WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 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, December 11, 2025, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center beginning at 4:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT
Chris Zellmer-Zant (via phone), Cindy Bennett, Neil Stockfleth, and Tom Limoges

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT
Aaron Gehling

STAFF PRESENT
Dan Heissel, Brian Stehr, Theresa Kruid, and Dawn Bostwick

OTHERS PRESENT
None

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

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS
None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
None

ITEM R1. Approval of Consent Agenda

MOTION by Neil, second by Cindy.

To approve the consent agenda.

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

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

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

C2. Approve the November 2025 Claims and Expenditures

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

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:

- Framed & matted "Bald Eagle" Robert Sisseel print donated by Mark Haindfield
- Framed & matted Ducks Unlimited 1990 print donated by Mark Haindfield
- Ceramic bears, wood plaque with bear, and North Woods Flora guide donated by Marilyn Ebmeier
- Children's books, Field guides, activity guides, and 2 recurved bows from Mary Siepker
- $250 from John & Karen Gleeson for Denny Wynn memorial

ITEM R2. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The programs and visitors report for November was presented.
- Programming has shifted to being mostly in the school classrooms this time of year.
- Winter Fun Day is scheduled for Saturday depending on weather, but there is a plan for indoor activities.
- Kari & Mariah will be doing a few programs over winter break while kids are out of school.
- Nature Calls:
  - ArtSplash and the Orpheum have confirmed that their events are being held on September 19, 2026. The convention center is currently holding both September 19th and 26th for Nature Calls, but the 26th would be the preferred date.
  - Theresa, Kari, & Mariah toured the Mariott in South Sioux City and were very impressed with their new setup, but Nature Calls cannot be held there due to beer vendors not being able to cross the state line. Theresa has not heard back from the Arena yet.
  - Theresa has confirmed that a couple beer vendors are able to participate on the 26th, but is waiting to hear from Glazers, Marto, and Brioux City.
  - Theresa has started to work on a comparison of expenses from previous years and will provide more information later.
- The Missouri River Runners have expressed interest in possibly holding a trail run at the nature center in October. They would provide a 20% donation. It could possibly work in conjunction with the nature center Hike-A-Thon.

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Field staff has been moving a lot of snow and taking advantage of the snow to burn some brush piles. There are at least a dozen additional cottonwoods to be taken down this winter at Snyder Bend, and their burn piles were full. Brian talked to a logger recommended by Steve Griebel and is waiting for their response.
- Little Sioux staff has been cutting cottonwood trees to get ready for the Wi-Fi installation. They have a plan to avoid taking down the blue spruce that is in the path.
- Southwood staff had been preparing burn units for this fall, but the snow has shut that down now until spring. Staff is continuing to process and store native seeds collected throughout the year.

- Brown's Lake and Snyder Bend staff has been removing trees and spraying thistles on the CF Industries parcels. They also hosted a Hunter Education Field Day in November which reached full capacity.
- The new Kawasaki Mule has been delivered to Little Sioux Park. Brian stated that the bed size is quite a bit larger than the Kubota and accommodates the fire rigs better. Dan noted that it will be outfitted with LED lights for night work or search and rescue.
- Law enforcement personnel has been working on renewing their annual NCIC certification for the Mach system, as well as completing their final pesticide CEUs for the year.

ITEM R3. Capital Improvement Projects

1. FEMA Update

Dan reported that he and Brian met with FEMA today and received the good news that the trail has been removed from the archeological survey requirement. Brian located several original Phase I surveys in archived files, which helped get a clean bill of health for the trail. However, FEMA will still require a Phase I survey for the boat ramp. Dan will prepare RFPs with a submission deadline of January 15 to contract with a qualified firm. The survey must be completed by February 13, with the executive summary submitted by February 20. The goal is to secure approval in time to perform the work in March, before the water levels rise. Dan will present proposals for approval at the January meeting.

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 January 15, 2025, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center, most likely via video conference.

b. Budget Amendment FY26/27 Approval

Dan reviewed the highlighted changes to the final budget proposal included in the board packet. After approval of the budget last month, the building services director and budget director informed him that funding for the nature center foundation monitoring will be ending. They instructed Dan to budget $20,000 to cover that for the next year. Along with that increase, Dan made a few other minor changes that resulted in an overall increase of $17,700. Supervisors are hoping to have the budget approved by March 15.

MOTION by Cindy, second by Chris.

To approve the final updated FY2026/2027 operations budget as presented.[25-30]

[25-30] To approve the final updated FY2026/2027 operations budget as presented.

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

c. Needs Assessment Survey Update

Dan reported that after the first mailing of 2,000 postcards for the needs assessment survey, only 39 responses were received. SIMPCO stated that all responses were from individuals over 50 years old and were very positive. They are now preparing a second mailing to reach non-respondents, which will include a paper survey and a QR code for the digital version. A colorful one-page flyer will also be included, explaining the purpose of the survey and offering an incentive of a chance to win a one-night cabin stay for completing the survey. A total of 400 responses is needed to achieve a 90% confidence rate.

This time, announcements will be promoted through social media, radio, and television. Dan will also contact the newspaper. The plan is to have all outreach in place with the next week, prior to the mailing.

d. RFP's Needed – Projects

Dan noted that he will be preparing requests for proposals/qualifications for the following projects.

- RFP for graveling at Peter's Pit.
- RFQ for an engineer to design the boat ramp at Oto. A water enhancement grant will be available in January to cover engineering costs, and a Water Recreation Access Cost (WRAC) grant could assist with acquisition and development. Brian and Dan recently toured all boat ramps from Ida County to Smithland with the water trail coordinator, who recommended issuing the RFQ for engineering and design now.
- RFQ for HUD funding to address the Little Sioux Park bank erosion repairs that FEMA will not cover.

MOTION by Neil, second by Cindy.

To approve and authorize the director to apply for a Water Trail Enhancement Grant for the Oto boat ramp engineering and HUD funding for the Little Sioux Park bank erosion. [25-31]

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

[25-31] To approve and authorize the director to apply for a Water Trail Enhancement Grant for the Oto boat ramp engineering and HUD funding for the Little Sioux Park bank erosion.

e. Endowment Fund Investment

Dan reviewed his recommendation and the board's agreement at last month's meeting to reinvest the endowment fund interest along with the original $50,000 into a CD and allow it to accumulate. Dan advised the Treasurer to proceed but requested formal board action today.

MOTION by Chris, second by Cindy.

To approve and authorize the County Treasurer to reinvest the conservation department endowment fund interest along with the original investment and allow it to accumulate.[25-32]

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

f. Water Trail Grant Resolution

Dan asked for approval of the Water Trail Enhancement Grant Resolution for the Oto boat ramp.

MOTION by Cindy, second by Neil.

To adopt the following Water Trail Enhancement Grant Resolution.[25-33]

"Whereas the Woodbury County Conservation Board is interested in applying for a Water Trail Access Grant for design and construction of a boat ramp on the Little Sioux River near Oto, AND Water Trail Access grant funds are needed for the project. NOW THEREFORE, the Woodbury County Conservation Board does hereby make application for assistance, AND therefore agrees to abide by all the covenants of Section 483A.3A of Iowa Code 2001 and Chapter 35 (571), Iowa Administrative Code, AND further certifies this resolution was officially adopted by the Woodbury County Conservation Board at a legal meeting held on the 11th day of December, in the year of 2025."

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

2. Board Information

Tom reported that he spoke with the advisor regarding the possible construction of the new wing at the nature center who said the client appears excited and has been asking

[25-32] To approve and authorize the County Treasurer to reinvest the conservation department endowment fund interest along with the original investment and allow it to accumulate.

[25-33] To approve and authorize the director to apply for a Water Trail Enhancement Grant for the Oto boat ramp engineering and HUD funding for the Little Sioux Park bank erosion, and to adopt the following Water Trail Enhancement Grant Resolution.

questions about progress. Dan stated that he received an email from architect Terry Glade, who explained that he has been busy with the county jail demolition project but will provide plans before January. Dan added that the raptor house is also on hold pending their advice and answers on the foundation situation. The architect will take the well and septic system into consideration when recommending a location for the addition. Tom will inform the client that architect renderings should be available in January.

3. Other Business

Dan announced that Nathan Silfies, Resource Manager at Little Sioux Park will be resigning to take over his family farm. The position has been posted internally with a deadline of next Wednesday. Interviews will be conducted immediately so a promotion can be made promptly. Dan will email board members with the decision, and the board will officially set the salary according to the department matrix at the next meeting.

4. Old Business

Right of First Refusal on Property Acquisition:
Dan reported that he had received a phone call from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation regarding a right of first refusal for a property acquisition. He was informed that the landowner now has a buyer offering $400,000 equating to $3,500 per acre. The WCCB originally attempted to buy it a couple of years ago at $3,200/acre, but the seller backed out. Dan recommended that the board waive their right of first refusal and pass on the purchase. He cited a tight budget period, the INHF's selectiveness about investments, and the poor quality of the property. The parcel is located on the southeast edge of Oak Ridge Unit 2, a couple miles north of Smithland, but it doesn't directly connect to WCCB property.

Dan reviewed potential grant opportunities, noting that the Habitat Stamp Grant would require a 45% match (approximately $180,000) to remain competitive. He also mentioned the possibility of pursuing a REAP grant, which could fund the project at 100%, though he expressed doubt that this property would qualify as a strong candidate for REAP. He reminded the board of the upcoming road bond payment and the required LAWCON grant match, both of which will significantly draw down the CIP fund. Dan also raised concerns about removing 116 acres from the tax rolls given the county's current budget conditions. He further emphasized that the property would require substantial work and financial investment to rehabilitate.

Neil noted that the mission of the board is to protect ground.

MOTION by Chris, second by Cindy.

To support the director's recommendation not to pursue the property discussed.[25-34]

Additional brief discussion was held with a couple board members expressing that they were not ready to decide and would like a full board present for the vote.

[25-34] To support the director's recommendation not to pursue the property discussed.

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

Motion failed.

(Chris left at 5:42 p.m.)

Dan will reach out to the INHF to let them know the status and see what they advise. He will email their response to the entire board, and Tom will decide whether to call a special meeting.

Website Accessibility Mandates:
Dan reported that a new mandate has been issued to ensure that websites are accessible to people with disabilities. He has hired the department's website developer for up to three hours of work to determine areas of noncompliance and advise how to proceed. The MyCountyParks.com website is being evaluated by their developer as well.

ITEM R5. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:49 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

Board Secretary, Neil Stockfleth

Board Chair, Tom Limoges