

Benton County Conservation Board Meeting Minutes

Monday, February 12, 2024 at 5:30 PM

Benton County Nature Center 5718 20th Ave Dr, Vinton

Members present: Dan Hill, Becky VanWey, Randy Scheel, Liaison Tracy Seeman, Mike LaGrange by video

Staff present: Shelby Williams, Faith Henrichs, Cecilia Dirks, Ed Hach, Layla Hagen, Aaron Askelson, Camryn Grubic, Zach Parmater.

Call to order: Called to order at 5:30pm.

Guests or public participation: Sue Wilber, Benton County Human Resources Director, Myron Parizek Benton County Engineer.

Consent Agenda (previous minutes, expenditures, revenues): Motion made by Scheel; seconded by VanWey. All aye, motion passed.

New Business

a. Roadside Management/Weed Commissioner Appointment

i. Budget, Positions, Structure, Departments

Hill asked Williams to summarize current status on IRM appointment possibility. BOS is requesting that the IRM department be under the BCCB and under Williams as Director. Williams spoke on behalf of the Benton County Conservation staff that we are willing to take this on if given the proper support. Sue Wilber summarized how this opportunity came up during discussions with the BOS. This new opportunity would have the IRM Manager report to the Director of Conservation instead of directly to the BOS. Scheel gave a background on how the IRM department was started for Benton County. The board asked staff if anyone had any thoughts or concerns on the department addition opportunity. Askelson stated that his biggest concern is more workload for Williams. Grubic stated that his biggest concern was if roadside can't get items done, that work and public push will fall onto conservation staff. Hach stated that his biggest concern was space available for the department which was answered as they would have their own location and we would not need to expand. Hagen stated that her biggest concern is what will happen if our current director Williams is no longer the director or if the current staff shifts drastically. Hill suggests that we have a contingency plan if we choose to go forward to give our department and board some security. Scheel described the difference between the IRM Manager and the Weed Commissioner. His concern is having some time buffer to allow the new members of the department to get hired and caught up. Hill stated that the emergency aspect of the area position may need to be subcontracted out as staff hasn't been hired and conservation staff is completely booked. VanWey spoke with the Linn County Weed Commissioner and he suggested we

contract out the work for this first year. Williams asked Parizek if he had any employees with secondary roads that would be willing to take the Weed Commissioner appointment for the first year. He only thinks he has one employee currently that is pesticide certified for right of ways. Hill stated that he would like to see if the new proposed budget is approved in order to make any further decisions as conservation has requested additional staff, not including the IRM department. Parizek's concern is that some of the equipment purchased by IRM had split costs with the Secondary Roads department. Equipment maintenance has also been shared between the departments in the past. He is hoping that the sharing relationship between departments will continue.

All board members agree with the current document but are uncomfortable with not knowing the status of our budget for this upcoming fiscal year. Board would like to know the status of our needs before deciding about taking on another department. Scheel makes a motion to approve this proposed agreement and to move forward to the BOS. LaGrange seconded. Roll call vote: LaGrange - aye, VanWey - aye, Hill - aye, Scheel - aye; all aye, motion passed. Purposed agreement is attached to minutes.

b. Cabin Rental

- i. **Agreements and layout** - Hagen is looking into hiring out cleaning services for Wildcat rental. Hunter had concerns about no refund policy and/or lowering the stay minimum to 3-4 days instead of having a 6-day minimum. Staff is looking into refund options. Board reviewed items for Wildcat rental and told Williams to keep moving forward on it.
- ii. **Budget:** Looking to see how the property generates revenue and making minor adjustments.

c. Northern Natural Gas Pipeline

- i. **Easement** - Williams received a call about tree clearing for this project while staff was out of county for training. Larry Reiter counted nearly 160 oak trees and BCCB is discussing mitigation for the trees. Our county attorney reviewed the easement and had a concern about the current bird blind that is stationed in the center of the pipeline area.

Organizations

- a. **TriCounty Snowmobile Association** - No update.
- b. **Wildcat Disc Golf Volunteers** - Hagen is working on special event permits for future large participant (20+ people) events held at our areas.
- c. **Foundation - Next meeting: Tuesday, February 20th, 2024 at Hannen Lake Park** - No update.
- d. **OCNT Committee** - Next meeting: Spring 2024
 - i. Trail Run - March 2, 2024

- e. **Winegar Equestrian Volunteers** - No update
- f. **REAP Committee** - Next meeting: Tentatively April 2024 - No update.

Old Business:

- a. **Animal Shelter/Old VFW Post** - County Attorney has suggestions on how to move forward with the property. The BCCB discussed moving forward once we have an understanding with the Board of Supervisors.
- b. **One-Acre Parcels** - No update.
- c. **City of Atkins - Atkins Roundhouse**
 - i. **Lease** – City of Atkins Attorney and County Attorney are working on items for this lease. Changed to a 10-year agreement, Williams will pass it along to Atkins.
 - ii. **Canopy Grant** - Williams would like to continue with working on the lease and then decide if canopy grant needs to be started while it is under us or under City of Atkins. Board is comfortable with Williams moving forward with this. Once the canopy grant is officially approved, BCCB will have a meeting with Atkins for everyone to understand the project and future of the area.
- d. **Wildcat Bluff Recreation Area**
 - i. **Addition Funding/Outreach** - Currently at around \$453,000 remaining. BCCB is applying to smaller grants and reaching out to organizations for donations. REAP application is due August 15, 2024. Dirks stated that Dr. Thomas Rosburg is doing floristic inventories at the new addition.
 - ii. **ARPA Development** - BCCB has passed the viability assessment and now we are waiting on IDNR construction permits.
- e. **Wells**
 - i. **Iowa Geological Survey Sample Station** - No update.
 - ii. **Iowa Flood Center Hydrostation** - No update.
 - iii. **Rodgers Park** - Everything is buttoned up and fully functional. Survived our first freeze and the old shop renovation has made the area more usable.
- f. **Garrison Paha**
 - i. **Wildlife Stamp Grant** – Grant scored 1st place at the review meeting in January. Our contractor has started work on the Paha. Williams, Parmater, and Dirks will be meeting with the contractor tomorrow to look at the area and revisit expectations.

- g. Conservation Easements** - County Attorney is working with Williams on stipulations for conservation easements for future areas.
- h. Winegar Tobin Wildlife Area** - Williams reached out to a surveyor to discuss having an easement for the lane we use. Working with neighbors on easement process.

Environmental Education - In school programs are going well. Askelson and Hunt have spent a lot of time reviewing applications for REAP CEP scholarships to attend IAN - NAI. Currently awarded 65 scholarships. Askelson discussed a survey regarding the IDNR future Water Trails plan has been mailed out to landowners along the Cedar River in the Benton County area but is somewhat vague in explaining the project. Askelson clarified the Water Trails process for everyone to be able to answer any questions.

Law Enforcement

- a. Budget Updates** - Officers are working on recertification trainings and prepping for CCPOA Spring Workshop.
- b. Other** – Officers are looking to get additional tools and training. Grubic and Parmater are attending Hunters Education instruction training this spring. Looking for more instructors for Benton County. JAKES Day is May 18, 2024.

Director updates:

- a. Budget** - VanWey moved to accept the updated budget with Cabin Rental changes to the revenue and expenditures, seconded by LaGrange. All aye, motion passed
- b. Other** - While Williams is out of office, Parmater will be handling timesheets and Dirks will be handling claims and budget items. Almost all of our seasonal positions are filled.

Set next regular meeting: Monday, March 11, 2024 at 5:30 PM at Hannen Lake Shop.

Adjourn: Motion to adjourn at 7:57 PM by Scheel, seconded by LaGrange. All aye, motion passed.

Minutes Submitted by: Layla Hagen

Approved

Date