explained that no expenses show for insurance because it was paid before January 1. Other expenses coming up are \$80 for QuickBooks and our DropBox payment is coming up soon.

Mitchell now has a credit card for purchases for the organization. We must pay a fee for the credit card, and we are not passing our expenses for Neon or the credit card on to our members.

Karen asked about the Vascular Plants book, wondering if it had been printed yet. Mitchell will check on that. The contact person for that is Joey Shaw.

Karen noticed on Kim's report that there is an entry for both the Winter Guide Book and the Woody Plants book. Kim confirmed that these refer to the same book. Kim will consolidate this into one line entry. Members discussed how many Woody Plants books they have. Mitchell said we should get another box of these books. The directions for ordering more books are written on the form that Karen gave to Mitchell about the Lone Pine printing company.

(14:45)

Motion to Approve the Treasurer's Report was made by Karen Hill. The motion was seconded by Anne Ballentine. The motion carried.

(15:15)

OLD BUSINESS

Grants Committee Report and Plans for 2025 – Karen Hill

Last year we had 8 applications for these grants. Six were funded. Five worked through the entire process. One of the teachers on the sixth project was fired so Karen and Kim will ascertain whether this project was completed. The June newsletter reported on the five completed projects.

This year the application period was extended 10 days by way of a Facebook post. Twenty applications were received. Ten were funded. Four were funded with the donation from Margaret Fletcher in honor of her husband. TNPS funded the remaining six. All approved applicants have received their reference books. Six project schools submitted Action Plans and have had their grant checks sent to them. The four others have been reminded to send in their plans.

One of the main problems is finding mentors for these projects. Karen said we will probably need to appeal to the general membership to find mentors across the state.

Mitchell stated that the Grants for Plants program has been incorporated into the TNPS overall grant program that Tim is spearheading.

Mitchell thanked Karen for her hard work.

(24:30)

2025 Conference Update – Bart Jones

The last time Bart checked Neon we had 32 conference applicants. The speakers are lined up and the workshop for Saturday is set for those not going on the field trip. The field trips are planned. One of the state foresters will help with leading the hike on John Ross's property for help with tree identification. Bart is getting the menu arranged with Pickwick State Park. All that is left to do is make the final payment to Pickwick. We are ready to go. Mitchell will close registration now. Kim explained that if we are short for the needed funds to provide to Pickwick this year, we had some overage from the conference last year that will cover it. Pickwick was very good to work with us about us not getting the necessary 40 rooms reserved.

Bart related some difficulties in working with any of the state parks with arranging for the meals and the menus.

Mitchell thanked Bart for all his hard work.

(35:20)

Education Outreach – Anne Ballentine, Lesley Gunn, Shelley King, and Mitchell Kent
Anne Ballentine reported of no Outreach Events since the last meeting. The Memphis Mushroom Festival wants vendors and not so much education tables so we will pass on that event. Anne was invited to speak at a Master Gardner event scheduled for February, 2026. She mentions also that the Mushroom Festival charges \$75 for a table and Mitchell explains that it is not unusual to pay a fee for these events and it can be accommodated.

Bart will be speaking at the Mississippi State Master Gardner event in April. He may need some material for that.

Lesley Gunn reported that in August TNPS shared a booth with Wild Ones at the TN State Fair. It was not successful in terms of adding memberships or selling books. We were able to speak with a good number of people and are grateful to the Sierra Club for allowing us to join them in their booth. Tim agreed with Lesley's assessment. We received a lot of Facebook interaction about this event.

Lesley reported of the Hummingbird Festival at Barfield Crescent Park in Murfreesboro in August. This was a very successful meeting, in terms of good conversation, the selling of books and adding memberships. She recommended that we attend again next year.

On October 11th, Lesley will host a table at the Conservation in Action Expo in Murfreesboro also. She expects that the attendees of this event will be very sympathetic to our mission. Dennis Horn and David Duhl will be there to sign the Wildflower books. This will be posted on our social media page. Kim Sadler is assembling a group of people to have a table beside TNPS for the Center for Cedar Glade Studies for this event.

(45:45)

For East Tennessee, Shelley King reported that she is hoping to host a table at the Home and Garden Show in Knoxville in February. At Collier Preserve where TNPS has donated

money, there are educational walks and hikes scheduled throughout the park and the Native Garden area looks good. Shelley noted that she needs more Woody Plants books. Shelley noted that when she brings to her events a bouquet of native flowers that are blooming in her yard and labels them, it attracts a lot of people to her table and is a good conversation-starter.

Mitchell noted that he will send Shelley a couple of Woody Plants books.

Mitchell reported that on October 11th they have another Master Gardner Festival to attend. This has been a good venue in the past and he is expecting it to be a good one to attend again.

(49:05)

Social Media Update – Anne Ballentine

TNPS currently has over 12,000 followers. In the past 90 days TNPS has had over 600,000 views to our page and over 13,000 interactions. The trees posts seem to garner the most views with the Tulip Poplar post having the most views for our page at over 91,000 views. The next highest post was the Cardinal Flower with over 69,000 views. White Oak, American Beech and Sassafras posts were also top performers. Passion Flower was the top performing herbaceous perennial with over 32,000 views.

The Facebook page has received zero negative engagement.

Anne asked all the membership to send her photos from across the state, particularly of fall tree color.

Mitchell asked everybody to contribute for posts to the page.

(54:45)

TNPS Website Performance – Karen Hill

Karen can work on the website but it is currently being managed by a Webmaster, John Waraksa. She is pleased with the job he has been doing, but she feels the website should have a revision soon. The webmaster has been experiencing some family issues so is not fully available currently to help out Karen with statistics, etc.

Karen anticipates setting up a Google account soon for TNPS emails and videos. This will enable her to get the website statistics she needs, and to have a YouTube account for the TNPS videos. Currently the videos are on Karen's Google account. Karen asked for help in moving the videos from one Google account to another. Development of a new website through Neon One is being considered for next year. This will better integrate with our other Neon One activities and also provide needed statistics.

(59:30)

NEW BUSINESS

Progress on the Implementation of TNPS Scholarship Fund – Tim Kaltenbach

To recap, Tim explained that this is the TNPS program where we give an amount to various universities to be awarded through their financial aids office as they determine, to college students who study botany and the things that TNPS is interested in. Tim suggested we advertise and promote it on various platforms.

Tim suggested using Neon's "Campaign" landing page. This university scholarship program would be joined with the TNPS Grants for Native Plants program. People would be able to choose to donate to the university scholarship program or the Grants for Native Plants program.

Tim's next step is to contact eligible schools' financial aids offices and ask if this proposed concept of us giving the scholarship amount to them and for them to determine which students would qualify to receive the funds is an agreeable arrangement.

He has identified seven schools: (1) ETSU has a Botany Pathways program; (2) Tennessee Tech University has a Botany Concentration program; (3) UT Knoxville has a Plant Sciences program; (4) MTSU has a Ginseng Institute as well as several other plant related programs; (5) University of Memphis has a Plant Geneticist program; (6) UT Chattanooga where the Herbarium is; and (7) Austin Peay State University offers a Biology program and is where Southeastern Grasslands Institute is headquartered.

Tim questioned whether TNPS wants to give five \$1,000 scholarships or two at \$2,500 each. The \$1,000 might be part of a package the college could build. This would be a start in determining if we can support this, and if our fund raising efforts pay off for the future.

Kim noted at MTSU that when money is awarded, the financial aids office sometimes decides to take away other scholarship money from the awardee. Tim explained that the university reasons that this scholarship donation "frees" the money to be used for something else, but acknowledges that this can disadvantage someone through that process. Tim feels this is a concern and something to be sensitive to, and will take this into account when he speaks with the representatives of the colleges. This will be part of his process in determining his recommendations.

Kim recounts how MTSU held grants for the students and the department would disburse the money. Their department would assist with conference attendance, or materials for research or to travel for field work. This scholarship is a type of good faith advertising and recruiting if the students understand where the money came from. The students would need to know that the money came from us. Unless their professors have research money for their students, the student must work a summer job and the research money sometimes has to come out of their own money. There are several approaches to awarding this money. Kim agrees that TNPS should not be a part of selecting the student

or handling the money. Tim acknowledges that there is a distinction between giving the college's financial aid office the full determination, and awarding the money to a school's department and/or business office to award. Everyone agrees that the money should not be given directly to the student but this would be a very worthwhile gift.

Anne wondered if there is a way to circumvent the circumstance of a student losing scholarship money from the receipt of our gift. Tim suggests perhaps signing a "Gift Agreement" with the colleges. This allows the charity to specify the purpose of gift. For example, for paying down the tuition of a student in the Botany Department, that the college will select, and it can't be used for anything else. We need to be aware of the internal policy of the school.

(1:17:00)

Mitchell called for a Motion to earmark \$5,000 for a TNPS scholarship fund. Anne Ballentine so moved. Larry Pounds seconded the motion. All present were in favor. Motion carried.

The funds will be tracked and set up as a separate line item on the Budget.

Mitchell suggested utilizing "Gifting Tuesday" (the Tuesday after Thanksgiving) as a means to fund this. Tim suggested soliciting on the website and in the newsletter.

(1:24:00)

TNPS Volunteer Recruitment Initiative - Mitchell Kent

Mitchell presented a PowerPoint presentation about volunteering. Mitchell has been learning about Neon's new data-capturing capabilities about volunteers, providing for signups for events, gathering information about time spent by individuals, generating reports, etc. Mitchell would like to see more volunteering within our group to further the cause and mission of TNPS and why it's important. He discussed the current lack of a volunteer structure and communication of needs to the membership. One example Mitchell used was volunteers needed for Field Trip Leaders. If we had a way in which they could sign up, this would make the process much easier.

Mitchell would like to set up a type of training for the Neon system soon. Having people already signed up to volunteer would help to keep us out of crisis mode when someone leaves their position with TNPS. Mitchell would like to strengthen our volunteer network.

Mitchell shared a Volunteer Interest Survey he developed in Neon CRM. Mitchell also related an event where Neon was used for an electronic sign-up sheet for a field trip, with a waiting list and potential for cancellations and notifications of availability for spaces. But Neon would require an Event Monitor volunteer.

Mitchell has developed some descriptions of what the volunteer roles would entail. Having these descriptions on the website would educate and encourage people to assist with positions within TNPS. Mitchell would like ideas, questions, and feedback on this subject.

Karen suggested that the descriptions include language that a volunteer would begin as an assistant to learn, without feeling overwhelmed about the position. Mitchell explained that having a volunteer pipeline would enable this “assistant” capability. Bart stated that a problem he often encounters is finding good places to go on field trips. He believed this would provide a good way to find places for field trip hikes, where a “leader” wouldn’t feel compelled to know all the plants they saw, but rather to discover the plants at a location along with the other attendees.

Anne adds that the descriptions for volunteer roles should make clear that expert level knowledge of native plants is not necessary, only an interest, and a heart to serve the cause.

Tim added that a survey of this type many times is a tool to educate the reader on what the organization does and its strong points.

Mary suggested this type survey might be distributed at events like the Annual Meeting and other events. Larry added that at the events people can “unofficially” become assistants to field trip leaders, or other positions, and can be developed into the roles.

(1:57:40)

Membership Totals and Retention in 2025 – Mitchell Kent

Mitchell gave a recap of our membership positions. We have around 780 members, which includes individuals and households. There are however some membership lapses. We are retaining between 70-80% of our members. Mitchell will explore later why we lost those members and what we could have done to retain those members. But he feels confident with our membership.

(1:59:30)

Mitchell asked if there was any other new business. No one responded.

The next board meeting will be held on Tuesday, Dec. 9, 2025 at 7:00 pm Eastern Time; 6:00 pm Central Time, for an end-of-year recap.

Karen adds we need to discuss at the next meeting the three board members whose term is expiring in December, if they want to continue, and if there are any challenges to their renewal. This needs to be announced to the membership.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 Central, 9:00 Eastern time.