

Dickinson County Conservation Board

Regular meeting minutes

6 p.m. Tuesday, March 18

Dickinson County Nature Center, Okoboji

Presiding chairperson: Eric Stoll

Members present: Joan Gronstal, Kathy Kleen, Steve Anderson, Willia Mueske

Employees present: Lee Sorenson, Karess Knudtson, Kiley Roth, John Walters

Others present: Pam Jordan, Jane Goeken

Agenda Approval: Mueske/Kleen motion to approve the agenda. All ayes, motion carried.

Approval of February 2014 minutes: Kleen/Gronstal motion to approve the minutes. All ayes, motion carried.

Executive director comments: The staff deserves compliments for displays, Iowa Association of Naturalists conference. There were 67 naturalists from Iowa that attended the conference, expected attendance was only 30-40.

Conservation Foundation of Dickinson County update: The foundation gave \$2,500 to start the gift shop in the nature center. The murder mystery fundraiser was successful. The prints of the nature center are not selling as well as had been hoped, but foundation members are hoping summertime will sell better.

Environmental education update: The naturalists are working on a new sponsor-an-animal program, and Bucky Bedell has been photographing the animals so people can select them via photo. The nature center is starting to get plenty of calls for field trips. Kayaking, Hike the Wild and other summer programming is being finalized. Charles Vigdal is working with the Spirit Lake Middle School sixth grade at the Audubon sanctuary. The osprey camera is running but not publicized as kinks are worked out; the animals are expected back at the beginning of April. Still working on getting swans for Kenue Park. Earth Day is scheduled for Friday, April 18, including a pot luck dinner.

Operations and facility update

- Recycling center: The time of year is slow and quiet. Leaves and trees will be discussed at the landfill meeting, and that will depend on weather. With heavy vehicles, the area is getting muddy. Some hazardous materials were handled at the end of December. The recycling center is pricing how to sell compost instead of giving it away. Anderson said what he received last year had plastic bag, rock, etc., and would be willing to pay for it if it's screened, but the recycling center isn't sure how much it would cost to screen.

Budget was getting tight so part-time help hours were cut. The recycling center is only open Thursday-Saturday this time of year.

- Budget 2014-15: Sorenson submitted budget and needs to set his salary. He budgeted a 2.7 percent raise. Anderson received reviews and went through. Out of five points possible, the total average was 4.6. Anderson motions Step (which is 5 percent) plus a 2.7 percent raise. Gronstal seconded. All ayes, motion carried.
- Barn update: Sorenson is having trouble getting people to come investigate the barn. A contractor from Lake Park looked at the barn and looked at possibility of moving the barn and got an estimate of \$50 per square foot. The bottom needs to be redone and top could be moved for approximately \$10,000.

Dickinson County Conservation Board Areas

- Horseshoe Bend: Going over master plan for park.
- Spring burn: A management plan is being put in place for other areas and the conservation staff will attempt to burn as many of them as possible in April, as soon as it dries. The board will send out e-mails so board members can help. Staff talked about doing a night burn at Kenue Park if conditions are right, for the novelty and educational aspect. Places have not been burned for quite a while, and Sorenson expects the landscape to change. The Zimmer tract might need to be sectioned up for the burn.
- RAGBRAI: Sorenson is co-chair for camping and the nature center is officially a registered campground. It will be free for registered campers but the area will get portable restrooms, showers and vendors from RAGBRAI. The area where camping will be in Kenue Park and around the nature center will be burned and mowed down. Other registered campgrounds are Okobojo and Spirit Lake high schools as well as the driving range at Brooks Golf Club. 10,000 registered riders participate in RAGBRAI and about 10,000 don't register and just ride along, but they cannot camp at the registered campgrounds. Clay County Conservation will assist with law enforcement.

Approval of expenses: Kleen/Anderson motion, all ayes, motion carried. Motion to pay routine monthly bills prior to monthly meeting by Kleen/Mueske, all ayes, motion carried.

General discussion

- Kleen asked Sorenson about presenting his goals as a director. Sorenson is still going off what the board presented him for needs, but the board would like to see what his goals are for the next fiscal year. Displays that have been implemented as some of their goals. Kleen would like all the staff to have a set of goals, and that is the last part of the staff evaluations.

Needs assessment

- Jane Goeken from Iowa State University Extension came to start work on a needs assessment for the conservation board.
- She wants to get input from staff, residents and people who don't normally use this area. Next steps will include public meetings as well as focus groups. She wants specific issues to ask about at these upcoming meetings.

- Staff and board members were split into three groups to summarize response received on a survey taken by Goeken.

Group 1 (Facility/Park improvements)

Outdoor recreation improvements: Orleans, Horseshoe Bend, disc golf, Kenue Park

Nature Center aesthetics: Building, landscaping

Staff changes

Land acquisitions

Recycling center more efficient

Group 2 (New programs/services/initiatives)

Media connections

Connecting with other entities (trails, art center)

Kenue Park evolution

Staff evolution

Osprey camera

Volunteers

New displays (becoming more nature center, less museum)

Increased land acquisitions

Popular programs growing (kayaking, butterfly release, children's spaces)

Increased public awareness (established a presence through state conferences, etc)

Group 3 (Best stuff)

Environmental education: Four schools in county, nature center field trips, displays, ee events, website

Outdoor rec: biking, shooting sports, tubing, fishing, kayaking, camping, disc golf, hiking, birding, snowshoeing, swimming

Facilities/projects: Westport Schoolhouse, nature center, recycling center, butterfly house, osprey camera, recreational trails, tubing hill, primitive camp, disc golf course

Properties: Kenue Park, Spring Run shooting, Milford woods, Westport Park, Superior Marsh, Orleans Beach, Horseshoe Bend, Judd Wildlife/Zimmer, Canoe accesses

- Identification of stakeholders: Public schools, children, volunteers, tourists (day trip and seasonal), families, taxpayers, board of supervisors, conservation professionals, outdoor enthusiasts, service groups, local businesses (part of tourist attraction), conservation foundation, hunters, conservation organizations, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation,

photographers/artists, flora/fauna, past funders, staff, board members, protective associations, history enthusiasts, media, web surfers, potential donors, corridor, chamber of commerce, citizens of community, farmers, political representatives, city leaders, I-DNR, trails board, soil conservation district, IRVM program, homeschools, landfill commission, Clean Water Alliance, 4-H groups

- Non-users/under-utilizers: Senior citizens, local citizens, people on night shift, 20s/30s, tourists that are focused on the lake, teenagers/young adults without children, non-environmentalists, churches, bars, farmers, farmers market, community garden

Questions to ask the public

1. Need for roadside biologist
 2. Horseshoe Bend
 3. Programming
 4. What are we doing well/poorly?
 5. Best methods for communication
 6. Property/facility updates
 7. How do you feel about land purchases? Do you know what land we have?
 8. Trails
 9. How often do you utilize us?
 10. Donations
 11. Volunteers
 12. Spring Run
- Two public meetings will be scheduled for early June, and a questionnaire will also be posted online and available in print form.
 - Focus groups identified were: High school/college students, volunteers, school administrators, rotary/Kiwanis members

Next meeting: The next board meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, April 8.

Anderson/Kleen motion to adjourn, all ayes. Adjourn at 9:03 p.m.