

Meeting Minutes March 12, 2025

**Call to Order:**

6:33pm by Wacha

**Board Present:**

In person: Wacha, Allen, Behrens, Dunning Via Zoom: Kenkel

**Staff Present:** Director Behrens, Horne

**Approval of Meeting Minutes:**

Motion to approve March 5 2025 minutes by Kenkel, second by Dunning. All aye.

**No Bills**

**Public Comment:**

No public comment

**Reports:**

Maintenance Report:

Picked up protective bark paint and painted the river birch trees. fixed the broken floor tiles in nature center. safety meeting. clean N.C. for DNR meeting. replaced lights in the well house with new led. burned brush pile by shop. replace rear axle seals in F3990. serviced F3990 and removed blower and cab. put new garage door seal in shop. D1 meeting. finish forest reserve apps . checked wolf creek, heritage, IRNA, long point, McCoy's and Duffus. winterized plow and salt spreader. cut down trees off trails and Columbia. took delivery of dock and cut poles to size. mowed burn breaks in parcel D. started working on the list for upcoming insurance/safety assessment . plowed OCLAP and shoveled N.C.. work on spray rigs for spring. working on blading roads and parking lots and clean up for spring opens OCLAP and out parks.

Ranger Report:

Have budgeting discussions. Discuss burn plans. Mow burn breaks. Put new lights in wellhouse. Clean and mop nature center. Replace broke tiles in NC. Get materials, oil, filters, from menards, NAPA, CIFS. Clean shop. Replace leaking rear axle seal on Kubota mower. Take snow equipment off Kubota mower and put mower deck on. Powerwash equipment. Clean shop. Do forest reserve work for the county. Check wolf creek trail. Check Clarks Park. Check boat ramps. Cut brush along trail at Columbia. Check Ikes. District 1 Meeting. Do end of employment work/paperwork/cleanup. Burn brush pile

Director Report:

Answered calls, emails, talked with visitors, public, others. Building clean up. Calls for rentals and Ike's pass. Payroll and accounting. Several Department Head meetings. Supervisor meetings. Maintenance shop and staff meetings. Budget meetings with numerous staff, department heads, supervisors. Animal duties. Met with Drake University students for mapping assignment. District 1 meeting. Safety inspection. Sign orders for kayak launch and park roadsides. Prescribed burn. Office and filing organization and sorting. Met with Bumblebee surveyor John Freeley. Coordination with new naturalist for office and programming needs . Coord with Sheriff for Riley departure.

Rental calendar and shooting range re-organization. Hire, departure coordination with HR and Auditors office. Reach out to neighboring counties for labor and tool help for big projects, fire, etc. IT audit meeting. Shoveling

### **Old Business:**

#### **Budget Updates and Planning:**

Behrens updated the Board on new budget updates per the BOS, including a \$150,000 cut from next years budget, and \$100,000 from the current year. Behrens and Wacha discussed left over dollars and approximate monthly expenses for the remainder of the year, in contrast with the County Conservation average monthly seasonal expenses. Director Behrens concluded that with the new cuts, the Conservation Board should still have enough funding to finish the rest of the year comfortably. The group discussed seasonal staff needs and budget ability and the possibility of still hiring one or two seasonal staff, including the increased savings from not having a Ranger and Naturalist for a temporary period of time.

#### **Naturalist:**

Dunning asked who has authority to set wages for full time staff. Director Behrens stated based on his understanding of the Iowa Code that it was essentially the Director choice, but that in general the Board has to agree on that budgetary expense. Wacha reiterated that as long as the Director is within the guardrails of a reasonable wage that fits in the budget, that it is indeed up to the Director to set. Board member Behrens asked if the wage was set. Dunning stated it was not. Director Behrens made a correction that it was agreed on a range of \$24-26/hr at prior meetings and that this applicant was qualified for the higher end of that range. Board member Behrens asked how that compares to the prior naturalist. Director Behrens stated that \$26/hr would be \$1.50 increase.

#### **Park Ranger:**

The group discussed need and priority for Park Ranger at the park areas, and whether or not this should be split between Conservation Tech and Park Ranger. Allen asked the other Board members if a Park Ranger was really needed, and that the Sheriff could deputize staff to serve as law enforcement. Dunning asked if the new naturalist could do park ranger duties too, along with other staff taking on those duties, and if other staff could also serve as part time naturalist. Wacha discussed the difference between a “designated” Park Ranger, and a certified park ranger, highlighting the fact that a designation would not carry the same weight or have the same abilities to apply the law, make arrests, issue warnings, etc and the benefits of having Academy training. Allen asked how many times we’ve needed a Ranger to respond to an issue, proposing a maximum of 5 per year. Director Behrens responded that although the amount of responses are low, we have to assume that the presence of a ranger on patrol is a proactive/preventive tactic, where it may appear like “nothing is going on” to justify a ranger. Allen asked why we need a ranger, and suggested that the previous Rangers schedule was not helpful for park needs. Behrens and Horne responded, clarifying the Ranger preferred the schedule arranged, and that it worked well with the Maintenance side of things, being on maintenance duty for 4 days, and ranger duty on weekends when it was needed most. Allen argued that patrol time between wildlife areas and otter creek may be wasteful. Director Behrens reiterated that “nothing is going on” likely as a byproduct of the Ranger’s consistent presence. Wacha discussed the needs and likelihood of finding a full time Conservation Tech, vs a mixed Tech/Ranger, and Ranger, what those applicants likely come with for experience and how long they will stay, implying that it may be difficult for varying reasons to find either of those options. Dunning agreed that the presence of a patrol officer of some sort is

beneficial in keeping trouble out of the park areas. Board member Behrens asked Dustin/Director Behrens on opinions of need for a Ranger. Director Behrens responded that the previous setup of having a Conservation Tech/Ranger was likely the best situation if possible, specifically focusing Ranger hours on weekends, holidays and hunting seasons. Allen disagreed. Wacha brought up the arrangement with Tama County sheriff and other city police departments and the shared use if a big emergency were to occur. Board member Behrens stated he was in favor of a park ranger on staff and asked if there was a method to which we could borrow/hire certified officers on a contract or as needed basis. Behrens stated he would reach out to see what options were available. Wacha and Behrens agreed to table the discussion to dig into what truly makes sense for this position. Board members discussed how to advertise for the position, and how to leave the option open for a Conservation Tech to later become a Ranger. The Board agreed the sooner we can fill the position the better due to short staffing.

#### **New Business:**

Project coordination with neighboring counties

Behrens stated he is having discussions with neighboring counties to help with large scale projects, including burns, tree clearing, etc. and would be talking to insurance regarding use of equipment and vehicles across county lines.

#### **Floor Discussion:**

Director Behrens gave an update on the compost toilet replacement and the sluggishness of Insurance and HR with all the turn over and hand changes at the County level and an insurance check had not been issued/processed yet. With the vendors lead time to deliver the new toilet of up to 12 weeks, it was suggested that the Board foot the bill to get the toilet replacement ordered as soon as possible. The group also discussed a discounted rate for not providing full service for campers, at a rate of \$15 per night in modern, versus \$20, until the bathroom facility is repaired. Dunning motioned for the Board to issue the check to expedite the replacement time for the compost toilet. Board member Behrens seconded. All Aye. Motion passes.

The group also discussed need for volunteers due to short staffing and future budgets and discussed whether or not volunteers or board members could mow and do work around the park. Wacha expressed concern that volunteers may not be allowed to run heavy equipment. Director Behrens said he would dig into this with HR and insurance.

Dunning asked the group if the Naturalist living in the mobile unit would be a liability. Director Behrens stated that several staff members, both full time and seasonal, have occupied the dwelling with no issues from insurance. Director Behrens said he would re-check with the proper authorities on the issue. Dunning stated that with the cautionary spending currently within the county, if the mobile unit occupant should pay rent. Dunning stated she is not in favor of free shelter and free utilities for the occupant. Director Behrens stated it is well within the budget to pay for the utilities with the current and proposed budgets. Dunning stated this seemed like a large luxury for the naturalist. Director Behrens stated that it is up to the Board to decide, and that he suggests paying it forward and not charging utilities. The group asked if the naturalist was aware of the mobile unit conditions. Director Behrens stated when moving back into the state that the Naturalist stopped by to see the park and tour the nature center to verify if she was truly interested in the position. Board member Behrens motioned to allow naturalist to live in mobile unit rent and utility free. The group discussed terms of a rental agreement if the Board wanted and what a rent cost would be. Director

Behrens reminded the group of the mobile unit conditions, including pests inside the unit, a deluge of flies that get in, it rains through the front door, and water pipes freeze in cold months and suggested why no rent/utilities may be understandable. Kenkel agreed. Kenkel seconded the motion to provide the mobile unit rent and utility free. All those in favor: Behrens, Kenkel. Opposed: Dunning and Allen. The tie vote is broken by Wacha with an Aye. Motion carries to allow naturalist to live rent and utility free for one year.

Dunning asked if the new naturalist has any pets. Director Behrens confirmed she had a dog, incorrectly labelling it a "service dog". Dunning asked if the dog would be attending work and programs. Director Behrens corrected himself stating he thinks she may use it for a side job, as she mentioned in her resume and interview conducting cadaver searches with her previous working dogs. The group discussed whether or not a service dog would interfere with programming, kids etc. and any dangers. Director Behrens clarified that the dog would not be coming to work or part of any programs. Dunning asked Director Behrens to ask insurance if a dog would be permitted at the park and the mobile unit. Allen asked where the dog would be staying. Director Behrens said at home in the mobile unit with the naturalist. Dunning expressed concern about the dog being a danger to kids and patrons. Director Behrens stated again that the dog would stay home, its just her pet.

**Adjourn:**

Motion to Adjourn by Dunning, second by Kenkel. All aye.

Meeting closed at 8:34pm.