WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, JULY 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, July 16, 2026, at Brown's Lake - Bigelow 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
None

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Gehling called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS
None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
None

ITEM R1. Approval of Consent Agenda

MOTION by Tom, second by Chris.

To approve the consent agenda, with the exception of the Minutes of the June 11, 2026 Board Meeting, which will be presented at the next meeting.

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 June 11, 2026, Regular Meeting
(Minutes were not available. This item has been postponed until the next meeting.)

C2. Approve the June 2026 Claims and Expenditures

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

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:

- $2,000 from Jean "Joee" Ziebel for DPNC support
- $25.00 from various donors for raptor care
- $30.00 from various donors from 'Meet the Animals' donations
- Yarn, craft supplies & Garden Guests board game from Sally Hartley

ITEM R2. JEO – Scope of Services Contract – HUD Little Sioux Bank Erosion

Dan requested authorization to enter into a $10,000 contract for professional services with JEO Consulting Group to begin work on the Little Sioux riverbank erosion project. JEO will work with SIMPCO on the Iowa Department of Economic Development HUD grant. JEO has the required training, but they want SIMPCO to administer the IDED grant.

MOTION by Tom, second by Cindy.

To approve and authorize entering into a $10,000 contract for professional services with JEO Consulting Group to initiate work on the Little Sioux riverbank erosion project.[26-14]

VOTE:

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

ITEM R3. Capital Improvement Projects

1. FEMA Projects – Trail and Boat Ramp

Dan reported that both the trail and boat ramp projects at Little Sioux Park are on hold as they have been pulled back into eligibility review. He has been attempting for two weeks to schedule a meeting with FEMA. FEMA has restructured the projects and incorporated portions of previously declined high bank erosion work into the boat ramp project. Dan emailed Sarah to clarify that the erosion work is not part of the boat ramp project. As a result, FEMA determined that both projects need to be reviewed again. A meeting has finally been scheduled for Monday at 9:00 a.m.

The expected funding is $67,000 for the boat ramp and $110,000 for the trail.

Due to high river levels, work on the boat ramp cannot proceed until fall.

2. Owego Project – IDALS Agreement

Dan stated that he has reached out to IDALS requesting a letter of engagement but has not received a response. He also contacted Bolton & Menk who indicated they would follow up with IDALS; however, he hasn't heard back from them for a week. Dan will reach out again.

[26-14] To approve and authorize entering into a $10,000 contract for professional services with JEO Consulting Group to initiate work on the Little Sioux riverbank erosion project.

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 September 10, 2026, at Southwood Conservation Area.

b. Snyder Bend Park Update

Brian reported that staff has been working hard on storm cleanup. The last of the cottonwoods were dropped last week, with the final tree taken down today. A total of 130 trees fell during the storm, and another 70 have been removed. Dan noted that the Urban Forestry Grant will help with ideas moving forward.

Josh stated that a logger from Meyer Pallet came in and hauled the trees away. Brian added that Gardner Tree Service removed trees that posed risk to buildings or electrical panels.

Dan commented that he cannot complement staff enough, noting they have been working extremely hard with no complaints.

Brian reported that the cabin siding could not be matched, so stone was added on the front. The sliding doors have been replaced with windows. The small restroom building has a truss, soffit, fascia, and roof that need to be replaced. Brandon Deeds is planning to get that done next week. The park residence roof also needs work. Remaining repairs will be handled as fall approaches.

Dan stated that the lake water level is under the control of the tribe. Dan & Brian met with a tribal representative, and she plans to meet with Josh and Dylan also.

c. CIP Project Update – DPNC Water Feature

Sewalson Contracting was expected to begin the nature center water feature project yesterday but experienced a delay due to needed track replacement on their mini excavator. They have started delivering equipment and plan to start work tomorrow. Theresa and staff have relocated plants from the project area that they wanted to preserve. Brian and Tyler removed the railing and discovered a bumblebee nest.

d. Nature Center Facilitator Information Update

Linda Krei spent three hours with staff today for a final wrap-up session. She will prepare a working document for the next steps. Although the sessions went beyond the planned eight hours, she generously donated her time today. The board will likely be able to review the materials in September.

A decision will be needed on when to launch the project, but drawings of the proposed building will need to be available beforehand. A launch at Nature Calls was considered but it was decided to be too soon, and the project is large enough that the donor prefers the project launch to stand alone. A special meeting with the board and staff may be required to further refine and finalize details.

The project will go to the conservation board for approval first. A separate foundation bank account will need to be opened at Security Bank, pending approval from the foundation. This board must formally request the account, and minutes documenting the approval will be required.

The donor has not yet indicated when she would like to go public. Tom noted that she prefers to keep things generic at this stage and does not want recognition. Staff recently took the donor through the nature center and showed her the mockup. Tom emphasized that the next steps depend on the outcome of Linda's work, as the donor wants to review the action plan.

Dan added that the donor wanted to ensure the taxidermy room would be large enough for proper display. Brian informed her that murals and additional exhibit components will be included. The exhibit company will develop the layout, and architectural drawings will be created once the final concept has been determined.

e. Director Update

Dan announced to the board that he is giving his six-month notice of retirement, with his last day expected to be in early January or February. He will prepare his official retirement letter and have it added to the September agenda. Dan noted that he has worked in conservation for 41 years, including 9½ years with Woodbury County. He plans to meet with Human Resources on Monday.

He stated that the Director position will need to be posted internally for two weeks to allow the Deputy Director or other employees the opportunity to apply. If no internal applicants come forward, the position will then be opened externally. Dan stated that Brian is fully capable of stepping into the role but wants to give him time to consider it.

2. Board Information

None

3. Other Business

None

4. Old Business

Dan reported that Foth Engineering prepared the urban forestry grant application. An agreement will need to be signed with Foth Engineering. Project expenses will be paid through the CIP fund and submitted for reimbursement through the grant.

The project will include work at Snyder Bend, Brown's Lake, and Little Sioux parks. The total grant amount is $50,000 with allocations for tree management, staff training, and tree replacement. The remaining funds will be used to bring in an arborist for tree trimming and additional forestry work, along with recommendations for removal and planting. Brian noted that the department already has accounts with wholesalers for tree purchases.

ITEM R5. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- Theresa encouraged board members to contact their Nature Calls sponsors. The event is a little over two months away, and less than $11,000 has been received so far. She expects to have flyers and invitation drafts next week. An auction committee meeting has been held, and items are coming in. A few volunteers on that committee have stepped back, so staff will be handling much of the item gathering.
- Theresa, Dawn, and Kari researched auction software options. OneCause was priced at $3,000 per year, while Bloomerang offered a $700 option for a 90-day event window. Theresa has started the process of setting up a Bloomerang account through the foundation. The platform will provide a Nature Calls website, ticket purchasing, automated email and text messaging, and online or hybrid bidding capabilities. The team is considering offering two silent auction flights online and two on paper. The software will save time entering information by capturing bidder information during ticket purchases. There is also potential for future use, as Bloomerang also supports peer-to-peer and capital campaign fundraising.
- Scheels donated a Trek electric bike with charger valued at $2,354. Ticket sales will begin once the raffle license is approved and tickets have been printed. Raffle tickets cannot be sold online or outside the state of Iowa.
- Dave Remenschneider has the pistol ready for the raffle.
- Programs continue to be very busy, with camps currently 85% full. Kari & Mariah have been doing an excellent job, and seasonal staff has been fabulous.
- The Meet the Animals Day event had nearly 400 people in attendance.
- Planning is underway for Owl-palooza on August 4th in recognition of International Owl Awareness Day. Mariah came up with an idea to create stickers, and she designed them on Canva. Big Frig will print them for Harlan and Lucia. The artists had such a great experience that they visited to meet all the animals, and they plan to provide additional artwork for all the critters. They also agreed to provide the digital artwork files to be used for future tee shirts or other items.
- Kari has invited Audubon to give a presentation about bird-friendly coffee in partnership with Council Oaks coffee.
- A calendar of upcoming events was distributed.

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Brian introduced Rob Gray, Resource Technician for Brown's Lake and Snyder Bend. He was a former seasonal employee for a few years beginning in 2011.

- Campgrounds are now available for online reservations. In less than 24 hours, 110 orders were placed totaling more than $14,000.
- At Southwood, staff has been working on their crown vetch program, keeping patches small. A grant was received from Loess Hills Wild Ones for prairie plants to relandscape the entrance and cabin areas. The staff also converted a difficult-to-mow area at Fowler Forest to a native prairie seeding.
- A workday is planned at Snyder Bend on Tuesday, with staff from Southwood and Little Sioux assisting to get the storm cleanup finished.
- Nathan Fylstra has started as Assistant Resource Manager at Little Sioux Park and is learning the park areas. He has been eager to initiate projects and has been organizing the shop and shop yard.
- Little Sioux staff treated the pond again for filamentous algae which showed up last year. Treatment is being used to keep it under control before it becomes a larger issue.
- Brown's Lake was listed on the impaired water report last week. He noted that people can check the DNR Beach page for weekly status updates. Both beaches participate in testing and have for many years. Josh explained that the results depend heavily on the wind and rainfall prior to testing.
- Staffing levels continue to shift as several seasonal employees have already left.
- The slushy machine at Little Sioux has been a popular addition.
- Tom mentioned that the Pheasants Forever group has discussed conducting a trash cleanup at park entrances on a few public sites before hunting season, likely in late September or early October.
- Pumping at Owego was also discussed. Josh will fly the drone to assess what is needed. Dan estimated fuel costs at $5,000-7,000 and stated he will inform the board if expenses exceed $10,000.

ITEM R6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 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