WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 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, September 10, 2026, at Southwood Conservation Area beginning at 4:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT
Aaron Gehling, Chris Zellmer-Zant, Cindy Bennett, Neil Stockfleth (initially by phone)

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT
Tom Limoges

STAFF PRESENT
Dan Heissel, Brian Stehr, Theresa Kruid, Dawn Bostwick, Erik Lindsay, Brodie Skinner, Tanner Petersen

OTHERS PRESENT
None

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Gehling called the meeting to order at 4:04 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 June 11, 2026, and July 16, 2026, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the July 2026 and August 2026 Claims and Expenditures

C3. Receive and Place on File the June 2026 FY25-26 Final Accrued, July 2026, and August 2026 Financial/Budget Reports and the 4th Quarter FY 25-26 Reserve Fund Report

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:

- $3,285.79 from River City Anglers for Raptor House project
- $473 from various donors for Raptor House project (July & August project donation box)
- $868 (before credit card fees) from Owl-palooza program Bake Sale for Raptor House project
- $22.00 from various donors for our care of our raptors (July donation box)
- $100 from Dan & Sally Hartley for Turtle adoption for one year for Paxton Hartley
- $175 from Dan & Sally Hartley for Turtle & aquarium adoption for one for McKenna Hartley
- $150 from Tina Hall for Harlan, Barred Owl adoption in memory of Sally Smith
- $125 for Mary Jane "Sade" Africa Memorial for Tale Trail
  - o $75 from Pam & Eric Pfautsch
  - o $50 from Theresa & Jeff Kruid
- Colored pencils, crayons, markers, glue, craft materials, beanie babies, & small storage totes from Sally Hartley
- Three – 40-pound bags of bird seed from Mary Lyons
- Coyote fur sewn on double felt backing (~1950) from Clint & Michelle Leonard
- Fire equipment (2 Rogue Hoes, 2 drip torches, 2 stiff tine fire rakes, 2 council rakes) from Mike Sibenaller (for Southwood Conservation Area & parks)

ITEM R2. Executive Director's Retirement Date

Dan presented the board with his official retirement letter, noting his final date of employment will be February 5, 2027. He also distributed packets to each board member with the director's job description, timeline details, desired abilities & characteristics, interview agenda, and interview questions. The position was advertised beginning on August 10th. Although the Neogov website was down for five days, the direct link was posted on the conservation website and MyCountyParks site. Human Resources has received seven applications to date.

(Cindy arrived at 4:15 p.m.)

Dan will send an email to Board Chair Aaron Gehling and HR Director Melissa Thomas stating that the board would like him to be involved in the hiring process. He also recommended including Brian, Theresa, and Dawn in the process along with the five board members, as they will be working closely with the new director. Dan reviewed the proposed hiring timeline and noted that he announced the position opening at an ISAC meeting and again at a District III directors' meeting.

(Neil arrived in person at 4:25 p.m.)

MOTION by Neil, second by Chris.

To accept the official retirement letter from Director Dan Heissel with a final date of employment of February 5, 2027.[26-15]

VOTE:

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

[26-15] To accept the official retirement letter from Director Dan Heissel with a final date of employment of February 5, 2027.

ITEM R3. Community Development Block Grant Application Approval – HUD Funding

Dan reported that he spoke with JEO earlier today and they are finalizing the grant application in coordination with SIMPCO. Dan has provided all requested information. The Board of Supervisors approved the funding and matching resolution, as that is the CDBG standard process. The grant request is for nearly $600,000 to shape and armor the erosion sites north and south of the Little Sioux Park boat ramp – areas that FEMA wouldn't mitigate. The grant will cover both engineering and construction work. Awards are expected either this fall or early spring, with project work beginning no earlier than next fall.

MOTION by Chris, second by Cindy.

To approve the Community Development Block grant application for the HUD project to repair bank erosion at Little Sioux Park.[26-16]

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

ITEM R4. Capital Improvement Projects

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

Dan reported that FEMA made no changes to the trail project during the second review, so the project is now ready to proceed. The contractor, Brandon Deeds, had been prepared to begin work before the delay but moved on to other jobs; however, he still expects to complete the project this fall.

Dan also noted that FEMA mistakenly added 122 feet of concrete removal—an item they had previously denied. He notified them of the error and received an email today confirming that the 122 feet should not have been included. As a result, FEMA is reducing the project funding from $65,000 to $49,000.

   b. **Boat Ramp**

Dan stated that approval is expected next week to proceed with the boat ramp project, but the river levels are currently too high for work to begin. He noted concern that prices may increase again before conditions allow the project to move forward.

   c. **Cabins**

Dan reported that FEMA intended to require the county to purchase flood insurance for the Snyder Bend cabins before it would reimburse expenses related to the flood. The annual premium, however, would have exceeded the amount FEMA would reimburse. After discussion with Emergency Management Director Mike Montino and Human Resources Director Melissa Thomas, it was decided not to pursue insurance, and the

[26-16] To approve the Community Development Block grant application for the HUD project to repair the bank erosion at Little Sioux Park.

money previously received from FEMA for cabin repair will be reimbursed. The flood-related expenses have already been paid from the CIP fund.

A brief discussion followed regarding potential long-term solutions, including constructing a berm near the cabins or relocating the cabins entirely. Further discussion will take place during long-term planning for Snyder Bend later this fall.

2. Owego Project – IDALS Agreement

Dan stated that he spoke with the engineer and consultants a few weeks ago at ISAC but has not received any updates since.

3. Playground Parts & Mulch Purchase

Dan reported that while repairing tornado-damaged playground equipment at Snyder Bend, additional deck damage was discovered due to rusted metal beneath deteriorated plastic coating. A full inspection of all playgrounds revealed similar issues requiring repairs.

Brian explained that long-term sun exposure causes the plastic coating to break down, exposing metal and resulting in rust and hairline cracks around bolts. Some stairs are also plastic-coated metal and have begun cracking. Due to the age of the equipment—some dating to the late 1990s and the newest installed in 2006—replacement parts have become increasingly difficult to obtain. Current repair needs are estimated at $31,600, with additional repairs anticipated in the future.

All playgrounds also require additional mulch. Our usual vendor for engineered wood chips is currently out of supply with no estimated production date. Bigelow Park was in urgent need, so Brian located an alternative vendor at a cost of $2,000 plus shipping. Dan suggested pursuing a more permanent solution moving forward. The Jelly Bean rubber mulch installed at Little Sioux Park has performed well, and he recommended replacing wood chips with Jelly Bean rubber at all playgrounds. Estimated cost is $37,988, not including curbing. Funding is available through the REAP and CIP funds.

MOTION by Neil, second by Chris.

To approve the purchase of playground parts and Jelly Bean rubber mulch at a total cost of $69,589, plus the cost of curbing, with expenses split between CIP and REAP funds.[26-17]

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

4. Nature Center Water Feature

Dan presented before and after photos of the nature center water feature repairs. The contractor is almost ready to pour the landing at the door. Three change orders were

[26-17] To approve the purchase of playground parts and Jelly Bean rubber mulch at a total cost of $69,589, plus the cost of curbing, with expenses split between CIP and REAP funds.

needed due to water leaks originating from the previous water feature. The contractor originally planned to excavate to a depth of 13 feet, but this was increased to 22 feet. CTS tested the soil and advised the contractor to stop digging because they were never going to reach dry ground. As a result, geogrid mesh was installed. The Board of Supervisors approved the $19,650 change order cost under the CIP using the original project funding. They noted their appreciation that Dan had not included a contingency amount in the original proposal. The third change order addressed replacement of the railroad tie steps. The contractor asked whether precast overlapping steps could be installed instead, which would prevent future rot and save installation time.

Theresa stated that she does not plan to fill the area with wildflowers immediately. She wants to wait until the raptor house is completed and then determine the best use for the space. A new water feature will eventually be added to provide moving water for the birds, but it will be designed differently and located away from the building.

Dan added that the Bacon Creek engineer evaluated the footing and determined it needed to be replaced in its existing form. The work is expected to be completed next week, weather permitting. The original railing cannot be reused because the footprint is now larger; Cardis will install a new railing at a cost of $6,800.

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 October 8, 2026, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center.

b. Raptor House

Dan reported that the contractor had to remove an oak tree that was in the way of the water feature work. Two additional trees need to be removed for the raptor house, and the contractor will take those out with their mini excavator as well.

Theresa announced that the Foundation has received a $50,000 Gilchrist grant and a private donation of $5,000 for the raptor house project. The Owl-Palooza event bake sale also raised a little over $800. She shared that Eric Kilburn from the Sioux City Career Academy contacted her after learning about the project. The Academy has an opening in their construction schedule and would like to build the raptor house at no cost, excluding the concrete. They will need to work under a general contractor. \ Dan stated that he will ask Brandon Deeds to handle the concrete work and allow the students to construct the building under his supervision.

The new building will have water, electricity and heat. It will be slightly larger than the current structure, with an expanded central area to house a freezer and other equipment required for USDA permitting. Staff expressed excitement about the partnership opportunity.

c. Nature Center Facilitator

Dan reported that he has received all of the information from Linda Krei but has not yet had time to review it. He stated that he plans to make the presentation to the board in October following Nature Calls.

d. Grazing Plan – Oak Ridge and Owego

Erik Lindsay reported that he and Josh VanVoorst attended a grazing workshop at the Hitchcock Center in June, where they received valuable information. They spoke with other agencies that utilize grazing and with several cattle producers from Harrison and Pottawattamie counties. Josh and Erik have begun reviewing contract information to understand the details. Most agencies use the standardized farm lease from Iowa State Extension, which can be tailored for Owego and Oak Ridge. The plan for Owego has already been approved. Goals include brome suppression, woody vegetation suppression, and use of livestock hooves to work seed into the soil. The RFP for grazing services could be issued as a combined document, with bullet-pointed distinctions for Owego, Oak Ridge, and Southwood. Dan added that they are exploring options for paddocking Owego.

Brian stated that he intends to release the bid this winter, with grazing planned to begin next May. Erik noted that starting dates for each project will be similar, while end dates will differ. They plan to begin with a small-scale approach in the first year to identify and work through any challenges. The grazing period will end by August 15th to avoid conflicts with hunting season.

Erik questioned whether pricing by the acre is practical, since cattle may need to be removed early if grazing becomes too heavy. He suggested a cost-per-head, per-day structure to allow flexibility to move cattle between paddocks or back to the producer's pasture if necessary. Dan added that the contract would need to clearly state that early termination may be required.

The cattle producer would be responsible for installing fencing and would assume liability. Dan noted that the existing burn units and fire breaks—mowed several times a year—provide a good structural foundation for the program.

Erik reported frequent contact from a neighboring landowner and a couple of others in the Oto area regarding their interest in participating in a grazing program.

The board reached consensus to proceed with development of the project and requested more detailed information at a future meeting. No formal action was taken.

2. Board Information

None

3. Other Business

None

4. Old Business

None

ITEM R5. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- Program and visitor reports for June, July, & August were presented.
- Summer camps went very well, and summer staff did a fabulous job.
- Attendance at public park programs was low, which has been a challenge for several years. Staff will continue offering programs and working to improve participation.
- Fair programs drew more than 500 attendees over the four days. Morning and afternoon sessions were held at Old Town with a different topic each day.
- There were not many school programs scheduled for September.
- Monarch tagging events are being held today and next week. Jim Henning of Good Earth State Park in South Dakota reported tagging 30 monarchs within a half an hour yesterday, indicating that the migration is well underway.
- On October 3, the Missouri River Runners will hold their Mount Lucia trail race at the nature center. As of today, 108 participants are registered. Parking arrangements will need to be addressed.
- Staff is partnering with Audubon for World Migratory Bird Day on October 10th.
- Iowa State University is now asking schools to pay $600 for the School of the Wild program. Theresa noted the need to discuss this with Jay before meeting with Woodbury Central, as the cost may not be worthwhile to them. Journals are the main benefit provided by the University, as schoolteachers and nature center staff do the teaching. The program may not be called School of the Wild in the future. It remains on this year's schedule but may be reevaluated and reformatted.
- Nature Calls:
  - Sponsorships in hand are just under $22,000, with additional pledges bringing the total to just over $29,000. Sixty-seven tickets have been sold. Auction items are arriving. Early raffle ticket sales for the bike have exceeded $1,200.
  - Staff will need to rent tables and linens at an estimated cost of $3,000.
  - A few committee members have expressed concerns about online bidding, but the committee decided to proceed with fully online silent auction bidding. Stations will be available for attendees without smartphones, and volunteers and staff will be available to assist with placing max bids. Laura Pecaut has offered to help guests download and navigate the app.
  - Following an informative virtual meeting, Theresa opted not to purchase the $500 event-night tech support package but to go ahead and purchase a few card readers.
  - Silent auction bidding will open 24 hours in advance.
  - T-shirts have arrived. Dorothy has folded them and is working on bundling them for sponsors.
  - Jackson Street and Marto both have Octoberfest events on September 25th. They will provide product but will not have representatives available to pour.
- Stickers featuring all Nature Center animals have been printed and donated by Big Frig. These will be given to adoption sponsors and sold in the gift shop. Eight tumblers

featuring each owl design were ordered for the gift shop. Owl t-shirts will also be sold, with proceeds supporting the raptor house project. The artwork was donated by Big Frig at no cost.

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Parks were busy on Labor Day weekend. Snyder Bend and Little Sioux Bellamy campgrounds weren't full, but the rest were.
- The reservation system has been going well overall with just a few remaining issues to work through. The cancellation and refund policy is now in bold print in several locations to ensure users see it. A note was added to explain check-in and check-out day selection on the reservation calendar. Maps have been added to the campsite photos to make them easier to find. The system is attracting new visitors who previously avoided camping without a guaranteed site. Other counties have reported gains following the initial year of going online and do not regret the change.
- Little Sioux staff have been cleaning up at Midway with Southwood staff helping with a day of cutting willows and cottonwoods along the waterline that were making fishing access difficult. Staff pulled what they could and cut and chemically treated the others. Staff have also been cleaning up around the park shop, both inside and out.
- Snyder Bend and Brown's Lake staff have been pumping at Owego. The first cell pumped was "H", the westernmost well (Franklin and 300th). Pumping then moved to well 2 by the old town site before returning to finish at the Ducks Unlimited monument.
- Dan and Brian ran into Trisha Rivers of the Winnebago Tribe at a Supervisors meeting. At her request, Brian and Dylan met her at Snyder Bend to provide general information on how the lake is filled. The Tribe needs to conduct EPA reporting for their portion of their lake and sought guidance on where to place a water quality monitor. Daniel Kimball already samples the State of Iowa portion, and both groups are now sharing data. Brian requested a boundary map, which Trisha forwarded to their GIS staff. They will provide a map of the area under tribal control to help better educate visitors.
- The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers visited last month to inspect pins on the Corps ground. Some markers had been broken over the years by trees or equipment. They also surveyed the Winnebago boundary line in that area.

Southwood staff reported on park activities:

- Erik expressed feeling that Southwood's campground may be losing out on Wednesday and Thursday equestrian campers now that they can reserve sites. The campground is further away from the highway, but he notes seeing more new users than in the previous six years.
- Erik reported that seasonal staff shortages have slowed some habitat projects, but they are still getting much done.
- Loess Hills Wild Ones awarded Southwood a grant for native landscaping at the park entrance, restroom area, and Fowler Forest.
- Southwood staff worked with a landowner to remove dead trees from the hillside at Fowler Forest. The hillside has now been reseeded with seed donated by a previous neighbor.
- The retaining wall blocks removed from the nature center water feature area were repurposed at Southwood for the parking lot and north and south along the hill, highlighting the pollinator planting.

- A $5,000 Loess Hills Alliance grant was received this year and used to hire a contractor for tree removal at Oak Ridge Unit 2 this week. With the department's required labor match, using three contractor skid loaders and two county skid loaders, Erik expects to complete approximately five acres at a cost of over $1,000 per acre.
- Staff have also been doing trail work to clean up fallen oak trees. The archery trail is open until October 15th and has been very popular on weeknights.
- Brodie reported that he worked with Golden Hills RCD on an overlook sign. They also worked with him on descriptions for Southwood and Fowler to be used in a Loess Hills hiking guide they produced. Theresa added that they created a bird-focused hiking guide as well, which is available at the nature center.
- Southwood staff have been working with local volunteer fire departments, the county EMA director, and the state fire coordinator from Des Moines to provide S130/S190 wildland firefighting training.
- Tanner organized the first partner cut day at Oak Ridge Unit 1 on July 29th. Eight agencies and 33 individuals participated, removing cedar trees on thirteen acres in one day. Erik noted that in 2023, a CCI crew completed only 1.8 acres over four days for $5,000, and this year, volunteers completed 13 acres for the cost of about ten pizzas and staff coordination time.

ITEM R6. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:19 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