

Meeting Minutes May 2, 2025

Call to Order:

6:31pm by Kenkel

Board Present:

In person: Allen, Kenkel, Dunning, Chris Behrens

Staff Present: Director Behrens, Horne, Tague

Approval of Consent Agenda:

Motion to approve April Bills and April 5 2025 minutes by Dunning, second by Behrens. All aye.

Public Comment:

Kenkel opened the room to public comment at 6:36pm

Lacey Starits: Expressed dissatisfaction with recent communication exchanges with the Naturalist and Director, alleging failure to respond to her and other's messages or to follow through with assumed plans. There was additional concern with replacing in-person naturalists with take-away kits that were conceptualized in a previous Conservation Board meeting.

Board member Kenkel responded, stating, that the focus of the education programs were going through a change and that staff ought to be in touch with how that will affect their ability to serve.

Board member Behrens stated he was given a complaint from a North Tama teacher regarding difficulties in getting in contact with the naturalist and encouraged staff to reach out.

Board member Dunning also brought up public comments regarding a field trip that fell through due to miscommunication issues.

Naturalist Tague stated that communication fell off for one reason or another and felt she had made ample attempts to return calls/exchanges.

Kenkel closed the public comment period at 6:58pm

Action Items:

Park Ranger/Technician position:

Director Behrens presented final findings from due diligence regarding use of off duty police, sharing sheriff or local city police, to supplement for a full or part-time Park Ranger, or Ranger/Tech. Director Behrens presented a breakdown of several scenarios that include a full time park ranger on staff, a ranger/tech split like previous seasons, now ranger on staff and using what few local police options seem available long run. Director Behrens explained the logistical difficulties, specifically with prioritizing a contracted officer's time, exchanging camper registration information, and the lack of ability to conduct other duties in between ranger duties, and vise versa, not to mention an hourly pay rate that would be hard to sustain for just patrol needs. Director Behrens concluded that replacing the position as it previous was, as a split Park Ranger and Conservation Tech, would be the best scenario, regardless of if the Board needs to cover Police Academy fees. Director Behrens stated based on the previous Rangers wage, and the projected budget, he recommends a starting

wage between \$24 – 26 per hour, based on experience and qualifications. Allen stated he still felt there was too little reason to justify having a police officer on staff. Allen questioned the reasonability of having a ranger that lives too far away, if the sheriff is likely to respond to an emergency much quicker. Discussion was had that the consistent patrol presence of a scheduled officer on staff, remains a valuable deterrent and that the sheriff would likely respond to an emergency as back up anyway. Dunning inquired whether or not the Conservation Board can require applicants live within the County or a particular radius to the park based on concerns with response time. Director Behrens stated he wondered if that's really something we can require, and suggested it also risks alienating a great applicant who happens to live over the county border. Kenkel agreed that requiring that could be legally "hairy." Dunning asked about the need for a CDL and requirement to go to the Academy noted in the provided Park Ranger/Tech job description. Director Behrens stated the job description provided was an unchanged description from when the prior ranger was hired and agreed and intended to remove the CDL requirement and would adjust the language to explicitly require passing the Police Academy. Kenkel asked for a motion to approve the Director move forward with advertising for a Park Ranger / Technician at a wage starting between \$24-26 per hour, with the assumption that the discussed CDL requirements, and minor language/spelling corrections are adjusted. Behrens motioned. Dunning Seconded. A vote was called by Kenkel; Behrens aye, Dunning aye, Allen nay, Kenkel aye. Motion carries.

Volunteer Packet:

Director Behrens presented the modified Volunteer packet, already approved by insurance/legal with changes to fit the Tama County vision/mission and overall needs. This packet was presented in its original form, borrowed from Mahaska County Conservation, at the April meeting. Director Behrens briefly pointed out updates to History, Vision and Mission Statements, addresses etc. Director Behrens elaborated on the secondary benefit to collecting volunteer info and community involvement in the departments ability to apply for particular grants and other opportunities to do more for events.

Kenkel asked for a motion to approve the Volunteer Packet as presented for use in recruiting volunteer help for the Conservation Board. Allen motioned. Dunning seconded. All members voting Aye. Motion Carries.

Rules and Regulations Updates:

Director Behrens presented the Rules and Regulations that haven't been updated since 2020 and proposed small edits including updating incomplete sentences, rules, updating section numbers, adding verbiage regarding new ATV laws, and wood cutting clarifications. The Board also reminded Director Behrens of the \$5 Shelter rental fee agreed on last season that had not been updated into the Rules and Regulations yet.

Kenkel asked for a motion to approve the updates to the Rules and Regulations as discussed. Allen motioned. Chris Behrens seconded. All voting aye.

Information Items:

Maintenance Report for April:

- Bladed roads and trails T.F. Clarks, Manatts, IRNA, Duffus, Wolfcreek
- Burned south side of dam
- Trimmed trees wolf creek trail

- Hauled some rock to manatts and ikes
- Place summer order from CID
- Put up wooden signs on west side of park
- Put up new entrance directory sign
- Worked on making a back side of directory sign
- 811 been around park doing locates for remaining signs
- Safety meeting
- Turned on water @ clarks and oclap
- Open clarks, oclap for season- all power is on, replaced lights, checked pedestals, updated kiosk signs, loaded, firewood stand
- Replaced broken bench on picnic point
- Started going around staining memorial benches
- Fixed entrance sign light
- Been trying to get concrete contractors to get me quotes
- Picked up trash dumped at Mccoy's and IRNA
- Dumpstation line was extended into lake, Schanwebers came out trenched new electric line and helped get it running replaced pressure switch
- Got the tent section ready for 5th grade field day
- Tresspassed and removed camper from T.F. Clarks
- Arlo started been mowing
- Every trail and out park has been mowed at least once
- Started weed deeding OCLAP

Naturalist Report for April:

- Phase II of cleaning and organizing
- Discovered permits were in questionable order
- Inventoried all mounts, artifacts in preparation of permits
- Contacted and met (phone) with USDA representative as a means to learn how to update permits and ensure TCCB is in compliance
- Attended and certified as Basic Archery Instructor through NASP
- Attended Bird Friendly Iowa meeting – networked with contacts out of Ames and Des Moines
- Met with Madison County Conservation as peers
- Volunteer program
- Educational programming
- Conservation initiatives
- Met with Polk County Conservation
- Educational programming
- Met with Blackhawk County Conservation
- Educational programming
- Spoke with Ranger at Blackhawk Conservation about movie nights
- Met with peer via BPZ for curriculum sharing
- Met with peer from Story County Conservation

- Educational programming
- Met with peer at DSM Park and Rec – educational programming
- Spoke with Adam Janke regarding Master Conservationist, CWD in the area, future offerings through ISU ext
- Made contact with members of Ikes
- Cleaned and revamped critter enclosures
- Created programming request form
- Created programming contract form
- Researched starting volunteer programs
- Attending Master Conservationist weekly programming from Apr 22 – June 10 via ISU extension and Polk County Conservation
- Met with GR teachers for School of the Wild planning
- Researching Outdoor recreation and educational programming equipment needs
 - Archery equipment
 - BB guns
 - Fishing equip
 - Lifejackets

PROGRAMMING

North Tama 9th graders – service project - 35

Field Trip – Union 1st graders - 30

Outdoor Classroom – through approx. 180 kids

- Presentation – Emerson- Fishder Controls – 35

Director Report for April:

- Answered calls, emails, talked with visitors, public, others
- Building clean up
- Calls for rentals and Ike's pass
- Payroll and accounting
- Staff meetings
- Department Head meetings
- Safety committee meeting
- HR meeting
- Prescribed burns
- IT meeting with Kenny Rambaugh
- Rules and Regulations review and updates
- Volunteer packet coordination and generation
- Ranger vs Sheriff due diligence
- Meetings with Sheriff and Police departments
- Sidewalk contractor coordination
- Calls with architects for basement ADA requirements
- Career day presentation
- Outdoor classroom coord and prep
- Toilet and Kayak follow up coordination
- Basement organization and cleanout

- Program material inventory
- TF Clark Civil war coordination
- Some field trip and program coordination
- Misc naturalist training and meetings, program development and brainstorming
- Drake student project coordination, historical research, project review
- Seasonal hiring
- Remaining budget planning

Additional Updates:

Seasonals Hired:

Director Behrens stated that two seasonals have been hired, Arlo Cibula and Braxten Rohrs, two returns from previous seasons that did good work for the park.

Nature Center Updates:

Director Behrens provided a recap of a meeting with an IT Designer from Des Moines that was informative, but suggested that the conceptualized upgrades to the Nature Center; new screens, acoustic abatement, speakers, etc. would likely be more expensive than originally led to believe, or may prove too complicated. Director Behrens said he would have more discussion with other designers and contacts, and the impending IT Director at Tama County to find reliable feasible options.

Quotes for the sidewalk came in from one contractor for the proposed patio work out front. Dunning asked that additional quotes be pursued. Director Behrens said he would work with Maintenance Supervisor Horne to reach out to others.

Director Behrens told the Board that he had discussion with a career architect that has specialized in ADA design and requirement, about use of the basement. Previously, the basement could not be used because it did not provide ADA accessibility from the upstairs or from the outside. Director Behrens inquired specifically, if ADA access was provided from the lower parking lot, to the basement door, and the basement use remained separate from the upstairs use, i.e nature center downstairs, event hall upstairs, could we utilize the basement as a potential learning area. Based on those discussions, so long as the building floors have split use, and ADA is provide from outside, the basement should be useable. So Director Behrens stated he would like to pursue quotes for sidewalk leading from the lower nature center parking lot to the back door to meet the existing concrete at the doorway below. The Board was positive about the new potential use opportunity.

Delays with Kayak Dispenser:

Director Behrens provided an update regarding the kayak dispenser projected to get installed at the new kayak turn around/launch area. There is an issue with whether or not service can be provided to the specific location and that a technician was required to come out and do physical testing, but it otherwise looks like a booster would be needed. Behrens stated the company seemed constrained to using AT&T for their unit service provider. The group also hypothesized that current equipment at the park, not in use, may be used to relay WiFi to the location. Behrens stated he would continue to follow up in hopes that a solution is nearby.

Board meeting structure: (discussed at beginning of meeting to address new format immediately)

Director Behrens stated that, in an attempt to expedite time at these meetings, that a new format be followed, with a Consent Agenda that encompasses typical approvals; meeting minutes and bills, approving them in one sweep. This would be followed by the Action Items, that are likely items previously discussed, but are up for a vote or motion to take action. The informative items would then be the time for staff to update the Board on things going on in the park and elsewhere.

Final budget spending:

Director Behrens presented final end of fiscal year numbers expected following this meetings bills being paid out, showing the expected near \$45k State Attorney deficit, and \$100,000 defunding projections, leaving the department with comfortable funds to finish off the year and knock out some additional projects, and purchase new equipment for rec and education programs.

Discussion:

Board member Chris Behrens inquired on if allowing alcohol during rentals or at the nature center was ever considered lately, if it means potentially bringing in more rentals and funds for nature center and county projects, now that savings abilities and overall funding has been reduced. Director Behrens explained that the subject was brought up a year or so ago with some initial investigations into how to repeal the current ordinance, and how it ought to change the rules, but has remained tabled due to hesitation from various directions. Board member Behrens asked that if it was a viable option that it be put on the next agenda for discussion again.

Adjourn:

Kenkel asked for a motion to adjourn. Motion by Board member Behrens, second by Dunning. All voting aye. Meeting closed at 8:16pm.