

Meeting Minutes June 4th, 2025

Call to Order:

6:30pm by Chair Wacha.

Board Present:

Wacha, Kenkel, Allen, Dunning, Behrens

Staff Present:

Director Behrens, Horne

Approval of Consent Agenda:

Motion by Kenkel, seconded by Behrens to approve the Meeting Minutes from May and approve the May Bills. All voting aye.

Public Comment:

Bob Etzel was present to share thoughts and concerns about potential alcohol allowance at the Nature Center, along with questions about potential future building uses.

Action Items:

Alcohol Ordinance Repeal:

Director Behrens presented his due diligence findings on potential alcohol allowance options for the Nature Center to potentially bring in additional funding. A breakdown of other counties with similar facilities was presented to the Board for consideration of the varying options other County's have implemented. Options include raising prices, requiring security, limitations on attendance. There was discussion allowed between the Board and Bob Etzel, the former Tama County Conservation Director, on options and significance of the alcohol ban. Concerns included dance and party commotion, impaired drivers, prioritizing education, the history and purpose of the building per the original committee, etc. Director Behrens clarified the alcohol research task as an exercise requested by the new Board members and that the new building plans would potentially allow rental and education use at the same time, so bookings did not interfere, and expressed neutrality with which ever way the Board's decision would be, but that it ought to be a Board choice since it would be significant policy change. Dunning inquired about putting out donation boxes for programs and charging materials fees for programming to bring in extra revenue as well. Wacha discussed the consideration of dwindling numbers and the need to potentially evolve policy to attract more in different ways. Kenkel expressed a desire not to stick with "what's always been done" for the sake of ease and voiced support for exploring new avenues. Etzel encouraged the Board to continue to be patient for Otter Creek to return to normal, which it hasn't been since 2021 when COVID hit along with a large closing for the lake restoration.

A motion was made by Dunning to not allow alcohol consumption at the NC, and was seconded by Kenkel. All voting aye, to table indefinitely the potential allowance of alcohol within the Nature Center building.

Information Items:

Maintenance Report for May:

Bladed boat ramps. Turned on fish cleaning station. Turned on shower house- replace broken valve, set shower and sink temps, posted closure signs, cleaned. Made concrete anchors for beach ropes. Side arm mowed roadsides and some of the lake shore. Blade roads OCLAP, got a load of

rock for north loop. Weed-deeded parks for holiday weekend. Started working on broken picnic tables. Meet with concrete contractor. Playground woodchips delivered, spread on west side playground. Put out beach ropes. Finished up wooden signs and placed all signs in park. Hung no swimming signs at boat ramp and kayak launch. Sprayed shower house and back pads in campground. Started spraying and mowing thistles. Ordered front tractor tires. All parks and trails have been mowed. Getting N.C. ready for rentals. Checking campgrounds/campers

Naturalist Report for May:

Outdoor Classroom

Covered teaching sessions for Outdoor Classroom –

- 180 participants / 300 minutes contact time (Curtis and I)
- Tore down tables and materials to be stored

School of the Wild –

- Met with team for Gladbrook-Reinbeck to plan for SOW
- Scoped out Union Grove State Park for teaching needs
- Designed curriculum for map and compass, shelter building
- Set up 2 compass courses
- Pulled canoes to and from Grove State Park
- Moved compass course location and reset both courses mid-week
- Taught 5 full days (M – F) – maps and compass and shelter building
 - 45 participants / 1650 minutes contact time

Master Conservationist in Polk County – May 6, 13, 20, 27 – great sessions on Prairies and Geological history of Iowa

Live Animal Care

- 3x a week care
- Obtained snapping turtle from Decorah County Conservation
- Set up new enclosures (ponds – via 300 gallon stock tanks) for new turtle and other two turtles

Parks tour with Curtis

Deeper dive into Otter Creek Park layout to determine best / possible programming locations

Fielded phone calls regarding park questions and needs, shooting range, and park rules

Meeting with website person with Curtis

Attended **STATE OF IOWA'S SCIENCE LEADERS SUMMIT** at the Science Center in DSM. Topic – Iowa's new Science Standards

- Networked with several attendees including:
 - Conservation Education Specialist, DNR
 - Director of Curriculum, South Tama Comm. Schools
 - 6th grade teachers for South Tama Community Schools
 - STEM Consultant, curriculum writer, Education Coordinator for NOAA
 - Education Coordinator Blank Park Zoo
 - Wartburg College Assistant Professor of Science Education
 - Science Consultant, Iowa Department of Education
 - IPTV education coordinator

Public program and Summer Day Camp Planning (long and short term)

- Deep dive into program planning integrating the following as a means to determine: needs, phenomena that can be highlighted, conflicts of schedule, timing of programming and topics of programming
 - School calendars (all)
 - Community calendars (all)
 - Library calendars
 - Phenology calendars for Iowa and region
 - Celebration days (ex: National Bald Eagle Day)

Public program and Summer Day Camp Planning

- Researched multiple topics based on above findings

THE GREAT REORGANIZATION - Almost finished!!!! (95% complete)

- Education and outdoor recreation materials Inventory, clean-out and reorganization

INVENTORY of all biofacts (mounts, pelts, bones, etc...) – 95% complete

PERMITS – salvage and educational purpose permits – almost complete (rather extensive process)

– should be ready to submit in the next 2 weeks

SUMMER PROGRAMMING Dates and times need to be finalized, but in general the following programs are being planned (subject to change):

GET OUTDOORS (with Tama County Conservation)

OUTDOOR RECREATION – reservations encouraged

June 14 – GET OUTDOORS DAY - FREE canoe rentals 11 – 3pm

July 12 – Sunset / Full Moon - FREE canoe rentals – Time TBD

Aug 16 – FREE canoe rentals – time TBD

Sept 13 – FREE canoe rentals – time TBD

PUBLIC PROGRAMS -

Creature Feature Pup-up Encounters -

 Otter Creek Lake and Park – June, July, August

 TF Clark Park – July, August

Nature Center Display Diorama Room Open with additional activity

 June – 1x, July – 2x, Aug – 3x (including Owl Awareness Day)

Owl Awareness Day –

 Aug – Nature Center open with activity

 -TF Clark Pop-up with activity

OTHER

 Mud Day – June - TBD

 Black-lighting programming at night – 2-3x for summer

 Prairie walks - July and Aug

 Monarch Tagging – 3x in early September

 Geocaching – needs to be created and set-up for on-going throughout parks

CAMPS – Nature and Science Camps

 Nature Art – July session, August session

 Nature Detectives – July session, August session

 Archery Introduction - TBD

 Shooting Sports - TBD

Director Report for May:

Answered calls, emails, talked with visitors, public, others. Building clean up. Calls for rentals and Ike's pass. Payroll and accounting. Staff meetings. Rules and Regulations updates. Volunteer packet finalization. Ranger/Tech position coordination. Nature Center basement organization and inventory. Sidewalk contractor coordination. Outdoor classroom. Toilet and Kayak follow up coordination. Some field trip and program coordination. Misc naturalist training and meetings, program development and brainstorming. Remaining budget planning monitoring. Drake Presentation and final coordination. District Meeting. Website training with Neapolitan Labs. Canoe registrations.

Additional Updates:

Nature Center Updates: Director Behrens stated that new sidewalk and front patio bids are still being pursued, new way finding park signs are up and installed, and reorganization of the basement and the educational inventory is complete. Director Behrens also mentioned that the kayak dispenser was back on track to be installed following pouring a concrete pad and that the new showerhouse toilet was scheduled to be installed this month. Finally, Behrens presented new educational pamphlets created by Drake students as part of a semester long project.

Ranger/Tech Applicants: Director Behrens noted there were two applicants that have applied for the Ranger/Conservation Tech position so far. The group discussed options for how long the job is posted, and when to cut off selection, suggesting establishing an end date to hurry more applicants, but leaving hiring choices to the Director. Director Behrens asked for any potential help for interviews in the case he needs another body for the interviews, stating he hopes to bring in Dustin and someone from Sheriff Department to provide their expertise.

Education/Rec Program Updates: Director Behrens presented a PowerPoint detailing previous and future educational and recreation priorities for the department. Director Behrens highlighted the lack of school classroom programs and an uneven distribution of programs between smaller repeat audiences, and presented a new direction for the department to integrate into school classrooms more frequently to get to underserved students, as well as new goals for more programming at Otter Creek Park. Director Behrens emphasized a goal to expand the department's reach to see as many people as possible, hoping to include more family and adult audiences. Board members and Bob Etzel were pleased with the research and new directives.

Discussion:

Member Allen voiced issues with Tama County Police using long range for pistol shooting, and stated the Tama police are telling other users they cannot use the space at the same time. Director Behrens agreed they should not be kicking others out, if true. Director Behrens outlined the policy for police departments use in sharing the space, issuing access for each individual department to use, and each department typically gives notice to the Director of the anticipated date, and then staff posts the date at the range to encourage members to share the space, and that there are no true reservations. Allen stated he is getting several complaints from others. Director Behrens stated he would call the named concerned citizens as well as the police departments to investigate.

Member Allen also inquired on where and how funds were secured/approved for the skid steer bought last year. Director Behrens explained that a year ago, there was confusion on how much actual funds were in the motor vehicle savings account, and when it was discovered that the values provided by the Auditor were not accurate, the department faced a restocking fee of several

thousand dollars, since the skid steer was already ordered. The Board approved the use of funds from other line item sources to complete the purchase as the machine was still deemed necessary. Board members Wacha and Kenkel agreed that the purchase and the circumstances were Board approved.

Adjourn:

Kenkel made a motion to adjourn at 8:41pm, seconded by Behrens. All aye.