

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

Zoom meeting

The meeting commenced at 7:00 pm Eastern time. Mitchell Kent, President, presiding. In attendance: Board members attending were Bart Jones, Tim Kaltenbach, Karen Hill, Anne Ballentine, Ken Rea, Larry Pounds and Allan Trently. Board members, Kim Sadler and Mary Priestley joined later. Guests attended were Elizabeth "Liz" Louie and Lorraine Flegal.

Mitchell welcomed everyone and introductory remarks were made.

Old Business was discussed first.

FINAL CONFERENCE 2025 UPDATE

Bart summarized the Annual Conference held in September 2025. We had 43 attendees. There were many positive comments about how good the speakers were. Bart felt the field trips went well with some rare plant discoveries along the lake shore of the park. The in-house event with John Manion went very well with good attendance. Mitchell thanked Bart for all his hard work on planning and preparations for the conference.

PROGRESS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF TNPS SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Tim explained the concept that was approved at a previous meeting. Our organization will award \$1,000 to each of five Tennessee universities, which are ETSU, Tennessee Tech, UT Chattanooga, University of Memphis and UT Knoxville. The award would be directed toward students working on Botany degrees. This would not be tuition money but instead be given to professors to help students with botany directed learning experiences. This might include research, herbarium work, field trip work, conference attendance, and travel expenses if necessary. Professors have verified this type of award would be of great value to the students we are attempting to reach. Four of the schools have come to an agreement with us on the program and we are at the point of administrative details. The only remaining school that is not yet complete is UT Knoxville. We are using either Gift Agreements or Memoranda of Understanding for this process. Tim has a phone appointment with a development officer at UT Knoxville and expects the details to progress quickly.

(11:00)

TNPS WEBSITE

Karen said the Volunteer tab has been added to the website. It includes descriptions of the volunteer roles available as well as some pictures. The Grants 4 Plants tab has now been expanded to include both schools and universities. Karen now has two volunteers, Liz and Lorraine, to help her. One of the women, Liz, is also already helping Anne with the Facebook page. Karen explained that she will not be able to focus on our group as much as she has in the past. She and her volunteers will look into the possibilities and potential of moving our website to the Neon One platform.

(17:13)

SOCIAL MEDIA UPDATE

Anne explained that our Facebook page had over one million views in 2025. Mitchell has initiated student-contributed content. Liz has assisted Anne and expressed that she enjoyed it. Anne needs help with posting our hikes and talks and official events in a timely manner. Anne is unsure how to link our Instagram account to our Facebook account. Right now they are not

linked. Liz expressed that she can help Anne with that. Karen expressed that the students working in the Grants 4 Plants program might provide some content for the Facebook page. Mitchell said the Facebook page now has 12,840 followers. Liz suggested we post more video content. Mitchell suggested taking snips from our seminars and posting those to the Facebook page. Karen suggested as things begin to bloom in the Spring, those plants' pictures will be featured on the page.

(33:40)

TREASURER'S REPORT

Kim explained we now use Neon Pay instead of PayPal. It is a very satisfactory system. However, Neon Pay was not synchronizing with QuickBooks. Kim entered the information manually. When the two systems synchronize Kim will send out an updated copy of the year-end financial report. She then went through the details of her report. The new Dues amount will begin when an individual's renewal date comes up. Any new memberships or renewed memberships will be at the new rate. Implementing the new rates in Neon One might be a challenge. Mitchell acknowledges that setting up the new Family membership might be a problem. The complications around receiving the old membership dues amounts at the end of the year were discussed. Kim stated that our book sales have been very good. Kim explained that we are ahead each month by \$100. We absorbed an additional expense of \$1,400 for the annual conference.

(53:00)

New Business

VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT INITIATIVE UPDATE

Mitchell explained that this was started about mid-year. Karen has made changes to the website and to Neon to make it happen. It has already been successful in recruiting help, even without advertising it. About 12 positions have been outlined on the website. Karen asked how hard was it to add additional positions. Mitchell will check on that. Karen thinks she has an additional position to add.

(55:53)

IMPLEMENTATION OF NEW MEMBERSHIP DUES

Mitchell stated that this was discussed previously.

(56:00)

2026 CONFERENCE PLANNING UPDATE

Mitchell stated that the site has been chosen and the financial side of it is being considered. Mitchell asked for discussion on whether we should make dinner on Friday night included in the fee for attendance, or to allow attendees to plan for their own dinner on Friday night, since there is a restaurant onsite. We have planned for a Welcome/Social time while people are arriving on Friday. Then meet at 7:00 for the Friday evening speaker. Saturday night will be scheduled the same as what we have done before. We'll schedule a full dinner, and a box lunch for Saturday. The only change is eliminating the Friday night dinner. This will have about a \$2,000 impact on the total fees for the conference. For the lunches, the hikers go from the morning field trip directly to the afternoon field trip with nowhere and no time to get lunches. So we will keep the box lunches on Saturday. Anne suggested instead items such as granola

and fruit and nutritious options. She expressed concern about the sandwiches and things being perishable. Mitchell relates that the snacks are expensive, at about \$15 per person, which is about the same as the cost for the lunch. Bart stated that if there is a refrigerator in the guest room people can bring their own food. The State Parks will not allow us to bring in our own food for the attendees. But there is no choice what is in the snack package. Bart relates that you have to schedule a minimum amount of food to be able to rent the conference centers. There is no cost savings in eliminating the Saturday lunches and substituting snacks instead. Karen suggested that we get fewer snacks for the Social Hour than the number we had on Saturday for the 2025 conference. Bart explained that you must order for a certain minimum number of people. The Planning Committee will further discuss the various packages available.

(1:15:49)

Mary Priestley discussed the subject of our organization's 50th anniversary in 2028. People have expressed that they would like to celebrate this anniversary at the Beersheba Springs Assembly, since this is where our very first annual meeting was held. Bart suggested we hold both the 2027 and the 2028 conferences in the Spring so that they are a year apart for planning purposes. He and Kim would like to make the 2028 conference a memorial conference. We need to start planning for both conferences now. Kim would like to have the 2027 conference at Rugby. The hotel in Red Boiling Springs, where we have had a conference before, has burned down. Mary will check on Beersheba Springs for 2028.

(1:33:10)

BOARD MEMBER ELECTION STATUS

Mitchell stated that notification was sent out in the newsletter that three Board Member positions are up for re-election. So far Mitchell has not received any nominations for different people. In such a case we would re-elect the three current board members for another term. The three members up for re-election are Anne, Bart and Allan. Larry Pounds let us know that he would be dropping off after this coming December. We will wait a while and then make the elections and re-elections at that time.

(1:35:10)

REVIEW OF PROGRESS ON INITIATIVES

We have engaged more with colleges and universities, particularly at Tennessee Tech. We signed up over 25 students there at the Earth Day event, and they would like us to come back for the one on April 22nd. The UT Chattanooga herbarium events formed some good contacts for us. We are scheduled to have another herbarium event there again this year. The University of Memphis and Dr. Mandell are a strong contact and a productive relationship. We were able to visit at UT Knoxville herbarium also and made good contacts. Tim has met developmental people and professors at these universities and the TNPS is now in more people's minds at these schools. Mitchell would like to meet with several people at Austin Peay University and at MTSU also and asked for Kim's help. Kim added that TNPS contributed \$25,000 of the creation of the TN/KY Plant Atlas. Kim explained about some of the programs at MTSU. Mitchell asked Anne for help with connections with Dr. Mandell in Memphis and she agreed.

(1:47:30)

MEMBER RETENTION

Mitchell has been focusing on member retention. Our organization had over 90% retention but dropped down to a low of 78%. But over time we have come back to 96% retention.

(1:50:10)

Anne related that the videos from In Defense of Plants podcasts can be made available to us. She asked if we would like to make these available to our members. Mitchell asked Anne for a write-up on this proposal.

(1:51:40)

Karen talked about our Resources section of our website and Where To Buy Native Plants and native plant landscapers. One of the businesses that wants to be listed has many non-native plants for sale, and even some invasive plants. Karen wants to add a section for vendors on how to be listed on our page. One of the additions would be a definition of what native plants are, as well as a source for what plants are considered invasive in Tennessee. Mary suggested referring people to established lists rather than us trying to formulate a definition. Karen suggested directing vendors to the TNIPC website and the Plant Atlas to use their definitions of what is appropriate to plant in Tennessee, and will draft some language to include on our website for this issue. Karen suggested a grading scale for these vendors. Anne and Liz volunteered to help Karen with reviewing vendors and what they sell.

NEW BUSINESS discussion was closed.

The meeting was adjourned after 2 hours, 13 minutes. The next meeting will take place via Zoom on Tuesday, March 10, 2026 at 7:00 pm Eastern Time (6:00 Central Time).