# WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
# MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026, BOARD MEETING

The following is a true copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Woodbury County, Iowa, Conservation Board held on Thursday, March 19, 2026, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center beginning at 4:00 p.m.

**BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT**
Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, and Neil Stockfleth (partially via phone)

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT**
Cindy Bennett and Tom Limoges

**STAFF PRESENT**
Dan Heissel, Brian Stehr, Theresa Kruid, and Dawn Bostwick

**OTHERS PRESENT**
None

**CALL TO ORDER**
Chairperson Gehling called the meeting to order at 4:06 p.m.

**CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS**
None

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**
None

**ITEM R1. Approval of Consent Agenda**

**MOTION** by Neil, second by Chris.

To approve the consent agenda.

**VOTE:**
Aye: Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, Neil Stockfleth
Nay: None
Absent: Cindy Bennett, Tom Limoges

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve the Minutes of the February 12, 2026, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the February 2026 Claims and Expenditures

C3. Receive and Place on File the February 2026 Financial/Budget Report

C4. Uniform Policy Changes

C5. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:
- $3,284.85 from WCCF for 2025 Memberships to support DPNC
- $300 from WCCF for 2025 Memberships to support WCCB Parks

*(Board members agreed to delay the SIMPCO presentation until Neil arrived at the meeting in person.)*

**ITEM R3. Consideration and Approval of Garbage Service Contracts**

Brian presented proposals received for non-hazardous waste pickup services. All proposals were for two-year contracts.

Little Sioux Park, Southwood Conservation Area and Fowler Forest:
Proposals were requested from two companies; only one bid was received from CHN Garbage, the current provider, at an annual cost of $11,826. This amount remains unchanged from the previous contract term.

**MOTION** by Chris, second by Neil.

To accept the proposal for non-hazardous waste pickup service at Little Sioux Park, Southwood Conservation Area and Fowler Forest and to enter into a two-year contract with CHN Garbage at an annual cost of $11,826.[26-8]

**VOTE:**
Aye: Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, Neil Stockfleth
Nay: None
Absent: Cindy Bennett, Tom Limoges

Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center:
Proposals were requested from three companies; only one was received from Gill Hauling, the current provider, at an annual cost of $998.76. This is an increase of $90.76 from the previous contract term.

**MOTION** by Chris, second by Neil

To accept the proposal for non-hazardous waste pickup service at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center and to enter into a two-year contract with Gill Hauling at an annual cost of $998.76.[26-9]

**VOTE:**
Aye: Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, Neil Stockfleth
Nay: None
Absent: Cindy Bennett, Tom Limoges

Brown's Lake-Bigelow Park and Snyder Bend Park:
Proposals were requested from three companies; only one was received from Gill Hauling, the current provider, at an annual cost of $5,353.20. This reflects an increase of approximately $900 from the last contract term but remains lower than the term prior to that.

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[26-8] To accept the proposal for non-hazardous waste pickup service at Little Sioux Park, Southwood Conservation Area and Fowler Forest and to enter into a two-year contract with CHN Garbage at an annual cost of $11,826.
[26-9] To accept the proposal for non-hazardous waste pickup service at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center and to enter into a two-year contract with Gill Hauling at an annual cost of $998.76.

**MOTION** by Chris, second by Neil.

To accept the proposal for non-hazardous waste pickup service at Brown's Lake-Bigelow Park and Snyder Bend Park and to enter into a two-year contract with Gill Hauling for an annual cost of $5,353.20.[26-10]

**VOTE:**
Aye: Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, Neil Stockfleth
Nay: None
Absent: Cindy Bennett, Tom Limoges

Aaron suggested O.C. Sanitation as an additional option for future bid cycles.

**ITEM R4. Website Overhaul – ADA Requirements**

Dan reported that the new accessibility app has been installed on the current website, bringing it to approximately 90% compliance. He has signed the contract with Artillery Media, and development of the new website has begun. The current site contains 46 pages, many of which will be combined or removed to streamline the site.

Theresa stated that staff now have access to Basecamp, the project management platform used by Artillery Media, to communicate with the development team and track progress. Staff have completed onboarding and branding questionnaires, reviewed the site outline to determine which pages need to be rebuilt, looked at mood boards to pinpoint preferred colors and fonts, and provided branding materials.

Dawn added that the entire process could take another 10-12 weeks, but the current website is already at a sufficient level of compliance for the upcoming federal mandate deadline. She also noted that the accessibility app also includes some litigation coverage, if needed.

Theresa stated that she will be meeting with Kari and Mariah to review compliance requirements for social media accounts and to determine whether there are built-in settings that can be utilized to improve accessibility.

**ITEM R5. Capital Improvement Projects**

**1. FEMA Projects Update – Archaeological Study**

Dan reported that the archaeological study has been completed, and results indicate that nothing of significance was found. Although work would normally be able to begin at this stage, FEMA is currently operating in emergency-only mode. Existing projects have been put on hold due to limited funding and staff capacity.

Dan expressed concern that the river level may rise before work can proceed. He also stated that the rock bids previously received from L.G. Everist have expired and will no longer be honored, as six months have passed. The contractor will obtain updated bids.

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[26-10] To accept the proposal for non-hazardous waste pickup service at Brown's Lake-Bigelow Park and Snyder Bend Park and to enter into a two-year contract with Gill Hauling for an annual cost of $5,353.20.

Dan stated that he will not begin any work until final approval is received and funding is guaranteed. He will be issuing a request for qualifications and initiating the process of selecting an engineering firm.

*(Neil joined the meeting in person.)*

**ITEM R2. Presentation of Needs Assessment Survey by SIMPCO – Nathan Kistner**

Nathan Kistner of SIMPCO presented the results of the Needs Assessment Survey conducted on behalf of WCCB. The survey examined how residents use the parks, what they value most, and where they would like to see improvements. A mixed-mode methodology was used, sampling 2,000 households. A third-party vendor was contracted to ensure a representative geographic spread. A total of 252 responses were received – 125 by mail and 127 online – resulting in a 95% confidence level with a ±5% margin of error. Nathan noted that the results qualify as a scientific study similar in structure to a political poll.

Findings showed that 83% of respondents have lived in the county for at least 20 years, with the majority aged 55 and older, indicating a deeply rooted and locally invested population. Seventy-seven percent reported that parks are extremely or very important, and 69% indicated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with current offerings.

Support for a tax increase was mixed: 37% responded yes and 41% maybe. Support increased to 54% when the funding was tied to specific projects. Respondents preferred voluntary contributions as a funding mechanism (66%). Top funding priorities identified were parks (42%) and trails (29%).

Suggested strategies include:
- Improving basic maintenance and infrastructure.
- Expanding high-demand amenities, such as water recreation, cabins, and trails.
- Increasing programming and county-wide outreach.
- Strengthening conservation efforts, specifically water quality, habitat protection, and invasive species management.
- Using project-specific funding strategies to build public support.

Dan stated that he will request time on the Board of Supervisors agenda for Nathan to present the survey results.

A brief discussion was held regarding the Inkpaduta water trail and potential ways to encourage visitors to stop at county parks. Theresa noted that the DNR will be holding a public event for the water trail on August 8. Nature Center naturalists will be assisting in a supporting role for the event.

**ITEM R6. Board Member/Staff Reports**

**1. Administrative Items**

Dan reported on the following items:

**a. Set Next Meeting Date and Location**

The next meeting will be held at 4:00 p.m. on April 16, 2026, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center.

**b. Nature Calls Venue**

Dan stated that he was impressed with the first Zoom meeting with the event partner, Siouxland Sports Academy. Theresa stated that although the agreement has not yet been signed, the group appears fully committed. They requested additional information, such as budget details, expense breakdowns, and sponsorship lists, and approximately half of the requested materials have already been provided.

The group has indicated they will assist with marketing, ticket sales, and other aspects of event promotion. Dan mentioned that the Arena has an electronic billboard outside their building with significant traffic exposure, and Theresa added that a billboard has not been used for event promotion for several years. They will provide a list of their sponsors but prefer that WCCB make the contacts to avoid any appearance of double dipping. Dan added that he hopes staff or board members will recognize some of the sponsors provided and feel comfortable reaching out to them.

Dan suggested that the committee reconsider the ticket price. He noted that he received a comment that more people may be able to attend if the ticket price was lower. Theresa stated that the price was raised last year to account for the increased food cost. Aaron suggested evaluating whether the event would earn more margin through ticket sales or by lowering ticket prices to increase attendance and rely more heavily on auction revenue.

Theresa reported that she met with Kathy from Aggies on Tuesday. Unfortunately, Aggies has three weddings booked for that same day, so it is uncertain whether they can commit to catering the event, but Kathy is interested in discussing it further. Theresa asked Kathy to decide by the end of the month, so other options can be pursued if needed.

Theresa is working on updating the sponsor list and will have information at the next meeting. Sponsors listed who have not contributed will be removed, and everyone was encouraged to seek out new potential sponsors.

**c. Budget CIP Request (FY 2026/27)**

Dan reported that he had received no additional information regarding the budget. He attended the last two supervisors meetings, but nothing has been approved and the General Basic Fund is approximately $630,000 short. He has asked supervisors Nelson and Dietrich whether departmental budget cuts should be expected. Dietrich stated that he is hopeful the shortfall can be addressed by having all departments contribute a little and noted that conservation contributed significantly last year. The budget must be approved and published by March 31st.

Dan stated that the department is currently unable to fill the six park seasonal positions that were forfeited last year until they are approved to be reinstated. Supervisors told

the county engineer during this week's meeting that seasonal employees are very important because they often end up being future full-time employees. Later in the meeting, Dan commented to the supervisors that he was glad they understood the value of seasonal employees and added that five of the conservation department's full-time staff started as seasonal employees, and two candidates currently being interviewed are also former seasonal staff.

Dan reviewed his planned CIP requests for FY26-27.

- Nature Center water feature repair (estimated at approximately $100,000)
- Nature Center retaining wall – 3 sections (approximately $18,000)
- Replacement of the Nature Center deck and ramp (approximately $48,000)

Dan was informed that road work is being planned near Anthon, and when the bid is prepared in the fall, a bid will also be requested for completing the remaining roads in Little Sioux Park, allowing that project to be submitted as a FY27-28 CIP request.

Finally, Dan reported that another survey was conducted on the building foundation, and none of the monitoring points have shifted.

**d. HUD Funding/Little Sioux Park Bank Erosion – Request for Qualifications**

Dan has the request for qualifications form completed and will be sending it out. Action will be requested at the April board meeting to choose an engineering company. Several engineering firms have expressed interest. The firm chosen will be responsible for preparing the HUD grant application for the funding to repair the two banks that are sloughing at Little Sioux Park.

**e. Nature Center Tours**

Full-time Nature Center staff have taken three days of nature center tours, including visits to Sioux, Lyon, Harrison, Pottawattamie, O'Brien, Clay, and Dickinson counties, as well as Good Earth State Park in South Dakota and Fontanelle Forest in Omaha. Staff agreed that it was beneficial to visit such a variety of centers and that it provided ideas of both what to do and what to avoid. The next step will be to meet with staff to sort through the ideas and determine needs and wants for the new addition. Dan noted that the process may take some time due to current workload and staff capacity. Neil suggested bringing in an outside facilitator who would be impartial and help work though the ideas. Aaron agreed that a facilitator would do a great job of keeping discussion focused and would also provide a final written summary and proposal with action steps. Dan will have information on a facilitator for the April board meeting.

Neil also noted that CF Industries has a foundation that provides large grants and has a preference for STEM-related projects.

**2. Board Information**

None

**3. Other Business**

None

**4. Old Business**

None

**ITEM R7. Department Reports**

**1. Nature Center Activities**

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The February programs and visitors report was presented.
- The calendar is nearly filled up for spring field trips.
- Public programs will taper off in May and pick back up in the summer.
- Brian, Tyler, and park staff helped Stacey Bragg with East High School's Hunters Education class (90 students), which is part of the Sioux City curriculum. Both Kirby and Stacey are retiring in July, and their positions will not be filled, so they are bringing WCCB staff in to help. They will also be helping with the class at West High School, and there will be a field day held at the nature center on Saturday.
- The annual volunteer dinner was held in February with an attendance of more than 40 people. Rod Tondreau was presented with the Conservation Educator award. Don Dixon was unable to attend but will receive the Friend of Conservation award at a later time.
- Theresa submitted a grant invitation request to Gilchrist for the raptor house.
- The Foundation's annual meeting was held in February, during which two new board members were elected.
- Mariah and Theresa attended the IAN workshop; Kari was unable to attend due to illness.
- Dawn helped set up online program registration through the MyCountyParks website, including summer camps. Registration will begin April 7th. Online registration is encouraged, but paper copies will still be accepted.
- Seven excellent intern candidates were interviewed. Four candidates were offered positions, and all four have accepted.

**2. Park Activities**

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Park staff have begun interviewing seasonal staff. Summer ranger applications are lacking, probably due to the longer six-month period required for this position.
- New furniture was delivered to the Snyder Bend cabins. A couch and chair in each cabin were replaced with two couches. After delivery, it was determined that the two full-size couches did not leave enough room to be ADA compliant, so they will be exchanged for love seats in the two ADA cabins to maintain accessibility.
- Snyder Bend staff have been grinding stumps and filling holes after Gardner Tree Service removed 12 cottonwood trees that were beyond conservation equipment capabilities. Eight more have been identified for staff to take down.

- Little Sioux staff have been using the bucket truck to trim trees that could interfere with the newly installed Wi-Fi equipment, as well as those that could rub against campers.
- Southwood staff, supported by crews and equipment from the other two districts, completed a 350-acre prescribed burn by the Zook and Salsness parcels just before the burn ban went into effect. The burn went well and made phenomenal progress.
- Dan added that Erik is also working with a couple WCCB easements in that area that need burned.
- Brian coordinated with the Sheriff's Office to organize the CCPOA Western Spring Workshop for forty officers. Sergeant Chuck Jorgensen provided an excellent de-escalation training, complete with some impressive role playing by a few WCCB officers. It was a good mix of classroom training and rifle/pistol qualification.
- Neil asked if the removed trees are being replaced. Dan stated that he had been contacted by Mike Heller from Foth regarding an urban forestry grant. They would prepare the grant for free on behalf of the WCCB. They have an arborist on staff that would survey Little Sioux Park, Brown's Lake-Bigelow Park, and Snyder Bend Park to identify each tree, evaluate its condition, and take soil samples. They would then make recommendations on which trees to remove because of damage and what kind of trees to plant, including how and where to plant them. Sioux County is participating in the same program. Brian added that the important thing is to know what kind to plant given current and emerging diseases.

**ITEM R8. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:17 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

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Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

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Board Secretary, Chris Zellmer-Zant

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Board Chair, Aaron Gehling