

**WOODBURY COUNTY, IOWA, CONSERVATION BOARD
MINUTES OF THE THURSDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2024, 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 12, 2024, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center beginning at 4:00 p.m.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT

Chris Zellmer-Zant, 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

Mark Nelson, County Supervisor/Conservation Board Liaison

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson Bennett called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

CORRESPONDENCE ITEMS

None

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

None

The board agreed to skip Item R1 until a quorum could be obtained, since Chris opted to abstain from voting on minutes of a meeting she had not attended.

ITEM R2. One Core Solar Lease

Dan stated that he had received a letter from a company wanting to install a solar farm on the Briesse property near Little Sioux Park. They are promising \$3,000 per acre, based on construction cost and utility cost, on a 20-year lease with option to extend. Dan stated that he is only presenting the information because the letter was addressed to the board, but he does not recommend pursuing it. Chris stated that zoning restrictions would not allow it anyway. The board agreed by consensus to decline the offer.

(Mark arrived at 4:03 p.m.)

ITEM R3. Endowment & Easement Monitoring Fund Information

Dan reported that he and Dawn Bostwick had recently met with Tina Bertrand, the county treasurer, and Charli Weaver, chief deputy treasurer, regarding the conservation department's endowment and easement monitoring funds. These obligated funds were currently intermingled in the conservation reserve fund. He asked that they be put in separate funds to make it more apparent how much is available for use. In that meeting, it was discovered that the treasurer had been investing the endowment fund which had grown to \$50,000 from the original \$25,000 investment. The easement monitoring fund is not currently being invested. Dan talked with the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, who also manages easement monitoring funds, and they confirmed that they are able to invest those funds and use the interest for habitat projects. Tina will begin investing those funds and

let the interest accrue. Interest can then be used for habitat restoration on easements or conservation property. It was also discovered that the treasurer has been investing the conservation REAP funds in annual CDs, but the interest is being deposited into the General Basic fund. Dan checked with Michelle Skaff, auditor, who confirmed with documentation from the state auditor, that the interest should go back into the REAP fund. Dan asked for a motion to authorize the treasurer to invest these three funds as discussed.

MOTION by Chris, second by Tom

To approve and authorize the endowment, easement monitoring, and REAP funds to be invested by the county treasurer.²⁴⁻³⁰

VOTE:

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

(Neil arrived at 4:07 p.m.)

ITEM R1. Approve Consent Agenda

MOTION by Tom, second by Neil.

To approve the consent agenda.

VOTE:

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

The consent agenda was approved and involved the following items:

- C1. Approve Minutes of the November 14, 2024, Regular Meeting
- C2. Approve the November 2024 Claims and Expenditures
- C3. Receive and Place on File the November 2024 Financial/Budget Report
- C4. Acceptance of Gifts/Donations:
 - Siouxland BIG GIVE (designated for Raptor House repairs)
 - \$1081 from Siouxland Community Foundation
 - \$1,000 from Stacey Gerhart (via SCF - \$974.59 after fees)
 - \$500 from Elaine Brown
 - \$300 from Dan & Sally Hartley for Turtle & Screech Owl adoption
 - \$100 from Marc & Tracy Vander Wilt for Fox Snake adoption
 - \$20 from Dawn Snyder for Carolyn Knapp memorial

²⁴⁻³⁰ To approve and authorize the endowment, easement monitoring, and REAP funds to be invested by the county treasurer.

ITEM R4. Closed Session – Land Deal Info – {Iowa Code 21.5 (1) (j)}

MOTION by Tom, second by Neil, at 4:08 p.m.

To enter a closed session pursuant to Iowa Code – Chapter 21.5(1)(j) for the purpose of discussing a possible land deal.

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Aaron Gehling - Absent, Chris Zellmer-Zant – Aye, Cindy Bennett - Aye, Neil Stockfleth – Aye, and Tom Limoges - Aye.

The board discussed a potential land deal. The session was recorded.

MOTION by Tom and second by Neil at 4:21 p.m.

To leave closed session pursuant to Iowa Code – Chapter 21.5(1)(j).

ROLL CALL VOTE:

Aaron Gehling - Absent, Chris Zellmer-Zant – Aye, Cindy Bennett - Aye, Neil Stockfleth – Aye, and Tom Limoges - Aye.

ITEM R5. Possible Exhibits Donation

Dan introduced the possibility of an exotic animal taxidermy collection being donated to the nature center. Tom facilitated a meeting with Dan, the individual, and their investment officer. Dan explained to them that the nature center only displays mounts native to Iowa and the Loess Hills. He suggested selling the collection for a profit, but the individual wants the collection to stay together in her husband’s name. Dan considered creating a traveling exhibit and rotating it to other nature centers but decided it would deteriorate the quality of the collection. The investor asked if he would be willing to build a separate wing for the display, but Dan explained that he does not have funding for that. They asked if a building would be a possibility if she were willing to donate to the building, and Dan said he would need to consult the board.

Dan stated that, if the donation came through, the displays would allow visitors to see animals from around the world that they wouldn’t normally see. The other part of the addition could be used for more storage, exhibit space, a coffee nook/library, additional offices, etc.

Dan asked if the board would be interested, and if so, Tom will tell his coworker to consult the investor and see what they offer. Dan estimated that it would take a million dollars for a 40’ x 60’ addition. If they agree to donate, Dan will talk to an architect to get an idea of what is wanted.

Theresa stated she had mixed feelings because the focus of the nature center has always been to promote the local area. She also said she could see the benefit of expanding it to the world because it is all connected, stating that pollinators produce 80% of the world’s plants and crops.

Board members expressed concerns about long-term expenses, heating & cooling, maintenance, staff, care of the mounts and exhibits and asked what other financial support would be available for the exotics and long-term maintenance. After discussion, there was board consensus to have Tom let his coworker know that the board is interested but does not have the money to build an addition nor it is part of the department’s long-term plan and ask if the donor is willing to fund the project.

At this point, the board agreed to skip to Item R8.1.c while there was still quorum.

ITEM R8. Board Member/Staff Reports

1. Administrative Items

c. Izaak Walton League – Update & Decision on Building

Dan reported that a company had been hired to do the abatement of the asbestos in the Izaak Walton League building. They haven't been given the go-ahead to start yet, because once they start, staff will not be able to enter the facility. Brian has worked with staff to get an inventory of everything that is salvageable. Items need to be removed before they remediate and will be stored in the old shop at Brown's Lake. Dan recommended razing the building and creating a green space. He hopes to be able to get the Salix Fire Department to do a practice burn. Dan stated that a staff member has asked to remove the car siding from the interior walls on his own time, and the board agreed by consensus to allow that.

MOTION by Chris, second by Tom.

To approve and authorize the razing of the Izaak Walton League building.²⁴⁻³¹

VOTE:

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

(Chris left at 5:00 p.m.)

ITEM R6. Department Reports

1. Nature Center Activities

Theresa reported on the following Nature Center activities:

- The programs and visitors report for November was presented.
- Kari & Mariah attended the IAN fall workshop in Tama County.
- Saturday is Winter Fun Day and Artist Open House from 10 a.m. – 3 p.m.
- The nature center's 30th anniversary is October 22, 2025. Planning hasn't gotten very far yet.
- Staff has been working on text, graphics, and information for the exhibit updates with Brown Knows Design. Installation is scheduled for March 2025.
- Loess Hills Wild Ones wants to start a seed library at the nature center. Tyler will be building the cabinet, and they will provide supplies.
- The foundation meeting was held on December 3rd. They are reviewing the bylaws, and minor updates are needed. Dan noted that Theresa is a board member, and Chris is a board liaison, but neither one can hold an office.
- WCCF/Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center was named as one of many beneficiaries by William Vust. Theresa will contact the lawyer to verify how they wanted those funds designated.

(Tom left at 5:10 and rejoined by phone.)

²⁴⁻³¹ To approve and authorize the razing of the Izaak Walton League building.

2. Park Activities

Brian reported on the following park activities:

- With the mild weather, staff has been working on outdoor projects.
- Since there is snow today, Southwood staff has been burning piles of unwanted vegetation that they had removed.
- Little Sioux staff installed the Briese parking lot and sign. They used boulders to outline the lot and used gravel from Peter's Pit. They also hauled gravel from Peter's Pit to several other wildlife area parking lots that needed additional material.
- Brown's Lake and Snyder Bend staff cleaned up rough-looking trees along the fence line.
- The abatement company wanted to remove the asbestos at Izaak Walton in mid-December, but they will hold off until staff is done removing items.
- Officers have been working deer hunting seasons, but it has been slow with not many hunters or deer.

ITEM R7. Capital Improvement Projects Update

1. Little Sioux Park Ranger Residence Septic Replacement

Dan reported that the septic system at the Little Sioux residence failed, backing up sewage in the basement fixtures. The system was over 30 years old with gray water and black water in separate tanks. The gray water tank was fiberglass and collapsing, and the black water tank was an old cistern. Mike Barkley had it inspected by the state and is installing a new system before the ground freezes. He was digging in sand down to 15'. It will cost close to \$15,000. It is considered a private system, rather than public.

ITEM R8. Board Member/Staff Reports

1. Administrative Items

Dan reported on the following items:

a. Set Next Meeting Date

The next meeting will be held at 4:00 p.m. on January 9, 2025, at the Dorothy Pecaut Nature Center.

b. CF Industries – Possible Management Opportunity

Brian explained that he and Dan were approached by Neil about another CF Industries buffer area that is too wet to farm to see if the board would be interested in managing it. The farmer would plant the natives, and WCCB staff would take care of it from there. Neil stated that it is not definite and that he isn't sure if it will end up with 25 acres of green area, but he wanted to gauge interest before moving forward. Brian stated that it wouldn't take much to manage this piece of ground. It is located a half mile north of Brown's Lake along I-29. It was the consensus of the board to go ahead and see what they come up with.

2. Board Information

None

3. Other Business

Snyder Bend Solar Lease Agreement: Dan stated that the solar lease agreement at Snyder Bend won't be renewed by the REC and electric will cost an additional \$149 per month. The system can be used as a backup battery for the cabins if they lose power. Brian added that the solar power can be stored and used for the cabins before using REC power.

Little Sioux Tree Clearing: Dan reported that the cottonwoods are tipping in the area by the Little Sioux beach on the east side of the road. He asked for a quote from Peterson's who cleared out the west side. He would like to remove the trees and fill it in to make a more usable green space. It is about an acre next to the shelter house. The quote is \$12,850 for grubbing, cutting it down, and piling it up. It is a liability concern, especially if more people are in that area with the new concession stand. The board consensus is to move forward, but Dan will add it to next month's meeting agenda for official action.

4. Old Business

Little Sioux Concession Stand: Dan talked to the Correctionville city clerk last week. She said that she and her husband are okay with and would support a new concession stand at Little Sioux Park. Dan will reach out to the contractor and get a better set of plans and cost estimate.

Brown's Lake Boiler: Dan reported that he has gotten on the agenda for the Board of Supervisors meeting next Tuesday. They have been limping along the boiler at Brown's Lake for two years. It has been on the department's CIP request for two years but apparently never made it to the supervisors, because the budget director, the buildings manager, and the supervisor chair would meet in advance to decide which requests to bring forward for approval. Dan is submitting it again in the budget requests due tomorrow. It is leaking within the heat exchangers and has only pure water now. The interior is not able to be drained, so if it goes down, all the pipes and floor will freeze. The cost is \$12,849 to replace the boiler.

ITEM R9. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 5:33 p.m.

The above minutes were recorded by Dawn Bostwick.

Recording Secretary, Dawn Bostwick

Board Secretary, Aaron Gehling

Board Chair, Cindy Bennett