WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, MAY 14, 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, May 14, 2026, at Snyder Bend Park beginning at 4:00 p.m.

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

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT
None

STAFF PRESENT
Dan Heissel, Brian Stehr, Theresa Kruid, Dawn Bostwick, Josh VanVoorst, Dylan Bales, Rob Gray

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

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Gehling called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS
None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
None

ITEM R1. Approval of Consent Agenda

MOTION by Tom, second by Neil.

To approve the consent agenda.

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

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve the Minutes of the April 16, 2026, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the April 2026 Claims and Expenditures

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

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:
- $250 from NW Sierra Club for raptor house project
- Rock collection given by Mary Delfs

ITEM R2. Request For Qualifications HUD Project Little Sioux River

Dan reported that the Request for Qualifications for the Little Sioux River HUD project was distributed and that four submissions were received from Foth, JEO, LT Luis, and Bolton & Menk. After a thorough review and scoring process, Dan and Brian recommended contracting with JEO for the grant writing and design work. Dan noted that JEO has two grant administrators on staff who meet the Iowa Department of Economic Development's requirements for CDBG funding grants. The other engineering firms would need to work through SIMPCO for the HUD grant.

(Chris joined the meeting via phone at 4:07 p.m.)

MOTION by Chris, second by Cindy.

To engage with JEO for the HUD project to repair the bank erosion at Little Sioux Park.[26-11]

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

Dan added that JEO will not get into the design work too heavily until the grant has been awarded.

ITEM R3. Capital Improvement Projects

1. **FEMA Projects**
   a. **Trail**
   Dan met with Deeds Construction again today. They will be pouring the concession stand sidewalks at Little Sioux Park and anticipate completing the trail work next week if the weather allows. An access road has been installed to minimize truck traffic on the concrete trail for most of the route.

   b. **Boat Ramp**
   Dan reported receiving an email with the encouraging news that FEMA is back to working on older cases. The case manager has submitted the boat ramp archeological survey for review. The hope is to secure approval from both FEMA and the tribe so the work can be completed before the water levels rise.

   Brian received a call from the contractor who was awarded the bid. The contractor's original rock quotes are no longer valid due to the amount of time that has passed, and he is currently obtaining updated pricing. Brian confirmed with FEMA that adjustments can be made for material cost changes. Once the new quote is received, it will be submitted to FEMA.

   The planned work includes underscoring the ramp, pumping concrete underneath, filling in the blowout on the side, adding soil, and installing riprap along the banks.

[26-11] To engage with JEO for the HUD project to repair the bank erosion at Little Sioux Park.

2. Great Outdoors Foundation Owego Project

Bolton & Menk began working with the Great Outdoors Foundation (GOF). Initially, the WCCB was expected to provide a funding match and intended to request that GOF establish an endowment, with interest proceeds used for electricity and pump repairs. However, Iowa Department of Ag Land Stewardship (IDALS) has expressed strong interest in the project and has agreed to take it on and fully fund it. As a result, GOF is no longer involved. The WCCB will need to pay project costs upfront and then request reimbursement from IDALS, which typically processes reimbursements within approximately 30 days.

Tom asked whether establishing an endowment was still a possibility, and Dan stated he would inquire. He added that the WCCB had previously anticipated contributing its own funds to match the project, but since this is no longer required, those funds could potentially be redirected to create an endowment independently if necessary.

(Chris arrived in person at 4:22 p.m.)

IDALS had discussed pumping all water from the top and redirecting the flow in the opposite direction. Josh VanVoorst questioned why the flow would not follow the current direction as it was designed.

The WCCB will enter into a scope of services agreement with Bolton & Menk and sign an agreement with IDALS.

MOTION by Neil, second by Tom.

To enter into agreement with Iowa Department of Ag Land Stewardship and Bolton & Menk to complete the Owego enhancement project.[26-12]

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

ITEM R4. 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 June 11, 2026, at Little Sioux Park.

[26-12] To enter into agreement with Iowa Department of Ag Land Stewardship and Bolton & Menk to complete the Owego enhancement project.

b. CIP Requests

Dan reported that the Board of Supervisors reviewed CIP project requests on Tuesday. He submitted three projects for the nature center: the garden retaining walls, the observation deck concrete and ramp, and the water feature retaining walls and sidewalk.

Mark Nelson stated that Dan had arranged for him and Dave Dietrich to visit the nature center in advance to review the proposed projects and had also provided information packets for Supervisors at the meeting. He added that the presentations on Tuesday were informational only, allowing the board time to consider the requests, and that decisions are expected at the June 2nd meeting. Mark stated that while $1.2 million is budgeted, nearly $2.7 million in requests were submitted. Although such a large gap isn't typical, this year includes numerous projects, some of which are considered high priority. The conservation projects are not among the most critical, but they are the only projects eligible for LOST funds due to their economic development component. Mark is working with the budget director and hopes to secure funding for the back sidewalk and water feature, though the retaining wall and entrance sidewalk likely will not be funded.

Mark explained that one $600,000 request submitted by WCICC was for five-year computer and printer replacements and network upgrades. Due to the Iran war and increased demand for precious metals, project costs have doubled and continue to rise weekly. Because of this rapid inflation, that request needs to be approved quickly.

c. Law Enforcement Computers

Brian provided an update on the law enforcement computers. Funding was approved by the Board of Supervisors to replace them, and the systems will be supported by WCICC.

Dan explained that originally WCICC was reluctant to take responsibility for these computers, which resulted in Brian spending significant time managing them. Dan recently contacted John Malloy, who agreed to support the equipment, but would need to be replaced first as they are out of date. The cost estimate was $37,000 for seven computers, with Dan and Brian sharing one. The plan was to use gambling revenue to fund the purchase; however, after recalculating and realizing that available funds were insufficient, the request was scaled back to six computers instead. Brian is coordinating with WCICC on this adjustment.

It was noted that WCICC should include these computers in the same replacement cycle used for the Sheriff's Department. Appreciation was expressed to Mark for his assistance on the matter.

d. Nature Calls

Theresa reported that she, Dan, and Brian met with Dustin and James of the Siouxland Sports Academy earlier this week and signed the contract for the Nature Calls event. The Foundation treasurer signed on behalf of the Foundation. The first committee meeting will be scheduled on-site.

Theresa distributed sponsor packets to the board members.

Aaron clarified a comment he made last month, stating that Mozak's is moving into the Ashley Hom Furniture building, not the Arena.

e. Little Sioux Wi-Fi

Brian reported that Quality Telecomm has completed Wi-Fi installation at Little Sioux Park's Riverside campground. The system is functioning well, and all sites are now online. He noted that there is strong coverage at the wagon wheel area at the back of Riverside.

He suggested offering free Wi-Fi for one year before transitioning to a paid service to allow time to work out any issues. Bandwidth is currently limited to 15 Mbps downstream and 5 Mbps upstream, which is adequate for general browsing but likely insufficient for streaming. The shop previously operated at 50 Mbps; Long Lines recommended increasing to 1 gig, but the plan is to start at 500 Mbps and monitor performance. The speed can be increased at any time if needed. The system has not been running long enough to gather meaningful customer feedback.

Brian emphasized that throttling is essential to prevent any single user from consuming excessive bandwidth. By next spring, a charge-based premium service could be introduced to offer higher speeds. At that point, the overall service speed would need to be increased to 1 gig.

f. Online Camping Reservations

Brian reported that the new backcountry campsite at Southwood will be going online on Saturday and will serve as a test site for building the rest of the sites online. He noted that a few operational details still need to be finalized, such as whether two-night minimum reservations should be required on weekends, as it is for cabins.

Josh asked how the 14-day maximum stay will be enforced. Dawn stated that nothing in the system currently prevents someone from booking consecutive reservations, but a notice could be added to the checkout process requiring guests to acknowledge that if they exceed the maximum stay, they will be asked to leave and will not be offered a refund. Dan added that the rules and regulations will be updated to address these issues.

g. Nature Center Facilitator Information

Dan announced that he has coordinated with Linda Krei to facilitate a planning session with staff regarding the potential nature center addition. The meeting is scheduled for Monday from 12:00 to 5:00 p.m. and will include all nature center staff members. Her facilitation fees are expected to range between $3,000 and $5,000. Tom noted that there may be an opportunity for a donor to cover some of these costs. He also mentioned that the donor had asked when they would be brought onsite to view the facility.

Dan asked the board when they would like to make a public announcement about the project, adding that a decision will also be needed on whether to hire a professional firm to assist with fundraising. Aaron observed that the community is often generous with in-kind contributions and may be more inclined to donate materials and labor, rather than monetary gifts.

Dan suggested that the board hold a special project meeting after the facilitated staff session to review the recommendations, hear staff feedback, and establish a path forward. Tom suggested that the Nature Calls event could potentially serve as a springboard for announcing the project.

2. Board Information

None

3. Other Business

Seasonal Staff Hiring Nepotism Policy:

Dan noted that the board has always allowed seasonal staff to be hired provided they are not hired or supervised by a family member. Several employee family members have been worked as seasonal staff in the past. This summer Josh hired Brian's son for the Brown's Lake concession stand, and Human Resources questioned the nepotism law. Dan explained the department's policy and that the employee will not be supervised by a family member. If there is any issue, Josh will defer to Dan rather than Brian.

Potential Data Center:

Dan reported that the Salix City Council voted last night to voluntarily annex 900 acres, and the rumors are that the intent is to attract a data center. Mark and Aaron were in attendance. Dan received a phone call this morning asking what the County planned to do. He replied that he would not make any statement until the board had discussed it but noted that his primary concern would be water usage. Conservation groups have already been discussing the issue.

Mark stated that he attended the meeting simply to observe. Approximately 100 people were present, many demanding answers. The council has maintained that they do not know why the landowners want to be annexed, but the public was skeptical. Nothing is confirmed at this time; while the landowner supports annexation, there is no developer currently committed to building a data center. Mark also noted that the County does not have a formal role in the matter. The council commented that the County would still be maintaining the roads within the newly annexed area, but Mark noted that this would need to be negotiated.

Letter from Emergency Management:

Dan received a letter from Emergency Management Director, Mike Montino, thanking all WCCB staff members who helped with the recent Bronson fire. Southwood staff and Dan were the ones who were able to respond.

4. Old Business

None

ITEM R5. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The April programs and visitor report was presented.
- Field trips have been very busy in April and May, with over 250 kids visiting the nature center today alone.
- Kari assisted the Loess Hills Audubon Society with programming for World Migratory Bird Day at Bacon Creek Park.
- Mariah presented reptile programs at the Art Center's Family Fun Day.
- Camp registration is currently 72% full.
- Theresa is working on a grant for the new raptor house
- A volunteer workday was held on April 18th, and a CF Industries group provided additional volunteer support on April 23rd.
- Mark commented that his son's 1st grade class came to nature center last week and had a great experience.
- Theresa and Dawn have been working on documentation for the new website. The new home page mockup looks good.
- The Nature Calls artwork, which features a hummingbird, is ready.

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Parks are open for camping, and the camping kickoff weekend went well with average attendance. Instead of offering campers a coupon for a free night to be used later in the season, opening day was made free this year due to the coupon's incompatibility with the upcoming online registration system. Promotional plastic cups and chip clips were handed out.
- Southwood staff participated in a cooperative burn week. Brian received positive feedback from Pottawattamie County regarding WCCB staff performance. WCCB staff also had to move up the chain of command after the incident commander experienced a family emergency. Tanner Petersen received the MVP award for the week.
- Snyder Bend and Bigelow staff completed a large burn at Owego.
- Little Sioux staff have been working on hazard tree removals and coordinating with the electrician to complete Wi-Fi installation.
- A candidate has been offered the Assistant Resource Manager position at Little Sioux Park, contingent upon passing all background checks and testing. Once completed, the offer will be finalized, he will submit his two-week notice with the DNR, and a start date at the academy will be obtained.
- Staff assisted with a few burns at the nature center.

- Snyder Bend Park (Dylan):
  - Staff have been cleaning up the cottonwoods that were taken down in March. Another 25-30 trees were taken down by staff following the 12 that were taken down professionally.
  - All seasonal positions had been filled, but one candidate withdrew.
- Brown's Lake – Bigelow Park (Josh):
  - Lake levels are down, and camping has been slow at both parks.
  - Josh posted warning signs on the boat ramp today. He noted that there has been no communication from the DNR, which frustrates visitors and leads to misinformation being shared on social media. Dan stated that he wrote an article to address the issue for the newsletter that will be sent out tomorrow.

Brief discussion was held regarding the official boundaries of Snyder Bend.

(Tom left at 5:49 p.m.)

Plans for a dike across Brown's Lake were also discussed. Aaron reported that he had been told that the DNR has agreed to the project and has funding available. It was noted that this information should be confirmed with Doug Chaffa if anyone sees him.

ITEM R6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:55 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