

Wapello County Conservation Board
Regular Meeting Notice
Monday, February 13th , 2023
5:30 PM Meeting
Pioneer Ridge Nature Center (1339 HWY 63, Bloomfield)

Call to Order:

Beth Doggett called the meeting to order at 5:30 PM.

Roll Call:

Beth Doggett, Jeff Layton, Marsha Parker (zoom), John Henschied

Staff Present:

Rick Tebbs, Paul Totten, Mike McCall, Sara Runyan, Amanda Jones, Cari Nicely, Austin Roe, and Sunshine Laursen.

Approval of Agenda:

Jeff moved to approve the agenda, John seconded, the agenda was approved.

Approval of Previous Monthly Meeting Minutes:

Jeff moved to approve the previous month's meeting minutes, John seconded, the minutes were approved.

Guests:

Darren Batterson

Claims:

- WCCB claims for the month of January were submitted for approval.

Jeff moved to approve the WCCB claims for the month of January, John seconded, the claims were approved.

- The American Gothic House Center claims for the month of January were submitted for approval.

Jeff moved to approve the American Gothic House Center claims for the month of January, John seconded, the claims were approved.

Old Business:

- **Parking lot at Eddyville Sand Prairie**

Rick informed the board that Wapello County Secondary Roads will be putting in two 60ft. culverts and gravel down for the parking lot at the Eddyville Sand Prairie. This will open up the entrance of the parking lot and allow for tour buses. No price has been given yet.

Marsha asked if there was an update on the Eddyville signs. Sara informed them that she just gave the signs back to Kate and she will be completing the final round of edits.

New Business:

- **Office Space for Naturalist**

Sara gave the board a rough draft of a proposed new office space. This office space would be where the old meeting room used to be and displays are currently. She explained that new space would be able to accommodate a growing staff and give them more room to work. This space would also hopefully cost less than the original plan to build a new office structure in the entry way for the office manager. Amanda explained that she would then occupy the current office being used, and eventually a window would be cut looking in to the entry way to allow her to see and greet guests as they come in.

Marsha questioned where the current displays would go, and Sara explained that there is plenty of room for the current displays to be moved either upstairs or downstairs. She is also looking into redoing the current displays in the next budget year.

Jeff moved to continue with the new office plan, John seconded, the motion was approved.

- **Saturday PRNC Summer Schedule**

Rick informed the board that the possibility of having the Pioneer Ridge Nature open on Saturdays during the summer was brought to him by a supervisor and wanted the board's input. It would be roughly May-October with a round robin type schedule with staff. Discussion was had about the hours and Rick explained that the hours would be similar to The American Gothic House Center which is 10am-4pm. Jeff then asked for the staff's opinion on the matter.

Sara thought it was a good idea and would allow for more people to come to the nature center. She also brought up the possibility of staff working 6 hours but being paid for 8 as an incentive for working a Saturday. She also explained that she is already doing Saturday programs and could not keep the nature center open and continue doing those programs.

Mike brought up his concern for the field staff because they won't have as much to do with their office's being located in the shop. He also expressed that most of the staff was hired under the precedence of working Monday- Friday.

Austin said he is open to working periodic Saturdays and would be willing to give programs while he is here.

Amanda discussed that it would be beneficial to have the nature center open on Saturdays to allow more people to come and to help with campers as needed, but it is important to consider that some people aren't based out of the nature center. In the big picture, it wouldn't be a lot of Saturdays and could definitely be done. She also explained that currently guests aren't staying for very long because there is not a lot to interact with and keep their attention.

Paul explained that he thinks it is a good idea and that he thinks the field staff can find things to do while at the nature center.

Marsha expressed that we need to start doing things to keep people here and look for quotes for more interactive displays. She also wondered if we should be doing programs every Saturday and getting the animals out more for guests.

Rick said that before Covid closures the nature center was open on Saturdays with the part time help for 4 hours. It was very light traffic and was not resumed post Covid closure.

Cari said that in her experience in other counties volunteers kept the nature center from 9- noon, and expressed concern over programming every weekend without burning out the naturalist, and that the animal ambassadors would also come under stress if they were consistently being taken out for guests. She recommended more interactive displays.

Rick ended the discussion with this just being a thing to think about and would be discussed later on. No motion was required at this time.

- **Wetland Banking Management at Ajinomoto**

Rick informed the board that Wapello County was approached by Ajinomoto to help manage their wetland banking in Eddyville. It is roughly 80 acres. He will be attending a meeting along with the Monroe County director with Ajinomoto to learn more about it. Rick said the staff and board are welcome to attend. No motion is required at his time. Rick will attend the meeting and then report back to the board.

- **American Gothic House Center Grant**

Rick gave an update on the Destination Iowa grant for the American Gothic House Center. Originally they were told that they were receiving \$125k. After further conversation the committee said they were not sure they were going to fund the project at all. Rick reached back out and asked for confirmation so they could start perusing grants and has not heard anything. Cari informed the board that she is currently working on grants to make up for the remaining \$375k needed but can only do so much with the grant in limbo. The goal was to keep the project under half a million for the possibility of 100% funding.

- **Lake at Pioneer Ridge Nature Area**

Rick was approached by the supervisors for a possibility of a 55 acre lake at Pioneer Ridge. This project would be part of a larger project that includes more campsites, cabins, Monarch Lodge, all season shelter, and expanding equine trails that may be affected by the lake. French Redekers will be coming to assess the land and give a quote on an engineer study. Discussion was had about making Pioneer Ridge a destination for travelers.

- **Admission Fee at the American Gothic House Center**

Cari explained that the American Gothic House Center would be receiving another part time help contingent on the center charging an admission fee. The American Gothic House Center board voted to charge a \$5 admission fee for anyone over the age of 13 that was not a Wapello county resident starting April 1st. They believe this will help raise the funds needed for additional help and prevent people from using the center as a rest stop. Some discussion was had about children proving residency and people who reside in Wapello county but have Bloomfield addresses. Cari informed the board that staff will use discretion and be as accommodating as possible. Jeff moved to have the American Gothic House Center charge a \$5 admission fee for visitors over the age of 13 that are not Wapello county residents starting April 1st, John seconded, the motion was approved.

- **Board Member Bio and Picture for Website**

Amanda discussed that she has been making strides to engage with the community on social media and has started a "Meet Us Mondays" on Facebook that showcases a different employee each month. She then asked the board to participate and send her a picture and short bio. She said that eventually she would like to have these on the county website.

- **Summer Help**

Rick and Paul interviewed Rachel Godby for the summer conservation technician position. They were both excited about her qualifications and attitude. They recommended her for hire starting the second week of March. Jeff moved to hire Rachel Godby as the summer conservation technician, John seconded, the motion was approved.

American Gothic Board Updates

None.

Staff Reports and Comments:

Rick discussed the following topics:

- Informed the board that the trust was going to be discussed and voted on at the next supervisors meeting.
- The DNR would be holding a public meeting at the nature center on February 21st to discuss hunting and trapping rules and regulations.
- The district 5 meeting will be taking place on February 23rd at the nature center at 10am. There will be a tour of the American Gothic House Center in the afternoon.
- Iowa Prairie meeting will take place on March 4th at the nature center.

Marsha asked for an update on the MOTUS system and Rick informed her that we are waiting on the motherboard.

Marsha asked for an update on the 5k taking place at Pioneer Ridge put on by Good Sam. Amanda informed Marsha that she reserved the Haybarn for them like they had discussed but had not heard any more information.

Marsha questioned Mike about the trees that were donated. Mike and Austin discussed the trees that were donated by Menards and how they were used.

Conservation Board Comments:

None.

Darren Batterson brought quotes for the skid loader replacement to discuss with the board and staff. No bids currently include a mower. Staff discussed the difference between companies and are still waiting on quotes from other companies. They discussed the benefits of remaining local and the different safety features each machine came with.

Darren also discussed the possibility of a lake at Pioneer Ridge. He thinks the lake will be a big draw for people to come and a destination to visit in Wapello County.

The new heated shop building with chemical storage was discussed. A plan was given out with the specifications of the building and a map of where it would be. It would house the new office for field staff and their old office would be turned into a heated area for a wood working shop and locker area for PPE.

The trust fund was talked about. Rick expressed the benefits of it for the conservation department. The money could be used to help fund infrastructure project and could be used for grant matches.

Adjournment:

Jeff moved to adjourn the meeting. John seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 6:45 PM.