

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
January 18, 2023**

PURSUANT to written notice given all members of the Board, the above meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by President Bendsen

Board members present: President Bendsen; 1st Vice-President Castor, 2nd Vice-President Schneller; Treasurer Reed, and Secretary Allen

Board Members absent: None

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the Minutes of the November 16, 2022 Executive Session Minutes and the December 22, 2022 Regular Public Meeting Minutes with correction as noted. Trustee Castor SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

Pam Smith pointed out that a sentence on page two under the approval of seed purchase should have read "*This price doesn't include shipping...*" instead of saying "*doesn't exclude shipping.....*"

Trustee Reed MOVED to approve the Treasurer's Report and disbursements in the amount of \$131,116.21 and additions to disbursements in the amount of \$43,406.50 as presented. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; and Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

**COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE:** No audience present.

**PRIOR BUSINESS:**

**1. Richie Wolf Memorial Scholarship:**

Pam Smith suggested to the Board adding the opportunity to apply for a summer camp scholarship to the Richie Wolf Memorial Scholarship. Trustee Schneller had already contacted Jolanta Wolf for her approval and she agreed that would be a nice addition to the scholarship. Pam explained that there has not been an overwhelming response to apply for scholarships related to certification but families were always inquiring if we offered summer camp scholarships. The scholarship that had previously been offered by the Macon County Conservation Foundation had been depleted a year ago. A lengthy discussion followed concerning how to qualify the need for the scholarship and how many to offer. The Summer Camp weekly fee will be \$140.00 a week for 2023. Jerry did explain that the Empowerment Opportunity Center (EOC) last year had families qualify for a grant to attend summer camp. The District could work with EOC and the Decatur Public Schools in offering scholarships. Other agencies that the District could partner with were the Boys and Girls Club and CASA. After some discussion, the Board decided target CASA for this first year and then review after a year. All were in agreement to add the summer camp scholarship and would work out the details at a later date.

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve adding a Summer Camp Scholarship to the Richie Wolf Memorial Scholarship as discussed. Trustee Castor SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE";

Trustee Allen, “AYE”; Trustee Schneller, “AYE”; and Trustee Bendsen, “AYE”.  
Motion carried.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

### **1. Campground Report:**

Jerry Culp gave the 2022 Campground report. The District transitioned to an online reservation system allowing campers to reserve and pay for campsites online instead of having to call the office. In addition to the online system, the District completed an electrical upgrade adding 50 amp service to 17 units and electricity to nine additional campsites. Camping fees were also raised this year, which had not been raised for over ten years; but this didn't seem to have any impact on the campground as the number of users and revenue increased from last year. The only recommendation for this year is to move the online reservation program to a cloud base program for next year. This will allow Conservation District staff to access the campground system from anywhere using any device when a change is needed, allowing them to take care of our customers in a more timely fashion.

### **2. Burn Report:**

Ethan Snively presented the 2022 Prescribed Burn Report. Ethan briefly reviewed the need for prescribed burning noting that it is a necessary process for our ecosystems and more cost effective than other methods in removing vegetation. He reported that they were able to burn 649 acres with two burn days in the fall and six burn days in the spring. Normally the District assists the Decatur Park District and City of Decatur with burns; but due to the weather, were unable to assist them this year. The District always alerts the Fire Chief and dispatch of the burns so they are aware and also posts signs that a prescribed burn is in process. Ethan explained that it is old school to conduct burns every three years but the new standard is to burn every year. He briefly explained the burns in each area and presented the Board with maps. Twenty-six acres were burned at Bois du Sangamon Conservation Area, 40 acres were burned at Fort Daniel Conservation Area, 275 acres were burnt at Friends Creek Conservation Area, 98 acres were burnt at Rock Springs Conservation Area, 167 acres at Sand Creek Conservation Area, and 43 acres at Willow Branch II Conservation Area.

Next, Ethan reviewed the 2023 proposed burn units. Staff recommends that the District burn 1,265 acres out of 3,866 total acres. Of course, weather and fuel conditions will influence how many acres they are able to burn. They plan to burn 15 acres at Griswold Conservation Area, 77 acres at Fort Daniel Conservation Area, (which will be a priority as the prairie was planted two years ago), 363 acres at Friends Creek Conservation Area, and 386 acres at Rock Springs Conservation Area. Staff hope to burn a 48 acre woodland at Rock Springs on the east side of Dipper Lane that has never been burnt. A total of 359 acres at Sand Creek Conservation Area and 65 acres at Willow Branch II Conservation Area are also proposed as part of the plan.

### **3. Set the Budget Study Session**

All members of the Board were in agreement to schedule the budget study session for 4:00 p.m. prior to the regularly scheduled Board meeting on February 15, 2023.

#### 4. Staff Reports

Jerry Culp reported that staff had been busy completing budgets and department budgets are currently being reviewed in preparation for the February budget study session. Staff worked with IT Consultant for transitioning the District from a server to the cloud. The District has received a grant from the City of Decatur to install wetlands at the Friends Creek Conservation Area. The Director of Operations position has been advertised with the notice closing December 30<sup>th</sup>. Staff are currently working with an HR Consultant to review the applications and make recommendations. United Way met with staff to discuss the success of last year's grant the District received for summer camp. One change to work on for next year will be the transportation process for summer camps. Staff is currently is working with the Foundation preparing for the Rock Springs Ramble on May 20<sup>th</sup>. The race is already live on Runsignup.com. There will be a 5K Run/Walk, a One Mile Run/Walk and a Kids Fun Run. Jerry accepted an appointment to the IAPD/IPRA Joint Legislative Committee. The Clean Energy Foundation signed off on the final report for the 180 acres acquired to Fort Daniel Conservation Area.

Jerry Culp also gave the Operations Department monthly report. Staff have been working on re-establishing the oak savanna next to the pine forest at Rock Springs Conservation Area. Staff will be working on cleaning up and burning the debris over the next few weeks. The South Wheatland Fire Department completed their training at the Xanders house and the demolition contractor started the final demolition last week. Staff received the permit for the removal of the barn on the north side of Friends Creek Conservation Area. The Operations Staff completed the excavator training in preparation for using the new piece of equipment. The seed from last month's bid has been delivered and staff is scheduling volunteers and staff to complete the final 45 acres of seeding at the Seay property at Fort Daniel Conservation Area. Staff are working on a multi-year plan to map out existing hedge rows and plan for their removal. Some of this work will be done in house with the new excavator and some will be contracted. These costs will be part of the next year's budget.

December is a busy month completing quarterly and year end reports. Pam Smith reported that all payroll quarterly reports were completed for the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, W-2's were reconciled and had been mailed out prior to this Board meeting. The 1099's will be mailed out at the end of January. Posting the Director of Operations position and meeting with an HR Consulting Firm to assist with the process took a considerable amount of time. Staff also met with three different IT Consultants to select a firm to assist the District with improvements to their Information Technology. The Employee's Handbook was updated per the approved recommendations at the last Board meeting. Pam was happy to report that three employees voluntarily donated sick hours for an employee in need. Employees were also informed of the new payroll deduction for their dependent coverage under the District's Health Insurance with United Healthcare. Staff were busy writing thank you letters for donations received from the Foundation's year end mailing. A total of \$24,426.00 had been received at the time of this meeting. The District received the \$400,000.00 grant funds for the ECO Center and received \$105,775.96 annual distribution from the Nearing Trust. A small grant from the Illinois Public Risk Fund was received in the amount of \$1,273.00. Pam reported that the saving account at Gerber State Bank had been closed and move to the Gerber money market earning more interest. Since the Friends Creek Campground no longer receives cash payments, there was no reason to keep this account open for deposits.

Alysia Callison reported on updates from the Program Services Department. In December, several groups of students came to Rock Springs for winter-themed

programs. Fifty individuals attended the NASA presentation from guest speaker Scott Tashakkor, a NASA Engineer. The Annual Volunteer Holiday Party was held at the Harristown Community Center. Volunteers donated 114 non-perishable food items to be donated to the Northeast Community Fund. Ashton Nunn was hired as the new Marketing Specialist. She previously held the position of the Animal Care Naturalist, which we are now in the process of filling. A Millikin University student reached out to the District looking for a possible internship in Marketing. So, he will be joining Program Services in late January or early February. Staff are excited about this addition and hopefully it will become an annual event. Staff were beginning to plan for spring programming, and planning and prepping for December activity kits. Overall, Alysia felt we had a positive December and a great end to 2022 and hoping for a prosperous 2023.

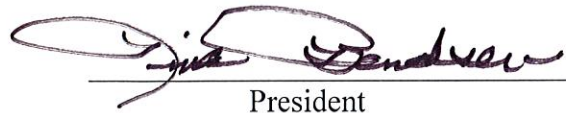
**5. Other Business:**

Jerry Culp will be bringing the discussion of the Griswold Residence to the February Board Meeting. A decision needs to be made as to whether to keep the residence or remove it. The shed has already been moved to another conservation area.

**COMMENTS FROM TRUSTEES:** No comments.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, Trustee Allen MOVED to adjourn the Public Meeting at 6:30 p.m. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; and Trustee Castor "AYE". Motion carried.

  
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President

  
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Secretary