

**WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD  
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, OCTOBER 19, 2023, BOARD MEETING**

The following is a true copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Woodbury County, Iowa, Conservation Board held on Thursday, October 19, 2023, at Brown's Lake-Bigelow Park beginning at 4:00 p.m.

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**

Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, Cindy Bennett, Neil Stockfleth, and Tom Limoges

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT**

None

**STAFF PRESENT**

Dan Heissel, Brian Stehr, Theresa Kruid, Josh VanVoorst, and Dawn Bostwick

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Mark Nelson

**CALL TO ORDER**

Vice Chairperson Bennett called the meeting to order at 4:07 p.m.

**CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS**

None

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None

**ITEM R1. Approve Consent Agenda**

**MOTION** by Neil, second by Aaron

To approve the consent agenda.

**VOTE:**

Aye: Aaron Gehling, Cindy Bennett, & Neil Stockfleth

Nay: None

Absent: Chris Zellmer-Zant & Tom Limoges

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve Minutes of the September 14, 2023, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the September 2023 Claims and Expenditures

C3. Receive and Place on File the September 2023 Financial/Budget Report and 1st Quarter FY 23-24 Reserve Fund Report

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:

- \$50 for Screech Owl adoption in memory of Loy “Greg” Dunn Memorial from Loyanne Jensen
- \$200 from Jeff & Shay Gebauer for Nature Center programs
- Baskets from Linda Bockelman, Marilyn Milbrodt, Betty West & Pam Ridgway
- Nature Calls sponsorships and auction donations

**ITEM R2. Capital Improvement Projects Update**

**1. Little Sioux Park Campgrounds Sewer**

Dan reported that the Little Sioux campgrounds sewer project plans are 90% complete with the engineering firm. The permit application will be submitted to the DNR by the end of the week. The permit is required before starting work, but not before letting bids. A change order may be needed if it can't be approved without electrical plans. Brian went to Little Sioux to assist with taking photos of the transformers needed by the engineering team. They discovered that there are no open spaces to plug into, so an additional transformer will be needed for this system. The engineers are estimating the project at \$1.1 million, but Dan noted a few discrepancies due to using figures from projects in bigger cities with higher costs. JEO has been working with Tyler Flammang for some maps. Tyler will lay out the camping pads for Bellamy campground on top of the survey they provided. This will save time and money and allow JEO to start working on Bellamy.

*(Chris arrived at 4:14 p.m. and assumed chair duties.)*

The collection system will be installed first, hopefully by May 15<sup>th</sup>, and then the BioMicrobics system can be installed during the summer and be hooked up when done. This should avoid much interruption to park operations.

*(Tom arrived at 4:16 p.m.)*

In the end, there will be approximately 80-90 sites, all with full hookups. The site layout will stay the same in Riverside campground, but several sites will be lost with the new layout of Bellamy campground.

**2. Nature Center Foundation & Retaining Walls**

Kenny had an informational meeting Tuesday with the board of supervisors, but Dan was unable to attend because of the REAP assembly. Mark and Kenny led the discussion, and action will be taken next Tuesday.

A company will come into the nature center with radar to detect any voids and cracks under the cement. The contractor will fill the voids to prevent any further movement. Radar and borings will also be done outside on the east to test the soil. Then a firm will come in every month for six to nine months to check on the settling. If there is additional settling, they will probably have to put in piers, which creates a problem with the garden area. The plan was to continue the retaining wall from the shelter and stair-step it down for two tiers of garden. A 15-20' area next to the sidewalk will be preserved to allow for equipment to be moved to the lower level. The retaining wall hasn't been completed yet, because it was unknown if it would be part of the big project.

Mark Nelson stated that they don't think the foundation is settling around the perimeter of the building. They talked about the potential need to remove retaining wall to get equipment down below to pour in foam, but there might be another company that can run hoses instead. They suspect water is the reason for the problem. The supervisors originally allocated \$100,000 from CIP. Kenny said he has already spent \$10,000 and may need to increase it to \$120,000.

Dan noted that the water feature hasn't been running for the last two summers. He also stated that for 20 years the downspouts ran on the ground next to the building and stopped, but those have now been moved underground in tile to take drainage away from the building.

### **3. Nature Center After-Hours Public Restroom**

Brian stated that the after-hours public restroom is getting close to opening. The plumbing is done. ADA handrails have been installed. There are a few fixtures on order yet, but it will hopefully be wrapped up next week. Brian has been having trouble reaching Thompson Electric to determine if a smoke alarm is required in that room. Neil stated that an alarm would be a good idea regardless of requirements. Brian will arrange for installation with the alarm company.

## **ITEM R3. Board Member/Staff Reports**

### **1. Administrative Items**

Dan reported on the following items:

#### **a. November Meeting Date and Location**

The next meeting will be held at 4:00 p.m. on November 9, 2023, at Southwood Conservation Area.

#### **b. 2017 Pickup Accident/Insurance**

Dan reported that last month one of the Little Sioux seasonal employees was involved in a vehicle accident in Anthon that totaled the 2017 ½ ton Chevy truck. Another vehicle ran a stop sign and hit the left front of the truck. The insurance payout was \$26,430.61, and the check has been issued to the county human resources department. There was no serious injury, but the employee was required to call the company nurse. She had a cut on her arm but did not need to be seen by a doctor.

Dan recommended bidding out a new ½ ton truck since the used vehicle market is overpriced now and there is another ¾ ton truck at Little Sioux already. The department has been moving to ½ ton trucks for officer vehicles to reduce cost and fuel waste. It was a regular cab long box but will be replaced with a four-door truck. Tom questioned whether the insurance company gave a fair reimbursement if one can't be purchased at that price. Dan will check with Melissa Thomas.

Dan will look at the current budget to see if any trailers or other equipment can be delayed which could free up funds for the truck purchase. He is afraid of losing the vehicle line item in next year's budget due to a \$4 million shortfall in the county budget.

Mark explained that the shortfall comes from legislation that was passed in the state house that will hurt counties like Woodbury. The legislation caps tax rate increases and allowable growth, as well as regulates where money can be distributed.

#### **c. Budget Preview FY 24-25**

Dan presented the initial proposed FY 24-25 budget for review. The spreadsheet tracks three or four years to show what has been spent. The proposed budget has an 3.17% increase overall. Dan highlighted the main increases as being in fuel, natural gas and electrical.

Dan noted that the solar project at Snyder Bend has shown a minimal payback. He wants to meet with Dolf Ivener to understand it better.

Brief discussion was held regarding increasing camping costs, as well as plans for handling EV vehicle charging. It was noted that some private campgrounds charge a \$5/day fee for leaving the camper air conditioner on while unoccupied. It was suggested that a discussion regarding EV vehicles be placed on a future agenda.

**MOTION** by Tom, second by Aaron

To approve the FY 24-25 operating budget as presented.<sup>23-26</sup>

**VOTE:**

Aye: Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, Cindy Bennett, Neil Stockfleth & Tom Limoges

Nay: None

Absent: None

**d. Director's Annual Review Information**

Dan reminded board members that his annual review will need to be completed at the November meeting. No step plan is involved. He provided a packet containing last year's evaluation and a blank form for the current year. The chair dictates how information is to be collected.

**e. Old Business**

Dan stated that Hecox and Ingenthron wanted to meet with representatives from the WCCB and Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation possibly on November 9<sup>th</sup>. Dan will meet with them and get more information.

Dan was approached by INHF about the Lee Mitchell property. The DNR was approached initially because it is attached to table marsh, but they walked away from it. The INHF then offered it to the WCCB, but the DNR got involved again. The property is 240 acres, 90 of which is in CRP.

Dan also received a phone call from INHF that Erik O'Connell has contacted them again to sell his 119 acres. The WCCB has right of first refusal. He is asking \$7,085 per acre which is double what the board offered before. Dan did not advise considering it at that price. It was agreed by board consensus to refuse the offer.

Mark commented that agriculture has been seeing some of the lowest prices in the last couple years with interest rates not seen in 20 years, and land is not selling in Woodbury County. Interest rates are probably going to keep going up. With the county coming into the worst budget years in a long time, he urged caution in buying land.

*(Tom left at 5:16 p.m.)*

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<sup>23-26</sup> To approve the FY 24-25 operating budget as presented.

## 2. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The programs and visitors report for September was presented.
- Nature Calls grossed around \$68,000. The last invoices have just been received, but last year's expenses were around \$30,000. Volunteers want to look at the Expo Center as a possibility for next year. Food would have to be catered at that location.
- The Siouxland Big Give fundraiser was held in October, and nearly \$1,800 was raised to replace the playscape spider web, and \$2,300 was raised at Nature Calls to be put towards a new climbing boulder. A former teacher/volunteer has offered to donate the remainder to add a new spider web, climbing boulder and xylophone to the playscape.
- Kari Sandage completed six months in the Naturalist 1 position in August.
- Betty West has announced her plans to retire in January. In December, she will complete her 16<sup>th</sup> year with the nature center.
- Theresa noted that she had a field trip today for Sacred Heart with a teacher she has done programs with for 25 years.

## 3. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- There are just a couple weekends left in the camping season. The Halloween celebration at Little Sioux will be held this weekend, and it is shaping up to be biggest weekend so far. Some campers arrived last week already, and the campgrounds are full now. The event is put together by community volunteers.
- Park staff have been working on native seed collection and processing. Josh has been doing some seed collection, as well as plots to grow more native seeds.
- Several loads of rock were delivered to finish up the Brown's Lake beach parking and Snyder Bend shop yard.
- All eight officers received a variety of training and qualified on handguns and rifles at the CCPOA Fall Workshop.
- Mariah Myers, Liam Bell, and Mary Lou Guthridge attended the ICCS new employee school in Webster City.
- Dawn Bostwick attended the annual ICCS E-Commerce summit in Webster City.
- Field staff have completed their pesticide recertifications.
- Chevrolet confirmed the 1-ton chassis cab truck order prior to the board's deadline. The truck is scheduled to be built on October 16<sup>th</sup>, but it is uncertain how the strike will affect that.

## 4. Board Information

None

## 5. Other Business

Mark apologized for missing the last two meetings due to scheduling conflicts. He told board members to reach out if they ever have any questions.

**ITEM R4. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 5:24 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

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Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

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Board Secretary, Tom Limoges

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Board Chair, Chris Zellmer-Zant