

Meeting Minutes April 2, 2025

Call to Order:

6:31pm by Wacha

Board Present:

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

Staff Present: Director Behrens, Horne, Tague

Approval of Meeting Minutes:

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

Approval of Bills:

Motion to approve March bills by Dunning, second by Kenkel. Alle aye.

Public Comment:

Bob Etzel, former TCCB Director, was present to voice concerns over budget, newspaper reporting content and future projects.

Reports:

Maintenance Report for March:

- Removed road close signs on east side of park
- Meeting with JRF about concrete in front of nature center
- Meeting with Musgraves on mowing OCLAP
- Worked on fire breaks
- Bladed roads and camping loops
- Ordered rock and spread on back in camping sites, kayak launch, camping loop road
- Filled a trail wash out by kayak launch with dirt and rock
- Burned parcel D spoils site and small area in parcel C
- Started going through camping electrical pedestals
- Extended dump station water line
- Started power washing and mopping bathrooms OCLAP
- Ordered the porta pot for Ike's
- Burned parcel D spoils site and small area in parcel C
- Started going through camping electrical pedestals
- Extended dump station water line
- Disc and seeded spoils site natives and cover crops
- Started working on camping pedestals and power washed R/R Clarks Park

Naturalist Report for March:

- Undertaking the cleaning, organizing, or orienting TCCB's educational materials
- Gutting the storage room
- Going through materials each day for purpose of organizing and identifying to know what programs can be created / supported

- Creating and refining Environmental Education program request form, program guidelines form, as well as program contract
- Met with DRAKE Capstone students (Director as lead) regarding park brochure project
- Assisted with prairie burns on Thursday, March 27, 2025
- Gutted and Cleaned office space – more than 20 bins of materials remove
- Cleaned and organized area where tortoises are kept.
- Reviewed Park properties via mapping - Created a map of parks and school districts
- Began researching school districts demographics that TCC serves for the purpose of scheduling and program development
- Began researching school district calendars for the purpose of determining year round offerings at TCC
- Began reviewing IA Core Teaching Standards for the purpose of program development
- Took note of previous permits obtained and will look into further (via a binder)
- Began scheduling a few Environmental Education programming requests
- Created animal care sheets and cleaned enclosures
- Compiled extensive list of program ideas – OWLS, adult, teen, schools, families youth groups.
- Brainstorming TCCs Environmental Education program needs
- Brainstormed ideas for TCC branding (messages that will be guiding tenants)
- Began compiling a list of TCC stakeholders for school districts and non-school district organizations as a means to reach out to openly discuss needs and potential areas TCC can fill with Environmental Education programming
- Began outlining a 1 and 3 year plan for TCC and for the Environmental Education program
- Continue to read and research the concepts of Nature Deficient disorder and how the lack of unstructured nature play is truly affecting our youth (MORE GREEN TIME, LESS SCREEN TIME) at all stages of development.

Director Report for March:

- 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
- Naturalist hiring, coordination and onboard training
 - Computer and phone configurations
 - Nature center how to and setup (A/V, diorama, thermostats, doors, animals, uniforms)
 - Programming breakdown and training
 - Coordination for future programs and field trips, school of the wild
 - Meetings with Admin, HR, staff
 - Basement cleanup and organization
 - New program formatting and strategizing
 - Program intake and survey collaboration
- Coordination with HR and Insurance for events, volunteers, etc.
- Calls to Insurance for Naturalist living

- Talks with neighboring counties for program ideas and fee structure
- Talks with Tama and Toledo Police for Ranger and Patrol needs
- Meeting with Drake students for new literature creation
- A/V meeting with County IT help for Nature Center improvements
- Coordination with insurance and vendor for compost toilet
- Seasonal and lawn care contracting comparative research
- Kayak Dispenser install coordination
- Budget work for various positions and contracting options
- Prescribed burns with Dustin and Angela

Old Business:

Budget Planning and end of year:

Director Behrens presented quotes from one of few local Lawn Care businesses to compare lawn care service pricing to staff pricing. Lawn care costs for just Otter Creek, no outlying areas or trails, would cost the same as three seasonal summer staff that would otherwise be doing a wide variety of other duties between in all areas. Board and staff agreed to move forward with hiring one to two seasonals so long as it fits the adjusted budget for the remainder of this year and next. Behrens also presented a quote from JRF for sidewalk patio renovation at the Nature Center for approximately \$29.4k. Board members requested additional quotes for the project to compare pricing before budgeting and moving forward with the project.

Park Ranger/Conservation Tech:

Director Behrens detailed preliminary conversations with local police bodies and fellow staff regarding use and cost of hiring a Park Ranger/Tech, A Park Ranger, and a Conservation Tech with utilizing outside police help. Director Behrens felt it was difficult to say what would be ideal for the county, as each option has it's pros and cons, and that it's difficult to way the true need of a police presence when the Lake and Campground have not had a regular year since 2019. The group discussed various priorities and patrol times for previous Park Rangers, academy costs, vehicle use, etc. Chair Wacha stated he anticipates the cost for an outside hired officer will be more expensive to do less and feels we have enough left over wage dollars to hire two seasonals due to the temporary vacancies with the Naturalist, and now Park Ranger position. The Board agreed to encourage Director Behrens to continue with due diligence and talks with outside police authorities to weigh options. Behrens stated he has a meeting with Toledo City Council next week to discuss in greater detail with Toledo Police.

New Business:

Naturalist and Education Goals:

Director Behrens gave an update on education programming goals and objectives for the last month and moving forward. Behrens stated that there is not a lot of reuseable materials or programs scripted from 2024 and that the Naturalist is largely starting from scratch and stated they are using this time to reassess and inventory the entire program to develop educational and recreational programs that are much more substantial than what has been done previously. Naturalist Tague outlined her goals in developing new and broad connections, short term and long term goals, revisiting school schedules to schedule our programming, and aiming to develop programs that cater to Iowa Core Standards. Behrens and Tague expanded on doing more adult and family programming in the near future and trying to integrate more technology when appropriate.

Tague stated her aim for redeveloping the educational department was to provide the greatest impact. Behrens stated that one of the main goals was to develop a template, more or less, for the next naturalist to use on day one if and when Tague ever parts ways.

Volunteers and Networking:

Dunning recommended contacting Jenny at ISU Extension to network different programming ideas as well as several other names. The group discussed other various groups and individuals to reach out to for programming partnerships.

Behrens stated he has been working with Tama County insurance to figure out a volunteer program that would be safe and low liability for the future. Behrens received a copy of Mahaska County Conservation's Volunteer handbook, which insurance worked to develop and approve, and stated he is aiming to modify the packet to serve Tama County.

Multimedia updates:

Director Behrens state he has reached out to several IT contractors to get quotes on Nature Center multimedia upgrades, including new screens for better visuals, sound proofing, etc. Director Behrens presented common complaints for renters and event hall users is that the projector screens are hard to see unless the facility is totally dark, and sound echos too much. Director Behrens is hoping to find affordable TV monitors to replace the projector screens, is researching sound proofing, and has a meeting with a local IT specialist to get pricing and practicality quotes.

Floor Discussion:

No floor discussion.

Adjourn:

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

Meeting closed at 8:18pm.