WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, APRIL 16, 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, April 16, 2026, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center beginning at 4:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT
Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, Cindy Bennett, Neil Stockfleth

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT
Tom Limoges

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

OTHERS PRESENT
Mark Nelson, County Supervisor/Conservation Board Liaison (Via phone)

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Gehling called the meeting to order at 4:05 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, Cindy Bennett, Neil Stockfleth
Nay: None
Absent: Tom Limoges

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve the Minutes of the March 19, 2026, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the March 2026 Claims and Expenditures

C3. Receive and Place on File the March 2026 Financial/Budget Report and 3rd Quarter FY 25-26 Reserve Fund Report

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:
- $500 from Sylvia Kuennen for Summer camps and interns
- $25 from Dawn Snyder for Sheldon Hamman Memorial (for turtles' care)

- $25 from Dawn Snyder for Phyliss Nickolson Memorial (for raptor house)
- $25 from Dawn Snyder for Margaret Thompson Memorial (for raptor house)
- Live Western (Ornate) Box Turtle from Laurie Yaneff & Bob Greco
- Honeybee for the observation hive in exhibit gallery from Dean & Barb Johnson
- Garden tools for Nature Playscape from Donna Popp

ITEM R2. Urban Forestry Grant

Dan reported that Foth Engineering contacted him and other CCBs offering to write an urban forestry grant. Sioux and Woodbury were the only counties to take them up on the offer. They requested and received $50,000 for each county. The funding will cover their forester conducting tree inventories, performing soil tests, and developing a tree management plan for Little Sioux Park, Brown's Lake-Bigelow Park, and Snyder Bend Park. Of that amount, $10,000 will be earmarked specifically for tree removal. Paperwork has been signed and submitted. We are now waiting for confirmation from state and federal agencies.

ITEM R3. Owego Mitigation Bank

Dan stated that the mitigation bank was established in 2011, consisting of 40 acres on the southwest corner of Owego, is being closed. The original expectation was to generate approximately 30 credits, but that wasn't met. Dan was advised not to sign anything beyond documentation confirming deposits into the easement monitoring fund.

In 2011, former director Rick Schneider signed an agreement to purchase the property for $100,000, with the company planning to donate $50,000 back. The wetlands did not develop as expected and did not produce the anticipated number of credits.

An easement was placed on the property, and the company paid $20,000 into the easement monitoring fund. The County Treasurer was able to locate the receipt confirming this payment. Neil explained that the landowner purchased the ground, placed an easement on it, and agreed to maintain it as a wetland. They intended to sell easements to others needing to mitigate for disturbing wetlands. In this case, it didn't work out for them.

Dan stated that Foth Engineering will have to do a survey and delineate the wetlands, identifying existing vegetation. It isn't expected to score very well. He added that the board is not obligated to move forward with the purchase, however, the right of first refusal from the 2011 agreement is still in place.

ITEM R4. Capital Improvement Projects

1. **FEMA Projects**
   a. **Trail**

      FEMA has released the trail project for work to begin. Brian and Dan visited the site and found that the shortcut road had been mined, leaving a ravine filled with spoils. Brian contacted Bedrock, and they agreed to rebuild and pack a temporary access road. With that in place, only about 150 yards will require equipment to travel with one wheel on the trail. Deeds Construction received the bid for the project and is prepared to begin. With access restored, they will be able to get in and pour the concrete.

c. Boat Ramp

Dan reported that the archeological survey is currently on hold, because FEMA is not processing older projects at this time. It is likely that river levels will rise before approval is issued. The survey results indicated no significant findings. The next steps require review by FEMA and then by the tribes. Dan will continue to stay in contact with the state FEMA representative.

When it became clear that only the boat ramp portion would move forward, the survey was split into two parts, allowing the eroded bank to be addressed separately. The cost for this portion was $3,000, which can be included as part of the HUD funding.

A request for qualifications has been issued, with responses due on the 24th. Engineering firms must have a certified individual qualified to work on HUD grants. Firms that do not specify that they have a certified staff member, or that they will partner with SIMPCO, will lose points and will not remain in consideration.

2. Great Outdoors Foundation Owego

Dan reported that the Great Outdoors Foundation Owego project is moving forward to pump water from the drainage ditch into the wetlands. IDALS supports the concept and will likely fund it. If they do not, the GOF is also looking for water projects and may be another option.

One structure will need to be plugged and another turned so the entire area can be flooded. The remaining question is who will cover the cost of pumping. The system will need to operate on electricity, as solar power does not provide sufficient capacity. Dan will advocate for the GOF to cover the electrical costs. Once completed, diesel pumping will no longer be necessary.

Brief discussion was held regarding a data center proposed for the Salix area and the potential development of solar farms.

ITEM R5. 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 May 14, 2026, at the Snyder Bend Park.

b. Nature Calls Update

Theresa reported that she expected to receive the Nature Calls venue agreement earlier but did not get it until Tuesday afternoon. She noted several concerning items and accepted Katie Roberts' (Siouxland Community Foundation) offer to review the agreement. Theresa emphasized the importance of ensuring the agreement is issued through the Siouxland Sports Academy's foundation so donors would receive full credit

for their contributions. A meeting will be scheduled with the Siouxland Sports Academy representatives to discuss the agreement further.

Aaron shared that he was informed Mozak's Furniture expects to move into the Arena building before the end of September, and he recommended confirming venue availability.

Theresa distributed sponsor lists and encouraged board members to report any contact information updates. She also challenged members to identify new potential sponsors.

She also presented catering information for Aggies, House of Q, and 5th Avenue Catering. Staley's was not available for the event date. The board recommended proceeding with 5th Avenue Catering unless circumstances change. They expressed appreciation for Aggies' efforts to accommodate the event despite having several commitments that day and noted that Aggies could be considered again next year.

c. Online Camping Reservation Update

Brian reported that staff has been discussing online camping reservations for quite some time. The initial plan was to have portions of Brown's Lake–Bigelow Park and Snyder Bend Park ready this spring, but after meeting again this week and noting that many counties have transitioned all campgrounds at once, it was decided to move all campsites online by mid-summer, with ample advertising beforehand. Some public pushback is expected regardless of timing. The proposed system would be fully online and cash-free, with a zero-day reservation policy allowing campers to reserve up to the day of arrival, either from home or from the campsite. Reservations could be made up to two years in advance. The target start date is July 15th. QR codes will be placed on campsite posts to provide visitors with easy onsite access to the reservation system.

Dan noted that counties already offering online campsite reservations reported wishing they had made the change sooner. Public demand for reservable sites has been strong, and the new system will eliminate the need to have a camping unit present to hold a site. Coupon books and camping envelopes will be eliminated.

Brian has taken all necessary photos. Dawn will need to build approximately 150 campsites into the system and generate QR codes for each. Field staff will need to install signage and notices.

A question was raised regarding cancellation refunds. Staff will need to develop a formal refund policy similar to the current policy for cabins and shelters.

d. Nature Center Facilitator Information

Dan reported that he had a positive conversation with Linda Krei, who is willing to serve as a facilitator for the nature center addition process. Linda indicated she would not need materials in advance and is already familiar with the facility through past family visits and meetings held there. She would guide staff through the process and compile the results in writing. Her estimated cost is $3,000–$5,000 for approximately four hours with staff. The Board reached consensus to move forward with using a facilitator, and Dan will explore options for funding the expense.

2. Board Information

- Neil reported that Josh VanVoorst will be giving a presentation on the Owego Wetland Complex next Wednesday for Earth Day at CF Industries.
- Aaron asked whether the biologist or anyone else had provided an update on potential grant funding for the Brown's Lake dike project. He noted that Justin Terrill of MidAmerican indicated that the DNR has received a substantial amount of funding for the dike and it appears the project is likely to happen in 2027. Dan responded that he has not heard any updates from Justin or Doug Chaffa. He added that the dike improvement would help with long-term water control, which is important for both the campground and the beach.
- Dan reported that the MidAmerican plant is currently conducting maintenance and will turn the pumps back on the third week of May. Snyder Bend is currently nearly dry.

3. Other Business

None

4. Old Business

None

ITEM R6. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The March programs and visitor report was presented.
- Program and field trip schedules are nearly full.
- Online registration for summer camps has begun. On the first day, 119 registrations were received (compared to 9 last year). During the first week, 190 registrations were received (compared to 84 last year). Camps are currently 62% full. Due to issues Sioux County experienced the week prior, adjustments were made to ensure better results. One downside is that foundation members did not receive early registration access – a benefit previously offered.
- The annual Volunteer Workday is scheduled for Saturday, April 18, with the goal of cleaning up the garden beds and around the building and raptor house, and possibly some work on the trails.
- Next Wednesday, Brodie Skinner will be giving a presentation on seed collection and cleaning for the Coffee and Conservation series.
- On Thursday, CF Industries staff will be assisting with spreading woodchips on the playscape.
- Neil noted that if any prairie rescue days are scheduled, his firm will publicize them internally. Each employee receives one volunteer day per year, and he will share opportunities as they arise.
- Staff is currently working on summer program schedules.
- All intern positions have been filled.

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Most summer positions have been hired; the concession stand positions are still open.
- Staff has been shocking the wells, and water testing is scheduled for next week.
- Little Sioux Park: Johnston Excavating completed the cleanup of the outlet area. They also pushed down several hazardous cottonwood trees that posed a danger of falling into a potential future development area. More than 50 trees were removed, with only about a dozen remaining. The contractor completed in a few hours what would have taken staff months to accomplish.
- Southwood Conservation Area: All three staff members assisted with a wildfire response a few weeks ago. They helped with mop-up efforts, monitored the fire overnight, and removed burning trees that could not be reached with a hose. The bucket truck was brought in from Little Sioux Park to assist with cabling a tree.
- Snyder Bend Park and Bigelow Park: Four side-dump loads of gravel were brought in to refresh the camping pads at Snyder Bend. Rob Gray began his position as Resource Technician on April 1st.
- Training: Staff completed CPR training at the nature center. Several staff members attended the hunter education recertification course in Sioux County. Staff also assisted DNR Officer Stacy Bragg at West High School with their hunter education program. A hunter education field day was held at the nature center.
- A conditional offer is being extended to a candidate for the Little Sioux Assistant Resource Manager position pending successful completion of the POST and MMPI testing. He was advised not to give notice at his current job until all requirements are met.

ITEM R7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:50 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