WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, MAY 8, 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, May 8, 2025, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center beginning at 4:00 p.m.

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

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT
Aaron Gehling

STAFF PRESENT
Dan Heissel, Brian Stehr, Theresa Kruid, Dawn Bostwick, Tyler Flammang, Mariah Myers, and Kari Sandage

OTHERS PRESENT
Mark Nelson, County Supervisor/Conservation Board Liaison (By phone)

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Limoges called the meeting to order at 4:08 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS
None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
None

ITEM R1. Approve Consent Agenda

MOTION by Cindy, second by Neil.

To approve the consent agenda.

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

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve Minutes of the April 10, 2025, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the April 2025 Claims and Expenditures

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

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:
- Feather Snap digital bird feeder from Sharon Nilges
- Garden Tools for Nature Playscape from Donna Popp
- Chuck Johnson Memorial Gifts: (Total = $2,463.49, with previous donations.)
  - Rex & Maria Rundquist $50
  - Erick & Pam Pfautsch $40
  - Greg & Rande Giles $50
  - Hilary Schmitz $100
  - Mary Joan Smith $100

ITEM R2. Hay Bids

Brian presented bid information for a two-year contract for brome hay removal on 16.75 acres at Little Sioux Park. A total of four bids were received. Brian recommended accepting the high bid of $3,499.91 per year submitted by John Heilman, the current contract holder. The bid amount remains unchanged from the previous contract.

MOTION by Neil, second by Cindy.

To accept the high bid of $3,499.91 per year from John Heilman for the two-year brome hay removal contract on 16.75 acres at Little Sioux Park.[25-14]

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

ITEM R3. FEMA Updates – Little Sioux Park

Brian reported on the current situation with FEMA and the federal government's restructuring efforts. Emergency management cautioned against initiating any projects that cannot be fully funded from the current budget, as reimbursements are not guaranteed. Dan noted that the City of Hornick has been waiting over five years for FEMA reimbursement. Both Dan and Mark expressed frustration with the federal process. The projects under consideration include boat ramp repairs, repaving the washed-out trail, and addressing the high bank erosion near the shelter/picnic area. The estimated costs are $89,000 for the trail and $80,000 for the boat ramp.

Dan stated the trail is currently open with a crushed limestone base. He was advised to wait until spring before proceeding to ensure the funding has been distributed to the state. He also emphasized that the conservation reserve fund does not have enough to cover the costs without reimbursement. Mark suggested continuing discussions with FEMA and see how the county is trending. He added that several residents had contacted him initially about the trail, but he has received no calls about the boat ramp.

Dan noted that any work on the boat ramp requires lower water levels, as a hole must be cut in the ramp to fill that area in. Current river levels are too high but may drop later in the summer. Dan stated he would feel more comfortable obtaining formal permission from the Supervisors before proceeding.

Mark stated that the Board of Supervisors has previously used gaming funds for unplanned necessary repairs or purchases. With approximately $400,000 unallocated in that fund, he believes there is a good chance of securing funding, at least for the trail repair. He stated that LOST funds might be another avenue.

(Chris arrived at 4:19 p.m.)

Dan stated that Mike Montino expressed concern over the boat ramp being unavailable for emergency access, particularly in cases such as drownings. Dan has been told by FEMA that the requirements have been met, and it will be funded. Dan said he would submit an agenda request for the supervisors meeting in two weeks to present the trail as primary project and possibly the boat ramp if the water level goes down.

[25-14] To accept the high bid of $3,499.91 per year from John Heilman for the two-year brome hay removal contract on 16.75 acres at Little Sioux Park.

Mark informed Dan that at a recent Supervisors meeting a representative from the Iowa Economic Development Authority shared information about a HUD allocation of $137 million for Iowa flood prevention repairs and infrastructure. Woodbury County qualifies as one of the top five impacted counties where 85% of funds must be spent. This funding is available to entities (not individuals) for eligible projects like infrastructure and flood mitigation. Dan said he would check into it.

ITEM R4. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The programs and visitors report for April was presented.
- Field trip season is in full swing, with 160 kids visiting the nature center just yesterday.
- Theresa distributed Nature Calls sponsor packets and asked board members to let her know if any contacts should be removed or added. A Nature Calls committee meeting is scheduled for May 22nd.
- To celebrate the nature center's 30th anniversary, a large family Fall Fest is being planned for Saturday, October 18th. The event will feature pumpkin decorating, Dutch oven cooking, a trail scavenger hunt, chances to meet the resident animals, and other fun family activities.
- Kari has been organizing a Hike-a-Thon to celebrate the nature center's 30th anniversary, inviting participants to hike a total of 30 miles. A 'Finish Line' event will take place on November 1st with refreshments and possibly prizes. Participants will receive a bandana printed with the nature center trail map, partially sponsored by Absolute Screen Art. This year's event is free, with the potential to become a fundraiser in the future.
- Theresa is waiting for a response from Morningside regarding permission to hold the Wildlife Encounters program at Eppley Auditorium, due overwhelming attendance when it was last hosted at the nature center. This program may be held with the foundation annual meeting in February.
- Summer staff will be starting May 19th through 27th.
- Summer camps are currently about 56% full, which is much lower than usual for this time of year. Kari posted another reminder on social media this week to help spread the word. Other counties are also reporting available camp spots.
- The volunteer workday went well with a small but mighty crew. Volunteers helped clean up the gardens and the grounds around the building. They also helped repair some stairs by the playscape.
- Burrowing owls were spotted by a local photographer at Owego Wetland Complex in April. The owls are a new species of bird observed at Owego.
- Dan shared that a peregrine falcon has taken over the nest site previously used by a red-tailed hawk on a ledge outside the Human Resources office window. If the peregrines begin nesting, staff are interested in taking photographs and possibly setting up a webcam to observe and document activity. Staff will check back to confirm if both a male and female falcon are present.
- Tom suggested increasing publicity for summer camps through platforms like the "Around Siouxland" television segment. Theresa noted that advertising hasn't typically been necessary in the past but agreed it's a good idea. Mark recommended creating a flyer to be distributed to elementary schools in the county, either sent home with students or emailed to parents. Tom noted that rural schools may be more receptive, as he has experienced challenges with distribution in Sioux City schools. Cindy suggested checking if the Sioux City schools would allow inclusion in their virtual backpack online systems. Theresa stated that any materials distributed through schools must include a disclaimer stating that it is not endorsed by the school system.

(Mariah arrived at 4:42 p.m.)

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- The camping kickoff event took place this past weekend at all parks and was well attended.
- Southwood Conservation Area hosted a workday with the Denison FFA horseback group, who assisted with trail cleanup. Staff reported the group was well-coordinated and accomplished a lot.
- With the burn ban lifted, Southwood staff resumed prescribed burns with a burn on one of the Salsness reconstructions and a burn around the shop building. Additional timber burns are planned on Oak Ridge units one and two.
- Little Sioux staff is working on landscaping along the lake, starting grass, placing rocks, and finishing parking lots.
- The Little Sioux entrance sign was refurbished due to age and peeling paint.
- Gardner Tree Service removed several large 120-foot cottonwood trees at Snyder Bend Park. Many of the logs are being sent to a pallet company to make use of them.
- Taser recertification training was held for officers at the nature center a couple weeks ago.

ITEM R5. Capital Improvement Projects Update

1. Little Sioux Park & Concession Stand

Dan gave an update on the progress for the new concession stand at Little Sioux Park:

- Staff has seeded the area with native grasses near the road and bluegrass near the pond. Grass has started to grow (about an inch high). To maintain the new grass, Brian and Dan rigged a trash pump to draw water from the pond for irrigation.
- The contractor is hoping to pour concrete by the end of next week, with construction to begin shortly after.
- The target opening date is July 1st.
- Main components for the stand have been ordered; a few kayaks still need to be sourced locally.
- Brian will work with CoreMark to place an order for concession supplies.

Dan reported a significant filamentous algae problem along the full length of the beach, extending approximately 30 yards out. This issue has not occurred at Little Sioux Park in the past, and the cause is uncertain—possibly due to environmental conditions or increased nutrient levels from recent flooding. A fisheries biologist confirmed that the algae can be chemically treated, which will kill it and cause it to drop to the bottom. A drone operator has been located, who could apply the treatment for $300. The chemical treatment costs approximately $500 per round and may require an additional treatment. Dan will order the chemical with plans to begin treatment as soon as possible. The goal is to have the beach treated and reopened in time for Memorial Day weekend.

Dan reported a major hurdle in the concession stand project due to a miscommunication with the local sanitarian, who initially thought the project was a refurbishment. Once she realized it was a new construction, she transferred it over to the DNR, resulting in more strict requirements. Engineering and permitting costs through the DNR would be significant, especially for a system expected to handle only about 500 gallons. Mike Barkley suggested the more cost-effective solution of installing a couple holding tanks and pumping them out yearly. Dan contacted the DNR and was advised that under Executive Order 10, which goes into effect on June 19th, no

permitting or engineering will be required for installing sewage holding tanks. The plan is to start digging on June 20th.

2. Izaak Walton League

Brian reported that he has obtained the permit to demolish the Izaak Walton League building. He spoke with Brett Steinhoff earlier today, who is finalizing a few remaining details. One key issue is that the power line is still connected and needs to be disconnected before demolition can begin. Once that is addressed, work is expected to begin promptly. There has been no update yet on the possibility of saving part of the chimney.

Dan commented that there were a lot of dishes salvaged from the building, which may have some value and could be sold online.

3. Nature Center Foundation

The foam jacking work has been completed successfully in the classrooms and basement areas, and the project went well. An engineering company will be coming out to take measurements around both the interior and exterior of the building. They will monitor it over a 12-month period to track any movement. The hope is that the floor settling was the issue, and no further work will be needed.

ITEM R6. 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 June 19, 2025, at Southwood.

(Kari arrived at 5:08 p.m.)

b. Survey - Needs Assessment

Dan distributed sample surveys to the board and proposed conducting a public assessment survey in response to ongoing budget concerns. He stated that Buchanan County completes a similar survey every five years, using the results to prioritize and plan for upcoming projects. The surveys help gauge public opinion on topics such as management practices, environmental education, and overall performance. Buchanan County works with their local Council of Governments (COG) to develop and distribute the survey. For this region, SIMPCO would be the appropriate partner. Dan has reached out to SIMPCO but has not yet received a response.

Buchanan County reported the process cost them about $2,000 and yielded an 85% response rate, with the COG handling distribution and data compilation. Dan emphasized the importance of carefully crafting the survey questions. He acknowledged that the next few years will be challenging for the board and stressed that such a survey would be a valuable tool for understanding public sentiment and guiding decisions.

Tom suggested utilizing AI tools to assist in developing the survey, by uploading sample surveys and generating questions. He offered to help get it started.

Dan asked for a formal commitment from the board, pointing out that this idea has been discussed in long-range planning but has never been implemented.

MOTION by Neil, second by Cindy.

To move forward with the development and distribution of a county-wide needs assessment survey.[25-15]

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

Dan stated that he won't enter into any agreements before getting the costs and reporting back to the board.

2. Board Information

Dan distributed copies of the completed annual reports for FY22-23 and FY23-24. He will also deliver copies to the Board of Supervisors.

3. Other Business

None

4. Old Business

In response to a question raised at last month's meeting, Dawn presented a comparison of nature center room rentals from the year prior to and the year following the rental rate increases. The data showed a net increase of two rentals in the year after the rate adjustment.

ITEM R7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

Board Secretary, Neil Stockfleth

Board Chair, Tom Limoges

[25-15] To move forward with the development and distribution of a county-wide needs assessment survey.