WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, MARCH 20, 2025, BOARD MEETING

The following is a true copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Woodbury County, Iowa, Conservation Board held on Thursday, March 20, 2025, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center beginning at 4:00 p.m.

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

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT
None

STAFF PRESENT
Dan Heissel, Brian Stehr, and Theresa Kruid

OTHERS PRESENT
None

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Limoges called the meeting to order at 4:05 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS
None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
None

ITEM R1. Approve Consent Agenda

MOTION by Zellmer-Zant, second by Bennett.

To approve the consent agenda.

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

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve Minutes of the February 13, 2025, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the February 2025 Claims and Expenditures

C3. Receive and Place on File the February 2025 Financial/Budget Report

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:
- Window Draft Blockers – Mary Crawford
- Reptile heat pad & food dish, stuffed animals - Anonymous donor
- Snowshoes - Mary Jo Smith
- The Conquest of the Missouri by Joseph Mills Hanson & Collection of Poems by John Cassens - Sheryl Banks.

ITEM R2. FEMA Updates – Little Sioux Park

Brian reported that a new FEMA representative has been assigned. Brian attended a meeting with them and explained the project again. The boat ramp is inaccessible, and fixing it will be priority. The rest of the project will continue once this is completed.

ITEM R3. Nature Calls & Nature Center's 30th Anniversary

Dan gave a brief introduction that education staff has been discussing changing the fundraising event from Nature Calls (September 13, 2025) to a special event for the 30th anniversary of the nature center (October 22, 2025) by bringing in a National Geographic photographer to speak close to the anniversary date. Dan expressed his support for potentially changing the fundraising event and asked Theresa Kruid to share more information.

(Aaron Gehling arrived 4:18 p.m.)

Theresa shared that the photographer is Joel Sartore, who started The Photo Ark, a photographic documentation of the world's captive animals. The project was started in 2006 in the hopes of raising awareness of threatened and endangered species. Theresa had requested information for Sartore to speak for the 30th anniversary event. However, after learning his fee is $25,000 plus expenses, she realized that she could not ask for sponsorship for Nature Calls in September and more sponsorships for an October event, hence the idea to shift away from Nature Calls at least for one year. Theresa talked with The Orpheum Theater and Country Celebrations as potential venues and does have Saturday, November 1st, held with both facilities. Theresa also has Saturday, October 18th, held for Cole Sartore (Joel's son) who also does speaking events and has assisted his father on The Photo Ark project. Cole's fee is $10,000 plus expenses.

Theresa shared a cost comparison of 2024 Nature Calls income and expenses with projected income and expenses for The Photo Ark event at The Orpheum Theater and Country Celebrations. She stated that she realizes that a new event is risky and most likely will not bring in the same revenue, but she has heard from some sponsors they are ready for something different. The Nature Calls planning committee has declined over the years, and staff spends a lot of time working on Nature Calls. This year's event will also be competing with the Boys & Girls Club Luau Dinner, ArtSplash, and the Iowa vs. Iowa State game.

Discussion followed with Tom Limoges asking about the goals of changing the event; Neil Stockfleth asking how it will be marketed, and Aaron Gehling asking if an underwriting sponsor could be found. Theresa responded that the desire is to focus on an educational event, that local media would be used to market the event, in addition to Sartore's website, and that underwriting sponsors would be sought out as is done for Nature Calls.

Tom commented that it would mean giving up a successful fundraising event and asked about volunteer and WCCF involvement for planning fundraising events. Tom also suggested checking with Center for Siouxland for their Fall fundraiser event date. Aaron stated that he is in favor of trying something new. Tom said he would have a hard time walking away from Nature Calls.

Tom asked when the next Foundation meeting was to be held. Dan suggested that a joint meeting be held soon with fundraising a topic of discussion. At this time, it was decided to table this discussion. Theresa and staff will continue to gather more information and report back to the board.

ITEM R4. Budget Cuts

Dan reported the overall county budget is grim. He was asked to come up with 5 % to cut and did so with $127,000 from our motor vehicle line. Dan attended a meeting Tuesday, March 18th, with all department heads to discuss the budget and look for an additional $2.5 million in budget cuts. The county auditor thanked Dan for his budgets and said to come back and ask for vehicle purchases under LOST funds.

MOTION by Chris, second by Aaron.

To approve and authorize the director to apply the 5 % budget cut requested by the Board of Supervisors to the motor vehicle line for fiscal year 2025-26.[25-9]

VOTE:

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

Dan explained that additional budget cuts may be needed. He has offered to eliminate the nature center cleaning contract and have staff pitch in to clean the building. He will continue to look for other areas to reduce as he does not want to have to cut any full-time staff.

Tom asked about the shortfall. Dan explained that House Bill 718 limits growth to 2% and not raising the levy for ten years is now causing problems. He stated that there is only 15% in reserve which is only enough to cover two months.

ITEM R5. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The programs and visitors report for February was presented. Some programs were cancelled due to the weather in February.
- Theresa shared photos of exhibit proofs including the Prairie Pollinator graphic panel. The installation dates have been pushed back and should take place mid to late April.
- The Monarchs & Milkweed traveling exhibit was displayed in February and had over 700 visitors view it.
- Summer camp flyers are out. Registration starts April 2nd for Foundation member and April 9th for the public.
- Kari & Mariah attended the Spring IAN workshop.
- All three naturalists attended the Siouxland Nonprofit Summit last week. It was a great opportunity to learn and network with other local nonprofit organizations. Their keynote speaker was fantastic.
- Shelby Campbell completed one year with WCCB.
- An offer has been extended to four people for the seasonal naturalist positions. Theresa will work with Dawn to get them their offer letters.

[25-9] To approve and authorize the director to apply the 5 % budget cut requested by the Board of Supervisors to the motor vehicle line for fiscal year 2025-26.

- The volunteer recognition was an enjoyable evening with 38 attendees. Marla Kerr was presented with the Friend of Conservation award and Randy Williams with the Conservation Educator award for 2024.
- The annual Foundation meeting took place with a small audience. The Insect Zoo had to reschedule due to weather conditions and will be here on Saturday, March 22nd, from 1:30-3:30 p.m.
- Staff is gearing up for Spring field trips. The Spring calendar of events was included in the board packet.

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Spring preparations are being done with removing and trimming trees and stumps.
- Staff has been upgrading fire rigs and preparing for burns.
- Brown's Lake & Snyder Bend staff are working on docks and repairs.
- Southwood's slide-in fire unit should be delivered soon. This was funded with a Gilchrist grant.
- Spring qualifying in Cherokee County went well. Officers are participating in training/qualification two times a year.
- CCPOA training has been rescheduled for next week due to weather.

ITEM R6. Capital Improvement Projects Update

1. Nature Center Floor & Foundation

Dan reported that the RFPs went out for foam filling to support the floors. The only bid received was from Concrete Raising Service. This will go to the Board of Supervisors next Tuesday for approval and will be paid from the Building Services CIP fund. Concrete Raising Service will do the foam support work, and Brandon Deeds will do the concrete work that is needed. The building will be monitored for a year to watch for any additional settling or other issues. He stated that the contractors think the foundation is settling, but the architects and engineers don't think it is. Once the bid is approved next week, staff will look at dates for scheduling the work to be completed.

2. Little Sioux Concession Stand

R Construction Inc. and Deeds Construction were the two contractors submitting RFPs for the Little Sioux concession stand. Deeds Construction's bid may come in a little lower due to reduced costs in the lighting. The low bid was $132,322 by Deeds Construction. Dan stated that the funds for this project come from the CIP fund, and once completed, it can help to generate income.

MOTION by Neil, second by Aaron.

To accept the low bid of $132,322 from Deeds Construction for construction of the concession building at Little Sioux Park.[25-10]

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

3. Little Sioux Dirt Work – Fill Tree Site

Brian reported that Johnston Excavating has gotten the main dirt work done. They didn't have to go as far to the north as originally planned. They need to haul in the black dirt to place on top once the dirt thaws. Johnston will bring in smaller equipment to finish the building pad also. Dan shared a few photos of this work.

4. Little Sioux Electrical

Dan stated that RFPs were received from Jacob's Electric for $30,147.54 and from Schoon Construction for $41,040. Dan stated that Woodbury County REC doesn't want anything to do with this as the concession stand is out of their territory and the bath house isn't worth running power to the park. They agreed to leave it as is and get power from MidAmerican for the new concession stand. MidAmerican will provide a transformer for power, and it will be sized for any future expansion that may include new campsites.

MOTION by Aaron, second by Chris.

To accept the low bid of $30,147.54 from Jacob's Electric to install electrical service to the Little Sioux concession stand.[25-11]

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

5. Izaak Walton League – RFP Selection

Brian sent out RFPs for razing the Izaak Walton League building, and he presented the bid quotes that he received. Steinhoff Construction Inc came in at $16,735, and Johnston Excavation LLC came in at $26,500. Brian and Dan recommended accepting the low bid from Steinhoff Construction.

[25-10] To accept the low bid of $132,322 from Deeds Construction for construction of the concession building at Little Sioux Park.
[25-11] To accept the low bid of $30,147.54 from Jacob's Electric to install electrical service to the Little Sioux concession stand.

MOTION by Aaron, second by Neil.

To accept the low bid of $16,735.00 from Steinhoff Construction to raze the Izaak Walton League building.[25-12]

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

ITEM R7. Board Member/Staff Reports

1. Administrative Items (Dan)

Dan reported on the following items:

a. Set Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held at 4:00 p.m. on April 10, 2025, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center.

b. Possible Donation

Tom relayed the information that the board is interested in finding more information to accept the donation. They are going to draft the donor's estate to accommodate the amendment to her trust. Staff will need to start putting together ideas of what things would look like.

Dan asked about an endowment for care of the mounts, and Tom will try to get more information regarding that. Aaron suggested possibly making an announcement of the incoming donation and building addition at the 30th anniversary event. The board and staff will have to look at how the money will be raised and whether a firm should be hired to organize and help with this project.

(Tom left at 5:47 p.m.)

2. Board Information

- Chris said Planning & Zoning may do some tweaking to the language on nuclear power. Each project will be examined to determine if it fits code.
- Aaron raised a question about the new off-ramp being planned, and Chris said it would provide better access to the industrial park.
- The pit with MidAmerican near Brown's Lake is still up in the air. Dan will check on it. NAWCA grant is tied to this project for future development projects.

3. Other Business

None

[25-12] To accept the low bid of $16,735.00 from Steinhoff Construction to raze the Izaak Walton League building.

4. Old Business

None

ITEM R8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:54 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Theresa Kruid.

Recording Secretary, Theresa Kruid

Board Secretary, Neil Stockfleth

Board Chair, Tom Limoges