WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 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, June 11, 2026, at Little Sioux Park beginning at 4:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT
Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, Cindy Bennett, Neil Stockfleth *(partially by phone)*, Tom Limoges *(partially by phone)*

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT
None

STAFF PRESENT
Dan Heissel, Brian Stehr, Theresa Kruid, Dawn Bostwick, Derek Bean, Thomas Cobb

OTHERS PRESENT
Mark Nelson, County Supervisor/Conservation Board Liaison
Don Dixon

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Gehling called the meeting to order at 4:09 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS
None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
None

ITEM R1. Approval of Consent Agenda

MOTION by Cindy, second by Chris

To approve the consent agenda.

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

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve the Minutes of the May 14, 2026, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the May 2026 Claims and Expenditures

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

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:

- $52.20 from Holy Cross Second Graders for Fish, Snake & Turtle adoption
- Cotton balls & Ziplock bags from Rhonda Leuer

ITEM R2. Friend of Conservation Award Presentation – Don Dixon

Theresa presented the Friend of Conservation Award to Don Dixon. Don commented that he enjoyed the 15 years he served on the board and also noted that he frequented the Little Sioux Park area as a kid before it was a park.

ITEM R3. Capital Improvement Projects

1. FEMA Projects

a. Trail

Dan reported that the road has been built to access the trail, but equipment will still have to travel over a section of the trail during work. FEMA approval has been obtained, though the process has been complicated by several coordinator changes. FEMA questioned the footage involved, ultimately authorizing 592 feet instead of the proposed feet, noting that some of the cracks were considered preexisting and that 100' section was removed from the proposal. The contractor was delayed by weather, but Dan advised him to wait until the FEMA approval was resolved. They are planning to start the week of June 22nd.

(Neil joined in person at 4:16 p.m.)

b. Boat Ramp

Dan reported that he has still not received a response regarding the archeological survey review, and work cannot start until it is approved. The contractor's supplier would only honor the original rock bid for six months, so a new bid has been requested. The new bid will have to be sent to FEMA to see if it meets their cost threshold. Brian added that the fuel costs have also changed and will need to be addressed.

2. Owego Project – IDALS Agreement

Dan and Brian had a Teams meeting on Tuesday with Bolton & Menk. Their representative was expected to send Dan contact and request information, but he hasn't received it yet. IDALS taken on the project and agreed to fund it. They will prepare a scope of services agreement, and once that is signed, the WCCB will enter into an agreement with Bolton & Menk. Dan clarified that he doesn't want to pump year-round but wants to have the ability to fluctuate water levels as needed.

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 July 16, 2026, at Brown's Lake-Bigelow Park.

b. Iowa Open Meetings & Public Records Training

Dan announced an Iowa Open Meetings and Public Records training led by Dan Priestly that is available to board members. This training is now mandatory for newly appointed or elected officials; however, conservation board members are grandfathered in and will not be required to complete it since they were in office prior to the law taking effect. Dan plans to attend, and Brian may also participate. Mark noted that he took the training in March and felt it was very good.

c. Great Outdoors Possible Opportunities

After the Great Outdoors Foundation stepped away from a project at Owego, Neil suggested another project be presented to them. Two days later Dan received a call from their rep stating that they have a client who wants to do some wetland mitigation. They are looking for wetland creation, expansion and/or restoration, prairie restoration, timber stand improvement or oxbow restoration. Dan suspects that it is related to the data center and advised the board to think carefully before getting involved since the public opinion of them is not positive. The board should consider the public perception if it pursues those dollars.

Mark stated that Dan Priestly has received a lot of calls, and a lot of negative comments were made on a Facebook page promoting the data center. He believes it would be wise to see how it plays out and not give locals the impression that the conservation board is working with them. The county is not taking a side, but Dan Priestly is going to start developing an ordinance on data centers.

d. Brown's Lake/Snyder Bend Updates

Brian reported that Brown's Lake-Bigelow Park is back up and operating following the recent storm. The first week involved significant cleanup of fallen trees and widow makers, but the park did not receive as much wind or damage. Staff worked hard and were able to reopen for the Memorial Day weekend.

Snyder Bend Park experienced much heavier storm impacts. Over 100 large cottonwood trees were tipped over, including a few uprooted at the root ball. Three cabins sustained broken windows, one cabin had roof damage, an aerial was affected, and there was minor siding damage. Additional roof damage occurred at the residence, shelter house, and pump house.

(Tom joined in person at 4:48 p.m.)

A workday was held on Tuesday with staff from the Iowa DNR, Monona County Conservation, and Woodbury County Conservation during which a substantial amount of fallen trees was cleared. Numerous widow makers remain, and staff will be evaluating and removing hazardous trees. Dan added that although some cottonwoods may have survived, he directed that all be removed to avoid future liability and complete clean-up all at once. Gardner Tree Services will remove ten trees. Dan shared photos of the damages.

Dan stated that no state aid or FEMA assistance will be available. Cleanup will require extensive staff time, and another workday will be scheduled with staff from the other districts. Volunteer groups assisted by piling sticks to allow easier removal with grapple equipment. Insurance will cover some structural damage, but not the cost of tree removal.

Brian estimated total costs at $ 40-50,000, including salaries and equipment costs using FEMA rates for skid loaders, dump truck, and other equipment.

On the cabins, replacement window inserts would cost $475/per pane, and with many of the double-paned window banks having all panes broken, replacing the whole bank of windows was more cost effective. Also, since the board had recently agreed to replace the sliding doors with windows, it was decided to proceed with that now so all windows will match. One special-shaped upper window needed replacement at $585. The full bank of windows will exceed $3,000. Dan reported that matching siding is unavailable, and the contractor recommended adding stone panels on the front of the cabins up to the height of the windows.

Cabin reservations have been cancelled and refunded. New windows are expected to arrive the week of June 22nd. Cleanup of broken glass in surrounding grassy areas will be required.

Dan expressed appreciation for the Iowa DNR and staff from other counties who responded immediately to assist with storm cleanup.

e. CIP Requests

Discussion was held regarding CIP requests. Mark reported that the county's CIP process has been turbulent this year. He explained that expenditures have risen significantly due to impacts from the Iran War, noting an example in which a $300,000 estimate obtained in the fall for fiber and computer upgrades had increased by $200,000 by spring. Mark added that fortunately there are unspent funds from last year's CIP cycle and additional reserves that may be shifted. He believes there is a good chance that funding for the nature center water feature and back sidewalk could be approved through CIP, with a final determination by late June or early July.

Dan stated that both Mark and Dave visited the nature center to review the project, and their support is appreciated. He added that two additional CIP requests remain: the deck and entrance project estimated at $15,000 and the retaining wall estimated at $42,000.

f. Budget – Motor Vehicle

Dan stated that it was fortunate that the motor vehicle budget was restored this year, as the department's large dump truck needs to be replaced. The truck's frame is twisted and cannot be repaired. Brian will begin looking for used dump trucks, but will avoid county trucks due to rust issues from hauling salt and sand. If an appropriate vehicle is located, he will request that it be held until July 1. Dan will notify board members by email if a decision is required before the next meeting. The estimated cost for a

replacement dump truck is $80,000–$100,000. This truck has been included in the five-year replacement plan. Any remaining motor vehicle funds will be used toward purchasing either a mower or a pickup.

g. Nature Center Facilitator Information

Dan reported that the staff planning session with facilitator, Linda Krei, was postponed due to the tornado that occurred the previous day. The session has been rescheduled for June 17th from 1:00-5:00 p.m. He noted that board members are welcome to attend if they wish.

h. Approve Salary Schedule for FY 26-27

The Conservation FY26-27 salary matrix, which includes the 3% cost-of-living adjustment approved by the Board of Supervisors, was presented for approval. Dan noted that a few matrix levels required adjustment to reflect actual current pay rates. He explained that the former director had indicated these updates would be needed periodically. The adjustments do not change any employee salaries; they simply bring the matrix into alignment with what is currently being paid.

MOTION by Neil, second by Tom

To approve the fiscal year 2026-27 salary schedule as presented.[26-13]

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

2. Board Information

Tom announced that the Pheasants Forever youth fishing derby will be held on June 20th at Little Sioux Park.

Aaron mentioned that a couple camping at Bigelow Park were impressed with the new camping pads and the overall appearance of the campground. They did request that online reservations be made available.

Dan noted that Rules and Regulations updates are needed, particularly to enable online reservations. He explained that the current requirement for campers to leave the park for at least 72 hours after staying 14 consecutive days is outdated. He added that counties are able to adopt their own ordinances and are not required to follow that rule. When he worked in Clay and Pocahontas counties, campers who wished to extend their stay simply had to move to another campsite, ensuring fair access for others and giving sites a chance to recover from wear such as rugs.

With online reservations, it is not feasible to prevent someone from booking under another name to get around that rule. Dan proposed adding a provision that if a camper wishes to

[26-13] To approve the fiscal year 2026-27 salary schedule as presented.

stay more than 14 days, their camping unit must be moved to another site. Campers will be required to check a box indicating agreement to this condition when making an online reservation. This change will need to be in place before online reservations launch on July 15. Dan noted that additional updates to the rules are needed and will be brought to the board for approval at a future meeting.

3. Other Business

None

4. Old Business

None

ITEM R5. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The May programs and visitors report was presented.
- Naturalists have noticed that during some school programs, teachers are less actively engaged than expected, but, overall, field trips went very well and reached children from across the county, not just Sioux City. She will encourage staff to make phone calls, in addition to emails, and to conduct brief discussions as groups arrive to set expectations.
- Summer camps began this week and are 82% full, with most openings in the 10–12-year-old age range. Online registration has gone smoothly.
- Theresa has been working on a Gilchrist grant for the new raptor house, which hinges on completion of the water feature.
- Shelby arranged training for ten new junior volunteers for summer camp.
- The nature center was nominated by a KCAU employee to their parent company, Nexstar, and selected to receive $5,000 grant through the Foundation. KCAU visited yesterday to film a story.
- The new web page mockup is complete and moving into the development phase.
- Staff will be helping with the fishing derby, and a couple seasonals will be helping with Fleet Farm kids' day. There will be a Meet the Animals event at the end of the month also featuring the SDSU ice cream truck.
- Nature Calls sponsorships total $7,500 so far.

(Tom left the meeting at 5:45 p.m. and joined again by phone.)

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on recent park activities:

- Memorial Day weekend went well. Visitation has fluctuated since then, but with schools out now, attendance is expected to improve.
- Cleanup efforts continue at Snyder Bend and Brown's Lake. The Brown's Lake beach opened the Thursday after Memorial Day, and both beaches have been busy.

- At Little Sioux Park, the new Wi-Fi has been well received.
- Derek reported that campers are pleased to have Wi-Fi and that online reservations will be well received by most users. Weekend camping traffic has been typically beginning on Fridays. Dirt work has been completed around the new concession sidewalks. Thomas attended a chainsaw class last week. Staff have been busy preparing the beach to open and helping with cleanup at Snyder Bend.
- Dan noted that Little Sioux Park has been short one staff member for six months due to academy requirements involved in the hiring process. Nathan Fylstra will begin work on Monday. He previously worked as a seasonal employee at Brown's Lake & Snyder Bend a few years ago and has been working with the Iowa DNR.
- Dan reported that water levels remain about four feet low in the Little Sioux pond. New fence panels were installed. Water level was previously up to the original fence. Cardis fabricated ten-foot removeable panels to allow adjustments as the water level changes.
- Brian shared that staff completed the 212 wildland fire chainsaw class, with additional training to follow. Two full-time staff and a few seasonal employees participated to gain experience and reinforce safety practices. All three full-time Southwood employees are certified instructors.
- Forty acres of food plots have been planted this year. Some areas will be converted to prairie next year. Roundup-ready soybeans were planted to prepare for fall seeding.
- Southwood staff assisted with cleanup at Snyder Bend for a couple days.

ITEM R6. Long Range Planning – Little Sioux Park

Long-range planning took place with staff for Little Sioux Park and the northeast district.

ITEM R7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 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