WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, JUNE 19, 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, June 19, 2025, at Southwood Conservation Area beginning at 4:00 p.m.

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

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT
Tom Limoges

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

OTHERS PRESENT
None

CALL TO ORDER
Vice Chair, Aaron Gehling, called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS
None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
None

ITEM R1. Approve Consent Agenda

MOTION by Cindy, second by Chris.

To approve the consent agenda.

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

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve Minutes of May 8, 2025, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the May 2025 Claims and Expenditures

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

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:
- Children's books and games from Sally Hartley
- Photographic collage of Owego birds from Curtis Meyers
- 20 fishing reels from River City Anglers
- Education & craft materials from Beth Maynes
- $50 from Donald Beuthin
- $65 from Joel & Christina Vos

ITEM R2. Bird Friendly Windows at Nature Center

The Loess Hills Audubon Society approached the nature center regarding installation of bird-friendly window treatments. The proposal includes installing Acopian blinds in the birdwatching area and stickers in the receptionist office. The installation will focus on the upper-level corners of the building, which are the primary area for bird strikes. The Audubon Society will fund the materials, but the nature center will be responsible for the cost of installation. This initiative is part of the Bird-Friendly City designation that was recently received. Clear View Windows and Blankenship Painting and Glass are possible options for the installation.

MOTION by Cindy, second by Chris.

To approve and authorize the installation of bird-friendly window treatments at the nature center with a donation from the Loess Hills Audubon Society for the materials and using Nature Center funds for the cost of installation.[25-16]

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

ITEM R3. FEMA Updates – Little Sioux Park

Dan reported that he requested funding from the Board of Supervisors for the flood repairs at Little Sioux Park so that repairs can be made without waiting for the FEMA payment. They agreed to pay for the trail and boat ramp repairs from either LOST or gambling funds and wait for the 85% reimbursement from FEMA. He also noted that they may be able to get the extra 15% funded through HUD.

ITEM R4. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The programs and visitors report for May was presented.
- The education department had a busy May with over 2,000 kids coming through the nature center and parks for field trips.
- Summer camps have begun and are approximately 80% full. Flyers were sent to the Sergeant Bluff and Sioux City schools prior to the end of the school year.
- Summer interns have started and are doing well.
- The exhibit installation did not go as well as planned. While the pollinator mural will be an impressive addition, it needs to be reinstalled due to visible screw holes and seams. The initial photo chosen for the back of the forest diorama didn't meet expectations, therefore that display case will be completed at a later date. Theresa has found a new photo from another photographer that may work better. Several of the interpretive panels that were installed have already shown signs of scuffing and denting likely due to the soft material they were made from. The team is exploring an alternative material that would be more durable. Despite these setbacks, the installation team has been very proactive and willing to address these challenges to ensure the final result meets expectations. The exhibit installation should be

[25-16] To approve and authorize the installation of bird-friendly window treatments at the nature center with a donation from the Loess Hills Audubon Society for the materials and using Nature Center funds for the cost of installation.

finished by the end of summer. Theresa obtained an extension on the Gilchrist grant. Dan acknowledged Theresa's efforts, noting that she had done an excellent job managing these issues and working closely with the installation and design team to resolve them.

(Neil joined by phone at 4:11 p.m.)

- Nature Calls: Committee members are actively seeking auction items. A total of $7,950 in pledged or in-hand sponsorships has been secured so far. Theresa shared a Google Doc link that lists the sponsors and auction items that have been requested. Committee and board members are encouraged to review the document and continue soliciting sponsorships and additional auction items.
- Adam Wheelock has been working on the architectural design for the raptor house. Theresa will submit a grant request to CF Industries. Brandon Deeds is going to compile a materials cost estimate to be used for the grant application.
- Representatives from Wheel the World visited the nature center to assess the facility and take photos. The nature center received a very positive rating and is now listed on their website as an accessibility verified destination. Their report included a few suggestions for further improvements.
- A Foundation meeting was held at the beginning of June. During the meeting, the foundation board inquired about the possibility of holding a joint meeting at some point.
- A public "Meet the Animals" event is scheduled for July 2nd at the nature center. The event will also include the SDSU ice cream truck and a National Guard information booth.

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Despite the forecast of rain, Memorial Day weekend was fairly well attended at the campgrounds.
- The prairie plantings at Little Sioux look good. Preparations are underway for another planting in the park, next to the residence area, which was previously brome and ash. A fall or winter planting is planned for this area.
- Little Sioux staff have also been busy helping get materials for the concession stand contractors.
- Snyder Bend & Brown's Lake staff have had limited time for tasks beyond general maintenance due to staffing shortages. Josh and other staff members have been on mowers more than usual. Similar challenges are being faced at other parks, as they are struggling to maintain operations with fewer seasonal staff.
- Rocks will be delivered tomorrow for the area where the old Izaak Walton League fence was.
- A training session was held by local sheriffs, EMTs, police departments, and WCCB officers. One officer from each district participated, with Erik assisting on training and Dan serving as an evaluator.

Erik reported on the following Southwood activities:

- The park has been busy, with day use significantly higher, especially with more hikers.
- In March, storm damage required several days of cleanup. Additionally, eleven members of a FFA group from Dennison helped with trail clearing after staff did some preliminary cutting.
- A freak rainstorm interrupted a planned burn, so the team used the time to clear trails instead.
- A new interpretive sign was installed by the overlook. Brodie designed the sign and wrote the narrative in collaboration with Golden Hills.
- Spring food plots have been planted and sprayed using a borrowed three-point planter.

- The spring fire season was successful, covering 750 acres, which is slightly below the original target.
- Staff is in the early stages of working with an individual on creating a high diversity prairie construction as a memorial. The site is located east of the Fowler parking lot.
- Erik is working with Tom Limoges on getting a $5,000 donation of seed and match it with a Gilchrist grant to cover 64 acres.
- Staff has been busy spraying weeds and keeping the campground going with only two seasonals.
- Next week, a CCI crew will work on the Salsness oak savannah project for the third year. This year, they are focusing on a 7-acre section.
- A Gilchrist microgrant application was written to fund the fire rig for the UTV received in early April. The unit makes fire management safer and more effective.
- The cedar clearing project at Zooks is progressing, though it is a daunting project due to the steep terrain.
- An open shelter at Southwood has been a long-standing desire. Staff was able to salvage a 20' x 36' shelter, some water heaters, and a walk-in freezer to be converted to seed storage from the Little Sioux Scout Ranch following its closing.

ITEM R5. Capital Improvement Projects

1. Little Sioux Park & Concession Stand Update

Dan reported that the concession stand project is in full swing. He presented pictures showing the progress as of today. Steel is expected to arrive today or tomorrow, and installation will occur on Monday. The plumber and electrician will come in following steel installation. Dan stated that he had a frank conversation with the contractor about the likelihood of opening for the July 4th weekend. He doesn't want to pressure the staff if the contractor is unable to meet the deadline. Dan and Brian have completed most of their tasks but still need to purchase kayaks and stand-up paddleboards. Dan has been negotiating discounts with Fleet Farm for the kayaks and paddleboards. Naturalist staff may assist with a fishing derby for Fleet Farm.

Brian stated that he has been coordinating with Quality Communications of Sergeant Bluff for the Wi-Fi setup. A point-to-point system will be installed, linking the shop to the swan pen and then extending to the concession stand. Additional equipment will be added to support future expansion to the campground. Installation is expected to be completed next week.

Due to budget cuts, staff has reduced the mowing along the entrance to two mower widths and planted prairie past that point. This will help reduce staff time, fuel, and mower wear and tear.

2. Izaak Walton League Building Update

Brian reported on the Izaak Walton League building demolition and presented pictures. Some concrete and asphalt remain to be cleaned up, but the structure has been fully removed. The concrete slab that was planned to be saved is in good condition. Unfortunately, the fireplace could not be saved. It had a lean, was originally strapped to the building, and lacked proper footing, making it unsuitable as a standalone structure. It posed a liability risk due to its instability. Also, the stonework ended at the wall and wasn't finished on the front, so it would have taken an investment to make it look decent.

Aaron shared a compliment from Wade Brown, who was the long-time head of the property. Wade expressed excitement that the property is being properly cared for and acknowledged they were aware the building would eventually be demolished.

Dan reported that the county recorder received a call from the lady who owns the property that Mark Arens leases. The property owner complained that overhanging trees pose a liability concern when they are mowing. Dan stated that park staff has been doing the mowing, and the trees are actually on her property. He also noted that, according to Beacon, their fence is on county property. The owners approached park staff for help in cutting down the overhanging tree. There is another tree in the area that needs attention as well.

Brian stated that the short-term goal is to place boulders along the fence line to prevent people from driving on the property, clean it up, and place picnic tables and grills there. An open shelter could potentially be built over the cement pad. Dan added that it will be a nice green space with concrete in the middle. The board can then discuss further ideas for its use and development.

ITEM R6. 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 July 10, 2025, at Little Sioux Park.

b. Survey, Needs Assessment Discussion & Update

A proposal from SIMPCO to complete a needs assessment survey was included in the board packet. Dan stated that he had a very productive meeting with Corine and Michelle at SIMPCO. He emphasized that using a third-party organization to conduct the survey would ensure the credibility and impartiality of the results, as it would prevent any bias from handpicking participants or manipulating the numbers. While the cost was a little higher than expected, Dan believed the investment was worthwhile.

The purpose of the survey is to gather public opinions on the department's operations and determine the level of support for the various areas, programming, campgrounds, and services. The data collected will be integrated into long-term planning and will serve as a key piece of information for the supervisors during budget discussions. Dan mentioned that an acre of ground is worth approximately $400 to the county economically, due to activities such as hunting, birdwatching, and hiking. He also stated that he would like the survey to be completed by November, ahead of the budgeting process.

Participants will have both electronic and paper options for completing the survey. Initially, a postcard with QR code will be mailed to participants, and those who do not complete the survey electronically will receive a follow-up paper survey.

Chris pointed out that the budget cuts are expected to last for several years, and that the conservation department is vulnerable to cuts because it provides non-mandated services. In response, Dan expressed his desire to have the survey data available to help support the department's case and protect the staff and its programs. He also shared that the sheriff has said that the federal jail contract is being renegotiated, which could bring in an additional $2 million to the county, potentially alleviating the need for additional budget cuts.

MOTION by Neil, second by Cindy

To approve and authorize contracting with SIMPCO to facilitate a needs assessment survey.[25-17]

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

c. Iowa Forestry Resiliency Program

Dan reported that the IFRP (Interior Forest Resiliency Program) has come out, and Erik brought the information to the team. They have been working with Sarah Bell, who is the wife of Liam Bell, a former staff member.

Erik explained that the program is federally funded, with dollars flowing down to the state and then distributed to County Conservation Boards (CCBs) to facilitate Forest Resiliency efforts. The funding will primarily be used for contractors, to avoid overburdening staff. The program offers 80% funding, with a minimum allocation of $100,000 per county. Initially, only two counties in the Loess Hills region expressed interest, but now more counties are getting involved. The deadline for submitting the proposal has been extended to October 1st for the first round, with subsequent rounds due on July 1st and October 1st each year for the next five years.

The project will focus on an area at Oak Ridge Unit 2, which is part of a 2006 forest management plan. The team plans to select 5-10 acres from the southern 75 acres of this area. The last cutting project in that area took place in 2014. There have been several complaints from hunters, and very little regeneration has occurred in that area.

The estimated cost of the project is between $100,000 and $200,000. The plan must be written by a district forester from the DNR (Sarah Bell is currently working on this). Even if only a portion of the 75 acres is completed, having the plan in place will provide a foundation for future work.

Dan suggested that the project could potentially be combined with the habitat stamp program and confidence that the 20% local match could be covered through available grants. Erik added that Sarah has already completed her walk-through of the area and is working on the plan, which should be finalized shortly. After that, the team will begin the grant writing process.

Erik spoke with a contractor to get per-acre cost estimates for similar TSI projects. Grinding services would cost around $4,000 per acre, pulling services would be approximately $900 per acre, and shearing would cost around $1,100 to $1,200 per acre. Lastly, it was noted that there is no in-kind match requirement for this project, meaning the work would not need to be performed by staff.

Dan clarified that no formal action is requested at this meeting since they still lack some information. The board agreed by consensus to move forward, and Dan will bring more information and ask for a formal motion at the next meeting.

[25-17] To approve and authorize contracting with SIMPCO to facilitate a needs assessment survey.

d. Approve Salary Schedule for Fiscal Year 25-26

Dan presented the FY 25-26 salary schedule. He noted that the salaries were set during the budget review and are based on the salary matrix which has been adjusted for the 3% cost of living increase approved by the board of supervisors. He asked for formal approval of the final salary schedule.

MOTION by Cindy, second by Neil.

To approve the fiscal year 2025-26 salary schedule as presented.[25-18]

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

2. Board Information

None

3. Other Business

Property For Sale:
Dan received information from Jon Hjelm of The Acre Company on a 284-acre property located in Sections 14, 15, and 22 of Kedron Township. The property includes 162 acres of crop land, 159.5 acres enrolled in two CRP contracts, and 84 acres of timber. After reviewing the details, Dan stated that he does not recommend pursuing the property, as it does not align with the board's current interests and is not located near any of the department's current complexes. By consensus, the board decided not to move forward with the acquisition.

Izaak Walton League Dock:
Dan reported that department has no use for the old roll-in dock at the Izaak Walton League, and the insurance company won't insure it. There are currently three or four people interested in acquiring the dock.

Dan proposed taking sealed bids for the dock, with the highest bidder receiving it and relieving the department of any further responsibility. He suggested bringing this proposal for action at the next meeting, noting that the board reserves the right to reject all bids.

Trailer Disposal:
Dan reported that the department has two old trailers that they wish to dispose of. The ISAC vendor, Purple Wave, will handle the auction for these trailers. A minimum bid will be set for each trailer. Brian added that this method has been approved by the supervisors as an efficient way to dispose of property. Purple Wave will manage all the legwork, including advertising the auction, and will charge a 10% buyer's premium.

Brian clarified that the trailers are both 1998 Titan models—one 16 feet long, and the other 20 feet long. While they are still functional, the department has outgrown them, and they are starting to show signs of rust and are no longer in use.

Chris raised the question of why a local auction company, such as Paulson Auctions or Hallberg Auction, which also do consignments, aren't being considered. Dan explained that

[25-18] To approve the fiscal year 2025-26 salary schedule as presented.

Purple Wave specializes in targeting counties and government agencies, which makes them a suitable choice for this particular sale. Dan will reach out to the local auction companies to gauge their interest. If they are not interested, the trailers will be sent to auction with Purple Wave.

4. Old Business

Nature Center Donation:
Dan reported that Tom has confirmed the trust has been signed for the donation, and everything is in place on their end. It is now up to the department to take the first step. Dan emphasized the need for a dedicated board meeting to discuss the next steps, specifically focused on this donation.

He expressed confidence that the donors likely have a backup plan in case things don't move forward with the department.

Dan stated that the board needs to first decide if they are willing to move forward with the donation, and if so, how they will proceed. The board should consider questions such as what will be required to move forward, what the costs will be, and the size of the project.

Once the board is aligned, the next step would be to meet with staff to brainstorm ideas on the location and scope of the project. Dan mentioned that there are firms available that can assist with fundraising efforts. Additionally, CMBA, a firm specializing in architectural services, could provide rendition drawings to help visualize the project and get it started.

CF Industries Offer:
Neil noted that it has been a lengthy process with CF Industries corporate, but the company is very close to offering 16.2 acres along the north boundary of Brown's Lake. The land will be treated as a wildlife refuge, and while the local company considered hunting acceptable, the corporate side does not want the public to access the area. The plan is to seed the land with native species and have it managed by the WCCB.

In addition, there is a second parcel about a mile and a half north of the first one, located at the old Matthey farmstead. To the north of this land is some farm ground that is too wet most years, adjacent to the interstate. This parcel is 20 acres and will follow a similar arrangement to the first. Both would be designated as a wildlife refuge and managed by the WCCB under a five-year agreement, with the option for any party to terminate the agreement at any time.

Little Sioux Park Road Replacement:
Dan was at the supervisors' meeting a week ago where he fought for the project and gained a little traction, but the chairman had other priorities for different projects. There was $170,000 left, and Dan was looking for $265,000. The $100,000 mobilization fee was removed because the team is already on site. Despite his efforts, Dan was unsuccessful in securing the funding.

After the meeting, the budget director spoke to Dan about the possibility of using LOST funds for the project. Dan confirmed that it qualifies under economic development. The budget director proposed using $110,000 from LOST funds and combining that with the $170,000 remaining in the CIP. Dan spent time on the phone with every supervisor and received support from Matthew, Dave, and Mark, but he hasn't heard back from Chairman Bittinger. Dan will submit a request for the July 2nd agenda. The campground road won't be completed, but it is in the best condition. The proposal would include the entry road to the four-way intersection, down past the front of the shelter house, and the loop around ending just before the cabins. Dan will continue to fight for this.

ITEM R7. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:07 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

Board Secretary, Neil Stockfleth

Board Chair, Tom Limoges