# WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
# MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, JANUARY 15, 2026, BOARD MEETING

The following is a true copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Woodbury County, Iowa, Conservation Board held on Thursday, January 15, 2026, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center beginning at 4:00 p.m.

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

**BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT**
Aaron Gehling

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

**OTHERS PRESENT**
Mark Nelson, County Supervisor/Conservation Board Liaison

**CALL TO ORDER**
Chairperson Limoges called the meeting to order at 4:06 p.m.

*(Chris and Neil are participating by phone.)*

**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 December 11, 2025, Regular Meeting and December 17, 2025, Special Meeting

C2. Approve the December 2025 Claims and Expenditures

C3. Receive and Place on File the December 2025 Financial/Budget Report and 2nd Quarter FY 25-26 Reserve Fund Report

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:

- A Cultural and Environmental History of the Big Sioux River Valley book copy from Dorothy Shamblen
- Box of Suet from Jeff Olson
- 2 antique vasculum's, migratory bird map, Arm & Hammer bird cards, 12 bird prints, 16 herbarium plates from Jerry Morgan
- $100 from Steve Shadle
- $500 from Loess Hills Wild Ones
- $100 from Alex Uhl Family for Aquarium Adoption for one year
- $100 from Marc & Tracy Vander Wilt for Fox snake adoption for one year
- $100 from Susan Hess for Corn snake adoption for one year – honor of Declan & Brody Hess
- $100 from Sonja Olson for Screech Owl adoption for one year – honor of Jeff Olson & Nancy Shulenberger

**ITEM R2. Swearing In of Newly Appointed Board Member - Election of Board Officers and Committee Assignments for 2026**

Tom Limoges administered the oath of office to Chris Zellmer-Zant as she has been reappointed by the Board of Supervisors to the Conservation Board for another five-year term.

Dan reviewed the traditional rotation of officers stating that Aaron Gehling would take the position of Chair, Neil Stockfleth would move to Vice Chair, and Chris Zellmer-Zant would serve as Secretary.

**MOTION** by Cindy, second by Chris.

To accept slate of officers for 2026 as presented.[26-1]

**VOTE:**

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

Chris agreed to remain on the REAP committee and the Woodbury County Conservation Foundation Board. Dan noted that all board members are members of the endowment committee.

**MOTION** by Neil, second by Chris.

To appoint Chris Zellmer-Zant as the board representative for the REAP committee and the Woodbury County Conservation Board, and to appoint all board members to the endowment committee.[26-2]

[26-1] To accept slate of officers for 2026 as presented.
[26-2] To appoint Chris Zellmer-Zant as the board representative for the REAP committee and the Woodbury County Conservation Board, and to appoint all board members to the endowment committee.

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

**ITEM R3. Friend of Conservation & Conservation Educator Awards**

Theresa presented a list of suggested nominees for the Friend of Conservation & Conservation Educator awards. She noted that some individuals have been on the list for quite some time, and it may be time to update the list.

*(Neil arrived in person at 4:21 p.m.)*

Brief discussion was held regarding potential nominees.

**MOTION** by Chris, second by Neil.

To appoint Don Dixon for the 2025 Friend of Conservation award and Rod Tondreau for the 2025 Conservation Educator award.[26-3]

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

**ITEM R4. Department Reports**

**1. Nature Center Activities**

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The programs and visitors report for December was presented.
- Winter Fun Day was postponed by one week due to weather, and attendance dropped to approximately 150, likely due to the rescheduling.
- Most programs are currently being held in the schools rather than at the nature center during this time of year.
- Kari recently earned her yoga instructor certification.
- Mariah launched a homeschool series in 2025 that has grown so popular she now offers both a morning and an afternoon session. The two-session format began today, with a little over 30 participants attending each session.
- Mark asked Theresa to provide a 2025 recap of visitors and programs.
- Naturalists have been organizing and inventorying program materials.
- The WCCB has been invited to participate in the Outdoor Show at the Expo Center in the Kids' Zone. Information on all the parks and the nature center will be provided, along with a small activity and casting game.
- The annual Foundation meeting will be held on February 21 at 1:00 p.m. at Briar Cliff. The *Wildlife Encounters* program will follow the meeting. Briar Cliff is co-sponsoring the event and waiving the room rental fee for a block of 50 student tickets.

[26-3] To appoint Don Dixon for the 2025 Friend of Conservation award and Rod Tondreau for the 2025 Conservation Educator award.

- Dr. Saulsbury and Brian Fernando will present about their dinosaur discoveries and Hell Creek formation on January 24th.
- Nature Calls: September 26th will likely be the date, but Theresa is still waiting for confirmation from Glazers. Staff will visit the Arena next week as another venue possibility.
- The volunteer awards event will be held on Thursday, February 25th.
- Kari & Mariah will be attending Winterfest the last week of January. The IAN Spring workshop will be held in March.
- Pam Pfautsch will reach her 30-year anniversary in February.
- Theresa received word of a possible donation from Premier Credit Union to go towards Loess Hills prairies and education.

**2. Park Activities**

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- Field staff have been completing prep burns to support larger burns planned for spring. Some areas are prairie reconstructions scheduled for reseeding this winter.
- Staff at Snyder Bend and Bigelow Park are removing approximately 12 cottonwood trees. Additional trees near infrastructure will be removed by a contractor. Replacements will include a diverse mix of species.
- Equipment maintenance, as well as picnic table and dock repairs, are underway. Staff have done an excellent job sourcing lumber at the best prices.
- The Kawasaki Mule was delivered and is in excellent condition.

**ITEM R5. Capital Improvement Projects**

**1. FEMA Update**

Dan reported that since the trail was released from the archeological study requirement, the contractor awarded the bid is now able to proceed with pouring concrete on the two trail sections. However, the mining company removed the road leading to the trail, so an alternate access route will be needed for concrete trucks.

He stated that an archeological study will be required for the boat ramp, the area south of the boat ramp to be riprapped, and the area near the shelter where the bank has sloughed off. Dan received the necessary information from FEMA and issued the RFP. He received interest from 13 contractors via email, but only two submitted proposals. If the weather conditions allow the Phase One study to be completed, the contractor could finish the boat ramp before water levels rise.

He added that HUD might be willing to fund work on the 600 feet north of the boat ramp and the area by the shelter that FEMA declined to cover. They are working with JEO and will need to issue an RFQ for this. Once completed, HUD funding work can be started for the bank stabilization project.

**2. Owego Project – Great Outdoors Foundation Update**

Dan reported that he and Brian have been working with Stacy Williams of the Great Outdoors Foundation and Bolton & Menk engineers on the Owego project. They met with

the local NRCS staff, who were very receptive to the plans and have begun involving their state team. The WCCB grazing plan has also been submitted to the state for approval. A Zoom meeting with all parties is scheduled for next week. Initially, the plan included solar pumping, but they are now considering electrical pumps. The area could have water year-round, but a schedule and plan will be needed to fluctuate the water levels.

**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 February 12, 2026, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center.

*The board agreed to move ahead to Item c while waiting for CMBA representatives to arrive.*

**c. Phase One Archaeological RFP Selection**

Dan stated that RFPs were sent out with a deadline of January 14. Two proposals were received:

- Chronicle Heritage (Milwaukee, WI): $35,000
- Bear Creek Archeology. Inc. (Cresco, IA) $6,465.
  *Note: Bear Creek indicated that fees would increase if additional areas require a survey.*

FEMA would cover some of the cost but splitting it between the boat ramp and HUD would be difficult. The bid covers the entire area, which involves two separate funding sources. FEMA advised that it would not be in the board's best interest to split the cost, so it may be covered by the board and included with HUD funding.

Dan recommended accepting the proposal from Bear Creek Archeology for $6,465, with the understanding that if additional surveys are needed, the cost will increase.

**MOTION** by Neil second by Chris.

To accept the proposal from Bear Creek Archeology to conduct a cultural resources survey at a cost of $6,465, with the understanding that if additional surveys are needed the cost will increase.[26-4]

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

[26-4] To accept the proposal from Bear Creek Archeology to conduct a cultural resources survey at a cost of $6,465, with the understanding that if additional surveys are needed the cost will increase.

*(Chris left the meeting at 5:00 p.m.)*
*(Terry Glade and Kaitlyn Schroeder from CMBA arrived at 5:05 p.m.)*

**b. CMBA Proposal**

CMBA representatives, Terry Glade and Kaitlyn Schroeder, presented preliminary plans for a potential two-story addition to the nature center, with approximately 1,800 square feet per floor. They recommended adding the structure to the west side of the current building to ensure it blends well and complements the existing design with an offset roofline. The estimated cost is approximately $1.6 million, based on $450 per square foot. Dan noted that while it would reduce some green space, fill dirt could be added to extend useable space towards the ravine.

Board members discussed other possible options. CMBA will prepare additional renderings that include a deck on the south side and an increase of 10 feet to the addition. Tom will present these initial plans to the client. The next step will be conducting a needs study and visiting other nature centers for ideas.

**d. Budget FY 26/27 Update**

The conservation department's budget review is scheduled for February 6 at 10:30 a.m. Dan will present the same budget as in the last three years, with a few minor adjustments. Dan will send the supervisors a synopsis of the changes prior to the review. Dan invited board members to attend in person or watch the session live on YouTube.

Dan asked for a jail capacity update. Mark reported that the county needs approximately 110 federal and ICE inmates to cover the bond payment without using taxpayer dollars; any surplus revenue goes into the county budget. Currently, the jail is housing 130-140 inmates and could accommodate an additional 25-50 inmates with the addition of 6-8 employees. Supervisors will evaluate the return on investment before adding more staff.

**e. Needs Assessment Survey Update**

Dan reported that SIMPCO initially planned to mail out 500 surveys and then send another 500 a few weeks later. Dan instructed them to mail all 2000 surveys immediately, as per the contract. To date, 108 responses have been received. The survey was publicized through television, the *Sioux City Journal*, the *Sergeant Bluff Advocate*, social media, and radio.

**2. Board Information**

None

**3. Other Business**

None

**4. Old Business**

O'Connell Property Easement:
Dan reported that although the board voted in December to purchase a 116-acre parcel from the O'Connell family, it was later discovered that the transaction involved a 1031 tax exchange. The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation advised that, while the board had the right to purchase the property under the right of first refusal, they did not recommend proceeding and preferred not to make the purchase. They met with the trust and negotiated a conservation easement and a right of first refusal for WCCB, ensuring the property will remain protected.

Nature Center Water Feature and Garden Retaining Walls:
Dan informed Mark that he would like him to schedule a visit to the nature center to review the water feature and assess the need for installing geogrids. The feature has not been operational for two years. Additionally, the railing around it is deteriorating, and the garden retaining walls are collapsing. Repairs have been delayed while foundation issues were being addressed, but Dan emphasized the importance of completing these repairs. He noted that investing county funds will be necessary to leverage grant opportunities.

**ITEM R7. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

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Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

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Board Secretary, Chris Zellmer-Zant

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Board Chair, Aaron Gehling