WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 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, October 8, 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
None

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Gehling called the meeting to order at 4:10 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS
None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
None

ITEM R1. Approval of Consent Agenda

MOTION by Cindy, second by Neil.

To approve the consent agenda.

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

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve the Minutes of the September 10, 2026, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the September 2026 Claims and Expenditures

C3. Receive and Place on File the September 2026 Financial/Budget Report and the 1st Quarter FY 26-27 Reserve Fund Report

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:

- $25 from Dawn Snyder for Bruce Hopkins memorial
- 10-gallon aquarium with 2 hides, water dish & heat lamp from Kay Reynolds

ITEM R2. Budget FY 27-28 Projection

Dan presented the first draft of the FY 2027-2028 budget which reflects an overall increase of 1.4% ($7,615) over the current fiscal year. He reviewed the proposed line-item adjustments. He also noted that the nature center HVAC contract had expired and hadn't been renewed, so he will be renewing the agreement and adding the cost to the budget. Final budget approval is anticipated in December.

(Chris arrived at 4:14 p.m.)

ITEM R3. Nature Center 28E Agreement with DNR review & discussion

The board reviewed a draft 28E Agreement with the Iowa DNR regarding management responsibilities at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center. Discussion centered on the DNR request for expansion of the management area beyond the current 10-acre footprint. Staff recommended mapping all facilities, trails, and other areas currently maintained by WCCB before determining an appropriate management boundary. The agreement would extend through 2051. Staff will continue discussions with the DNR and return with updated mapping information at a future meeting.

ITEM R4. Capital Improvement Projects

1. **FEMA Projects**
   a. **Trail**
   The contractor has started moving equipment on-site and is expected to begin pouring the trail tomorrow afternoon. The project consists of two sections of trail totaling 522 feet. Construction is expected to be completed within three days, after which staff will backfill the surrounding areas as needed.

   b. **Boat Ramp**
   The boat ramp project remains on hold until river levels recede sufficiently for Holly Brown Construction to complete the work.

2. **Owego Project – IDALS Agreement**

Dan reported that Bolten & Menk has provided two options for the Owego project: the original option at $165,700 and a 30% concept estimated at $50,700. The firm recommended proceeding with the 30% concept to allow for the purchase and installation of pumps, with the potential to expand the project to the full scope later.

Board members discussed the need for a written project summary outlining the purpose, goals, and intended outcomes of the Owego project. Staff will request an executive summary from the consulting firm for inclusion with future project documents

3. Nature Center Retaining Wall

The nature center retaining wall project has been completed, and the rear door stoop has been poured. The contractor incorporated staff's recommendation to use red granite on the sidewalk rather than concrete to allow for potential modification to the walkway alignment during construction of the new raptor house. Construction of the steps is approximately 25% complete.

4. Little Sioux Park Road

Dan reported that the county engineer plans to request bids in December for asphalt projects near Anthon. Because road work is not anticipated in that area again for several years, he would like to solicit bids for the remaining road work within Little Sioux Park at the same time to take advantage of potential cost savings. He will meet with Secondary Roads staff to develop the project design and specifications. The proposed project would include the half-mile section of road between the county blacktop road and the park entrance, which has experienced significant deterioration due to heavy gravel truck traffic.

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 November 5, 2026, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center.

b. Peters Pit

Dan reported that Bedrock Gravel, which is currently conducting gravel mining north of Little Sioux Park, has expressed interest in mining Peters Pit and purchasing the sand. In discussions with Secondary Roads staff, Dan was advised to include minimum annual payment requirements to ensure that work is not delayed. He will begin preparing a Request for Proposals to seek contract proposals from interested parties. He estimated the project could generate $250,000 or more in revenue for the department.

MOTION by Neil, second by Chris.

To authorize staff to develop and issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for mining operations at Peters Pit.[26-18]

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

[26-18] To authorize staff to develop and issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for mining operations at Peters Pit.

c. Donor Update

Dan, Brian and Theresa met with the prospective donor to discuss the potential donation of wildlife mounts and related artifacts. They photographed and measured the collection and discussed future exhibit planning.

2. Board Information

Neil asked for a follow-up on quotes for the Southwood items discussed during long-term planning. Dan stated that he just received them and is waiting for a second bid. He will bring information to next month's meeting.

3. Other Business

Dan and Brian reported on upcoming changes to state firearms qualification requirements, including low-light shooting scenarios. Equipment upgrading to red-dot optics may be necessary. Staff will obtain cost estimates and return with recommendations at a future meeting.

4. Old Business

None

ITEM R6. Department Reports

Due to board member scheduling constraints, the board agreed to consider Item R7 prior to Item R6 and then return to the regular agenda order.

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The September programs and visitors report was presented.
- The annual Nature Calls fundraiser was successful, with approximately 390 guests and 75 volunteers. Final financial reports are pending receipt of remaining sponsorship payments and invoices. Sponsorship revenue is expected to total approximately $31,000. Preliminary results indicate the auctions generated $18,335, and the bicycle raffle raised approximately $1,400. A final event report will be presented at a future meeting.
- Due to inclement weather, no one attended the Monarch tagging event; however, staff have been able to complete some tagging since then. Theresa discussed a radio-tagging program that Adams Nature Preserve and Good Earth State Park are involved with, which allows monarch movements to be tracked through a mobile app. Theresa will look into possible future participation.
- Staff discussed recent changes affecting School of the Wild programming in other areas of the state following a reported incident in Iowa City. Prior to the incident, WCCB staff and fifth grade teachers from Woodbury Central Community Schools had elected to transition to a staff-led science camp rather than participate in School of the Wild due to new program fees being implemented this year. The one-week science camp concluded on October 8th and was reported to be successful.

- The Missouri River Runners hosted a 5K race on Mt. Lucia Trail with more than 130 runners. The organization arranged shuttle transportation using the train museum parking lot.
- Naturalists are partnering with Loess Hills Audubon to host Fall Migratory Bird Day on October 10th, as well as offering a Dutch Oven Cooking Demonstration that day.
- The nature center will be receiving an IAN traveling exhibit, "Your Friendly Neighbor", featuring information on backyard wildlife, beginning in November.

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Wet weather and limited seasonal staff created a challenge to keep up with mowing. A couple of seasonal staff have been retained longer to help with mowing.
- Seven conservation officers attended CCPOA training. Topics included firearms qualifications, the Perry School shooting, a thermal hunting accident, and upcoming changes to qualification requirements that may necessitate equipment upgrades.
- The local Pheasants Forever chapter conducted a cleanup of parking lots and wildlife areas.
- Staff replaced a vandalized door at the pit toilet facility at Brown's Lake and installed door stops to help prevent future damage.
- Brian met with neighboring landowner regarding replacement of the boundary fence along Curtin Timber. Tree clearing and fence maintenance are required, and the landowner has offered assistance and equipment for the project.
- Tracks on the department's 2011 Bobcat were replaced.
- Staff continue clearing and widening trails at Southwood Conservation Area and Fowler Forest.
- An additional backcountry campsite at Southwood is planned as an Eagle Scout project. Board members requested usage information for the existing campsite.
- A CCI crew completed habitat management work at the Nature Center, clearing vegetation along the ridge to increase sunlight exposure and encourage prairie expansion. Additional prescribed burning may be conducted next spring.
- The CF Industries prairie seeding project is on schedule for dormant seeding this fall.

ITEM R7. Executive Director Applications Review (Closed Session)

MOTION by Chris, second by Cindy at 5:00 p.m.

To enter a closed session pursuant to Iowa Code – Chapter 21.5(1)(a) for the purpose of reviewing applications for the Executive Director position.

ROLL CALL VOTE:
Aaron Gehling – Aye, Chris Zellmer-Zant – Aye, Cindy Bennett – Aye, Neil Stockfleth – Aye, Tom Limoges – Absent

The board reviewed applications for the Executive Director position and selected three candidates for interviews. The closed session was recorded.

(Aaron left the meeting at 5:20 p.m. Neil assumed chair duties.)

MOTION by Chris, second by Cindy at 5:28 p.m.

To leave closed session pursuant to Iowa Code – Chapter 21.5(1)(a) for the purpose of reviewing applications for the Executive Director position.

ROLL CALL VOTE:
Chris Zellmer-Zant – Aye, Cindy Bennett – Aye, Neil Stockfleth – Aye, Aaron Gehling – Absent, Tom Limoges – Absent

MOTION by Chris, second by Neil.

To authorize the director to arrange interviews with candidates number 7, 10 and 11 on October 20, 2026, from 3:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m.[26-19]

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

Dan will contact the candidates to schedule interviews and follow up with letters. He will also send proposed interview questions to board members for review and selection. It was noted that all candidates must be asked the same questions, but board members may ask follow-up questions as appropriate.

ITEM R8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:00 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

_____
Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

_____
Board Secretary, Chris Zellmer-Zant

_____
Board Chair, Aaron Gehling

[26-19] To authorize the director to arrange interviews with candidates number 7, 10 and 11 on October 20, 2026, from 3:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m.