WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 17, 2025, SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

The following is a true copy of the minutes of the special meeting of the Woodbury County, Iowa, Conservation Board held on Wednesday, December 17, 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 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 Agenda

MOTION

To approve the agenda.

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

ITEM R2. Right of First Refusal

Dan informed the board that Chris had shared her thoughts on the land acquisition via email due to a scheduling conflict and would be arriving late to the meeting. *(Her email has been attached as part of the record.)*

Dan reported that he received a call on Friday from the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF) and learned that the trust with the $400,000 offer on the property owns all the land along the east side of the parcel. They have historically been good neighbors to the WCCB, and Dan expressed hesitation about taking any action that could jeopardize that relationship. INHF indicated to Dan that the transaction would qualify as a bargain sale since land in the area is

selling for $5,000 per acre or higher. The price difference could be leveraged as a bargaining chip for grant funding.

Board discussion:

- A couple members expressed interest in acquiring the property, noting it would be a valuable addition at a favorable price compared to past land purchases.
- The parcel was described as low quality farmland and marginal pasture. It was noted that the restoration work wouldn't need to happen until funds are available.
- One member pointed out that larger blocks of land enhance recreational opportunities and habitat, and all WCCB units were acquired piece by piece.
- It was stated that the trust should have been aware of WCCB's right of first refusal when making its offer.
- Another member reminded the board that the property had been vetted in 2021, and an offer was made at that time, adding that the parcel also provides access from a good road.

Dan clarified that while he previously had concerns about grant availability, INHF's confirmation of a bargain sale changes the outlook. The price difference represents over $100,000 of in-kind value, which can be used as leverage for the Habitat Stamp Grant. Additional funding of $50,000–$70,000 may be available through other sources, such as Gilchrist and Pheasants Forever.

(Chris joined the meeting by phone at 4:25 p.m.)

Tom reviewed the acquisition details and asked for any further discussion.

MOTION by Neil, second by Aaron.

To approve and authorize the purchase of a 116-acre parcel from the O'Connell family next to Oak Ridge for $400,000.[25-35]

ROLL CALL VOTE:

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

Motion carried 3-2.

Dan stated that he would contact the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation to inform them of the board's decision to pursue its right of first refusal. The INHF indicated that since they were involved in the initial offer, they would complete the transaction by securing the property. The WCCB will then enter into a purchase agreement with INHF and pursue grant funding for the acquisition.

Dan expressed appreciation to the board for open discussion and for the votes on both sides of the issue.

[25-35] To approve and authorize the purchase of a 116-acre parcel from the O'Connell family next to Oak Ridge for $400,000.

Other Business:

Dan reported that the nature center foundation had been re-measured and confirmed that there had been no further movement.

Dan also stated that he received a call from CMBA earlier today. They were working on the proposal for the nature center addition and asked a few clarifying questions. CMBA indicated that they would have something ready soon.

ITEM R3. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:33 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

Board Secretary, Neil Stockfleth

Board Chair, Tom Limoges