

Aransas Pathways Steering Committee

Minutes of May 5, 2026 Regular Monthly Meeting at 3:00 P.M. at the Aquarium Education Center located at 706 Navigation Circle, Rockport, Texas, 78382

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 3:00 P.M. by Co-Chair Rich Connell.

2. Roll Call and Confirmation of Quorum

Members present: Commissioner Pat Rousseau, Rich Connell, Pam Stranahan, Dr. Rebekah Rylander, Steve Ferguson, Jim Farnsworth and Shelly Stuart

Members absent: Andrea Hattman, Jatin Bhakta, and Councilwoman Mary Ann Pahmiyer

Staff: Rene Butler and Leah Medado

Guests: Commissioner Dupnik, Katie Clark, Jennifer Day, Sara Rock, Shelby Bessette, Robert Back Hurst and Ashely Bennis (Zoom)

A quorum was present.

3. Citizens to Be Heard

a) Aransas Bird Days Feedback & Goose Island State Park Partnership

Sara Rock shared positive feedback regarding the inaugural Aransas Bird Days programming and partnership efforts between Aransas Pathways and Goose Island State Park. Approximately 203 participants were reported during the event weekend, with strong public participation noted in the Bird Banding activities and “Big Sit.”

b) Tourism & Educational Opportunities

Discussion included future opportunities related to field trips, tourism impacts (“heads and beds”), registration coordination, and continued collaboration with tourism and park partners.

Commissioner Bob Dupnik acknowledged the continued growth of Aransas Pathways and recognized the increasing number of events, volunteers, and partnerships taking place throughout Aransas County. Appreciation was expressed for the organization’s continued community engagement and tourism-related programming efforts.

4. Approval of April 7, 2026 Minutes

Minutes from the April 7, 2026 meeting were presented. **Motion to Approve** Motion to approve was made and seconded. Approved unanimously.

4. Steering Committee Co-Chair's Report – Rich Connell & Pam Wheat Stranahan

Welcome remarks were provided.

a) Strategic Plan Review

Leadership reviewed the existing Aransas Pathways Strategic Plan and discussed the need to revisit and refine priorities following changes in committee composition and ongoing program growth. Strategic focus areas discussed included:

- Marketing
- Partnerships
- Planning

b) Partnership Framework Discussion

The committee discussed the need to better define the role of partners, sponsors, vendors, and collaborators within Aransas Pathways programming and operations. Existing partnerships and future expectations for collaboration, volunteer support, and event participation were reviewed.

c) Planning & Committee Coordination

Discussion included improving long-term planning coordination across the four Aransas Pathways pillars:

- Birding
- History
- Kayaking
- Trails

Leadership discussed the importance of aligning future events, timelines, and committee coordination through a more structured planning process.

4.1 Event System & Planning Framework – Leah Medado

a) Event Management Standardization:

Leah Medado presented a draft framework for the standardization of Aransas Pathways event planning, logistics coordination, and operational workflows. The framework is intended to create a shared system among committees, partners, and collaborators as Pathways programming continues to grow countywide.

b) Event Classification System:

Three classifications of events were introduced:

- **Major / Signature Events** – requiring approximately 9–12 months or more of planning and development (example: Aransas Bird Days)
- **Mid-Scale Events** – requiring approximately 3–6 months of planning
- **Rapid / Pathways-Initiated Events** – short-term outreach or partner-driven activities requiring shorter preparation timelines

c) Planning & Logistics Coordination:

Discussion emphasized the importance of backend coordination involving facilities, vendors, logistics, marketing, and operational preparation to support sustainable event growth.

d) KPI & Evaluation Tools:

The framework also introduced the use of KPI (Key Performance Indicators) and assessment tools to evaluate event performance, scalability, and future planning direction. Successful rapid or mid-scale events may evolve into larger signature programs over time.

5. Subcommittee Reports- History – Pam Wheat Stranahan

a) Historical & Cultural Preservation

Leadership discussed preserving and interpreting the historical and cultural significance of Pathways sites, including Murph Park and Tule West Pavilion.

b) Tule West Legacy Recognition

Discussion included the idea of creating a future recognition or interpretive installation honoring the original volunteers and community members who helped establish Aransas Pathways and support the original venue tax initiative.

c) Historical Documentation

It was noted that historical records and materials related to the early development of Aransas Pathways are available for future reference and preservation efforts.

5.1 Kayak/Jim Fansworth Eco Summit Coordination – Jim Farnsworth

a) June 19 Kayaking Event:

Updates were provided regarding the June 19 kayaking initiative currently in rollout and planning phase.

b) Ecosystem Summit Coordination

Ashley Bennis joined virtually to discuss coordination for the upcoming Ecosystem Summit programming and tour logistics.

Proposed Tour Coordination

Discussion included possible coordination for the History Center, Cultural Interface Sculpture area, and additional interpretive stops connected to environmental and community education efforts.

Planning Coordination

Aransas Pathways was invited to assist with interpretation and coordination support related to the tour planning efforts.

Appreciation was expressed for the organization's continued community engagement and tourism-related programming efforts.

5.2 Birding –Rebekah Rylander, PhD /Sara Rock

a) Aransas Bird Days Recap

Discussion included positive feedback regarding the inaugural Aransas Bird Days programming and partnership efforts with Goose Island State Park.

Approximately 203 participants were reported during event activities, with strong participation noted in the Bird Banding and “Big Sit” activities.

b) Tourism & Educational Opportunities

Discussion included:

- future field trip opportunities,
- tourism impacts (“heads and beds”),
- registration coordination,
- and continued collaboration with tourism and park partners.

5.3 Land Use / Site Planning – Steve Ferguson, PhD

a) Land Management Planning

Discussion included ongoing land management planning considerations related to Copano Cove Ranch and other Pathways natural areas.

b) Site Improvement & Planning Concepts

Leadership reviewed conceptual planning ideas for future site improvements, accessibility, trail surfacing, shoreline considerations, interpretive signage, and visitor enhancements associated with Pathways properties.

c) Future Planning Coordination

The committee discussed the importance of continued long-term planning and coordination for future Pathways projects and site improvements.

5.5 Venue Site Maintenance / Improvements – Rene Butler

a) Linda S. Castro Nature Sanctuary Updates:

Discussion included ongoing site improvements, billboard/signage coordination, and sculpture installation activities at Linda S. Castro Nature Sanctuary.

b) 188 Kayak Launch Site:

Updates and coordination efforts regarding the 188 Kayak Launch Site were discussed as part of ongoing venue and recreational site improvement initiatives.

c) Operational Coordination:

Continued coordination between Facilities, committees, and project partners remains ongoing to support upcoming Pathways events, public access improvements, and long-term site stewardship efforts.

5.6 Events-Leah Medado

Aransas Bird Days 2026 Post-Event Report

- Recognized as one of the first countywide, multi-site birding mini-festivals organized through a county-supported initiative in partnership with Goose Island State Park.
- Activities included Bird Talk, bird banding demonstrations, guided tours, nature and heritage bus tours, and educational programming.
- Approximately 203 participants attended the combined activities, with strong volunteer and community engagement highlighted as a major success.
- Recognition was given to event speakers, volunteers, Goose Island State Park, and community partners.
- Discussion included marketing reach, sponsorship and in-kind support, and future recommendations for establishing annual festival dates, expanding tourism opportunities, and strengthening regional promotion efforts.

Next Regular Meeting

The next regular meeting is scheduled for June 2, 2026, at 3:00 P.M.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn was made and passed. The meeting adjourned at approximately 4:34 P.M.

