WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 12, 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, February 12, 2026, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center beginning at 4:00 p.m.

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

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT
None

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

OTHERS PRESENT
Mark Nelson, County Supervisor/Conservation Board Liaison

CALL TO ORDER
Chairperson Gehling called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS
None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
None

ITEM R1. Approval of Consent Agenda

MOTION by Tom, second by Neil.

To approve the consent agenda.

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

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

C1. Approve the Minutes of the January 15, 2026, Regular Meeting

C2. Approve the January 2026 Claims and Expenditures

C3. Receive and Place on File the January 2026 Financial/Budget Report

C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:
- $100 from Jean Parden in honor of Donna Popp
- $1,000 via WCCF from Premier Credit Union for Loess Hills Conservation

ITEM R2. Snyder Bend Cabin Doors & Deck Replacements

Dan reported that the sliding doors on the Snyder Bend cabins have been problematic for several years, and the decks are also in poor condition. Brian added that the sliding doors have been leaking and sticking, causing the interior wood to deteriorate. The decks were constructed with early composite decking material which has faded and weathered, and the underlying structure has also begun to decay. Dan asked Brandon Deeds to inspect both the decks and the supporting structure. Brandon has access to a decking product comparable to Trex that could be used for replacement. Brian proposed removing the sliding doors entirely and installing windows to mirror the three windows on the opposite side, noting that there is an alternate entrance door from the deck. Brandon will provide quotes for both options. The board agreed that replacing the doors with windows would be the preferred option.

ITEM R3. Cabin Refund & Cancellation Policy Change

Dan presented the proposed changes to the cabin and shelter refund and cancellation policy, noting that the current policy is very strict and not customer friendly.

Dawn reviewed the proposed updates, which include:

- Extending the deadline for reservation changes from two weeks to three weeks prior to reservation date.
- Amending the current no-refund policy to allow for one of the following options:
  – A change of reservation dates
  – A gift certificate for a future stay
  – A refund for the full amount, minus a $25 administration fee

The Board added that any gift certificate issued under this policy must be used within one year.

MOTION by Neil, second by Cindy

To adopt the proposed changes to the Cabin and Shelter Refund and Cancellation Policy as amended.[26-5]

VOTE:

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

ITEM R4. Website Overhaul – ADA Requirements

Dan reported that staff have been working with Artillery Media to update the conservation website to meet new federally mandated ADA requirements. The county is also updating its main website, and Mark provided additional details about the required changes. Dan explained that the conservation department's website is separate from the county's website.

Staff met with the website developer via Zoom and determined that rebuilding many of the pages will be more cost-effective than repairing them. The result will be a more functional site

[26-5] To adopt the proposed changes to the Cabin and Shelter Refund and Cancellation Policy as amended.

and an improved customer experience. The estimated cost for the website revamp is $8,000-9,000. In addition, an AI application will be added for $490 per year to assist with captioning photos and maintaining compliance. The deadline for full ADA compliance is April 15, 2026.

Dan also noted that while the state association website is addressing the same requirements, each county is responsible for captioning its own photos. Dawn has been working on completing those captions.

Tom asked whether the mandate also applies to social media accounts. Mark said he believed that if the accounts are owned by the entity, they would also need to comply. Staff will research the specific requirements for social media platforms.

MOTION by Cindy, second by Neil.

To approve and authorize the director to contract with Artillery Media to update the department website at a cost of up to $9,000.[26-6]

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

ITEM R5. Capital Improvement Projects

1. FEMA Projects Update

Dan reported that the contract for the archaeological survey on the boat ramp has been awarded. However, frost has set in, so work will need to wait until the ground thaws or there is sufficient rainfall. Once the weather warms and the ground dries out, the trail can be poured.

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 March 19, 2026, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center.

b. Nature Calls Venue

Theresa stated that she has tentatively reserved the Nature Calls event date with the Sioux City Convention Center, but a contract must be signed by end of the month. The estimated cost is approximately $24,600, with food accounting for the largest portion;

[26-6] To approve and authorize the director to contract with Artillery Media to update the department website at a cost of up to $9,000.

last year's food exceeded $17,000. At the board's direction, staff met with Dustin and James at the Sports Academy Arena to explore alternative options. The facility is large, and the event would use only a third of the available space. They have a liquor license, coolers, an ice machine, chairs, and cocktail tables, but additional tables, linens, and pipe and drape, would still be required. Facility rental is $2,000. The organization's mission includes supporting other nonprofits, and they proposed a 70/30 partnership. Under this arrangement, they would help promote the event, sell tickets, serve on committee, and assist in securing sponsors and auction/raffle items.

Dan stated that the partnership could expand the event's audience, and provide strong promotional advantages, including email outreach to thousands of people and the ability to sell tickets at the facility. He also mentioned that the Sports Academy has a golf simulator, basketball hoops, and concession equipment that could be utilized for the event. He recommended moving forward with this option.

Theresa added that committee members are supportive of trying a new approach and reaching a broader audience.

MOTION by Tom, second by Cindy.

To hold the 2026 Nature Calls event in partnership with the Siouxland Sports Academy at the Arena.[26-7]

VOTE:

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

c. CMBA Proposal

Dan presented updated plans for the nature center addition, which now include an addition of 10 feet to the building footprint and a deck on the south side. If a deck is added, a no-drip solution could be installed so the area beneath the deck remains usable during rain.

Staff visited nature centers in Lyon County, Sioux County, and Good Earth State Park in South Dakota on Monday. Two additional trips are planned to visit facilities in Harrison, Pottawattamie, O'Brien, Dickinson and Clay Counties, as well as Fontanelle Forest in Omaha.

(Tom and Brian left at 5:00 p.m.)

[26-7] To hold the 2026 Nature Calls event in partnership with the Siouxland Sports Academy at the Arena.

d. Budget CIP Request (FY 2026/27)

Dan reported that he met with Supervisors Mark Nelson and Dave Dietrich at the nature center prior to today's meeting to review several repair issues that need attention.

- The water feature is sloughing, and geogrid will need to be installed.
- The garden walls are leaning, and the retaining wall needs to be extended. Machinery access must be maintained along the stairs.
- The red stamped concrete on the observation deck is cracking. Dan consulted with a contractor who recommended cutting along the existing lines and repouring with standard concrete. The contractor also advised removing the ramp, as the beams are breaking out of the concrete. Dan noted that an accessible sidewalk could be connected to the path leading to the playscape, allowing stroller and wheelchair access without going through the building.

Dan will gather cost estimates and submit a CIP request in March.

e. Phase One Archaeological Survey – Little Sioux Park

Addressed under Item R5.

f. Needs Assessment Survey

Dan reported that as of Friday, 238 survey responses had been received, representing a 12% response rate. The national average for a cold survey is 10-15%. Dan shared key points from a preliminary summary of the responses that he received yesterday.

(Mark left at 5:20 p.m.)

g. Uniform Policy Update

Dan explained that the department's uniform policy is outdated and no longer reflects current practice. He reviewed the changes that need to be made, including adding the director to the policy and increasing the naturalists' allowance from $225 to $300 to match other employees. Dan is also developing standard cost guidelines for uniform items and will require staff to obtain approval before exceeding those amounts. Action on the updated policy will be taken at a future meeting.

h. 2025 User Fees Report

Dawn presented the 2025 user fees report.

2. Board Information

None

3. Other Business

None

4. Old Business

None

ITEM R7. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The January programs and visitors report was presented.
- Most recent programs have been public and classroom programs. The dinosaur program was very well received.
- Summer camp dates have been announced, with registration beginning in April. Online registration will be offered this year. Early registration for foundation members will not be available. All other programming will also transition to online registration.
- The department was asked to take part in the Outdoor Show at the Expo Center at the end of February.
- The volunteer awards dinner will be held on February 26th.
- The foundation's annual meeting will be held on February 21st at Briar Cliff's St. Francis Center, followed by a Wildlife Encounters presentation. Two board vacancies will be filled at the meeting.
- Staff gathered to celebrate Pam Pfautsch's 30-year anniversary, during which she was presented with a plaque and expressions of appreciation.
- Kari & Mariah attended Winterfest, and all three naturalists will attend the IAN workshop in March.
- Summer naturalist intern interviews will begin in the coming weeks.

2. Park Activities

Dan reported on the following park activities:

- A timber burn was conducted yesterday in the Oak Ridge area, with 19 people assisting. Staff tested a new approach by mowing firebreaks and using a custom attachment on the front of a Bobcat to push brush down the burn line. The method worked very well.
- Maintenance work continues on the Snyder Bend cabins.
- Staff attended the annual wildland fire refresher training.
- A hunter safety course has been scheduled.
- Preparations for spring operations have begun.
- The resource technician opening at Brown's Lake/Snyder Bend closed on Friday with 22 applications received; five or six candidates will be selected for interviews.
- The assistant resource manager opening at Little Sioux will close on the 20th.

ITEM R8. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:45 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

Board Secretary, Chris Zellmer-Zant

Board Chair, Aaron Gehling