

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT**

June 21, 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, and Secretary Allen.

Board Members absent: Treasurer Reed

Trustee Castor MOVED to approve the Minutes of the May 17, 2023 Public Meeting. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; and Trustee Bendsen, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the Treasurer's Report and disbursements in the amount of \$198,858.22 and additions to disbursements in the amount of \$87,321.08 as presented. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE:

No comments.

PRIOR BUSINESS

No prior business.

NEW BUSINESS:

1) Deer Herd Management Report:

Ethan Snively, Natural Resources Manager, gave an overview of the report he included in the Board packet. The Archery Deer hunting was allowed at Rock Springs, Sand Creek, Fort Daniel, and Friends Creek from October 21 – December 15, 2022. Hunter participation, harvest numbers and hunter success rate remain consistent. Harvested deer from the Conservation District accounted for 17% of the total archery harvest in Macon County. Does observed and total deer harvested were significantly down at the Rock Springs site, probably due to the prevalent deer herd disease while they were up at the Friends Creek site as compared to 2021. The 2022 archery season closed with few incidents and interest from long-term participants remained steady. Both Macon County and the Conservation District saw a decrease in harvest numbers from last year. The Sheriff's Department reports that 45% of all deer-related vehicle accidents reported in Macon County took place within two miles of our Conservation Areas. Ethan briefly summarized the deer density measurement techniques used such as browse studies, observed deer sightings by hunters, records of deer harvested and vehicle vs deer collisions. The Department of Natural Resources indicated that Macon County deer harvest numbers were down 13% from 2021/2022 while the Conservation District's harvest numbers were down by 9%.

Due to the consistently high browse pressure on District holdings, the number of deer-vehicle accidents and the tendency for deer populations to increase, staff recommend that the District continue its Deer Herd Management Program for the

2023 Season, which would run from October 20 to December 14, 2023. Staff have a few new recommendations to present to the Board for approval:

- Limit each participant to two permits allowing them to harvest up to four deer, including one buck. The previous limit was four permits or up to eight deer. Staff felt this was excessive and four was usually the maximum harvested within a year.
- Add a second disabled hunting blind at Sand Creek Conservation Area. Ethan reviewed the map included in the Board packet with the Board. By adding another blind, this would double the opportunities for disabled hunters on District property.
- District employees are exempt from the preseason and weekly drawings and will be permitted to hunt the entire 8-week program with all other rules being followed. Staff felt this would allow the District to have a presence in the field during hunting season without being disruptive. This would help build relationships between staff and participants as well as ensuring that participants are following the rules. If the maximum number of hunters are signed in, District Staff will not be allowed to hunt at that specific area. Some discussion followed with the Board members, questioning how other staff felt and if they felt it was unfair. Administrative staff present at the meeting assured the Board that other staff would not have a problem and there are only two full-time staff that participate in the program from year to year.

Trustee Allen MOVED to approve the Deer Herd Management Program with the new recommendations as presented by Ethan Snively. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; and Trustee Bendsen, "AYE". Motion carried.

2) District's Revision of the Mission/Vision Statement:

Jerry Culp reported on the proposed change to the District's Mission Statement. As staff were reviewing the District's Mission statement, they realized that a key component was missing from the Mission which was the education component. A majority of what the District does is educate the community about natural resources and is certainly a large focus. Staff propose changing the Mission statement to read:

To promote the conservation of natural and cultural resources by acquiring, maintaining, and restoring areas of natural and cultural significance within Macon County, and to protect and preserve those spaces for the education, recreation, and enjoyment of all its citizens in perpetuity.

Staff also realized that it was important to develop a Vision Statement that defines how we meet the Mission and a set of values that support the vision statement. The Board was presented with the Vision Statement and values for their review. Trustee Schneller recommended that under "commitment to patrons" that the word "safe" be added to the statement to read:

We will strive to exceed visitor expectations by delivering professional, safe, helpful, efficient, and friendly service during all interactions.

All members agreed that it was a good suggestion.

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the revision of the Macon County Conservation District's Mission Statement as presented. Trustee Castor SECONDED the motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "Aye"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; and Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

3) New Board Member Recommendation:

Each year the District Board recruits a new member and forwards that information to the County Board Chairman for review and approval. This year the District would like to present Heather Stoa for approval as the new Board member. Heather is a long time resident of Macon County and is very involved in the community. She would be a great asset to the Macon County Conservation District. Heather's detailed application and resume were shared with the Board. Staff recommends that the Board of Trustees approve Heather Stoa as the new Trustee for the Macon County Conservation District Board and forward recommendation to the County Chairman for review and approval.

Trustee Castor MOVED to approve Heather Stoa as the Trustee Nominee for the Macon County Conservation District Board beginning her term July 1, 2023, to the Macon County Board for approval. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

4) Approval of setting fee for dumping at Friends Creek Campground :

Jerry Culp reported on the new dumping fee instead of Phil Julius who was currently attending a conference. Friends Creek Campground has not been charging non-campers to pull into the dump station and empty their black and grey water. The current system can handle outside dumping but it adds to the maintenance of the system as well as wear and tear. With this added maintenance, staff would like to recommend that the District begin charging a fee of \$10.00 to **non-campers** for dumping black and grey water at the Campground. Some discussion followed concerning how often are non-campers dumping and how will the fee be collected. Staff have not been keeping track of how many times the dump station is used by non-campers but will look into the matter. Regarding collecting the fee, a small locked box will be placed by the dumping station. It will be on an honor system but the District currently collects the equestrian fee on an honor system by using a locked box at their site. Many state parks use this honor system as well. After the discussion, Board members were in agreement to give it a try and see how it goes.

Trustee Allen MOVED to approve the \$10 dumping fee for the public to use the dump station at the Friends Creek Campground. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

5) Staff Reports:

Jerry Culp summarized his Director's report with the Board. The drawings for the Nature Outdoor Classroom have been finalized and the Illinois Park and Recreation Facility Construction Grant Program application was submitted. The grant would cover 75% of the cost or up to 90% if Macon County is considered a disadvantaged community. Staff met with the City of Decatur Administrator to discuss partnering on projects in the future. One such project was the management

of vacant properties and wildlife corridors. A new bus route has been temporarily started to bring the public out to Rock Springs Conservation Area. Staff is busy creating new ideas to get the public interested in riding the bus to Rock Springs. The Committee was formed for the Local Government Efficiency Act and staff will be attending a training webinar in late June. Staff attended annual training which included CPR, defensive driving and sexual harassment training. The Rock Springs Ramble was a success with 200 registrations. Staff are transitioning now to details for the annual Prairie Pedal event on September 24th. Staff is working on the required paperwork and documents to complete the Floyd Property OSLAD Grant. Closing is scheduled for early August. Closing was completed on the Penhallegon Farmstead on June 16th.

Jerry Culp reported for Phil Julius on the Operations Department's projects. Staff met with Pat Penhallegon to go over maintenance items in the house and out buildings. A new security camera was installed above the volunteer desk in the Rock Springs Nature Center for security. It is a 30 day trial to see if staff likes the style of camera. Construction of a second handicap blind continues. At Griswold, the new *Infinity Hello Arbor and Bench* were installed. This was a cooperative venture with the Park District. The idea behind it is to talk to past loved ones. The Community Foundation will be doing a dedication on July 5th. A well was discovered by a hiker at Griswold which has now been covered for safety reasons until further investigation can take place as to the purpose of the well. At Sand Creek, trail pruning has begun, trees were mulched in the parking area and re-sprouts in forestry mowed areas have been sprayed. Staff repaired a bench that had been vandalized along the Wagon Trail at Fort Daniel. Riprap was added to the base of the footbridge near the concrete ford. Internet was upgraded at Friends Creek so all devices in the maintenance building can communicate with each other. Progress has been made on the Wetlands project. Control structures and other miscellaneous parts have been delivered to Friends Creek. Silt fence has been put up and the next step is starting excavation. In all areas, invasive herbicide application has begun and will continue through the growing season at all locations.

Pam Smith gave a brief overview of her monthly finance and human resources report. Phones have kept office staff very busy with changes in camping reservations and summer camp. Paperwork was completed for all the Summer Camp Counselors, Program Services Intern, Historic Intern and new Site Keeper hired at Friends Creek. Recently staff have been reviewing personnel files, to weed out documents containing personal information that should not be found in personnel files but in separate files and kept confidential. It will be a work in progress but we began with the recent hires/rehires. Exciting news is that the District was named as the beneficiary in the will of one of our volunteers who recently passed away. The District received \$29,806.56 without any type of restrictions for use. Paperwork was completed for an employee's FMLA as well as responding to an unemployment charge. Also a claim was filed with our liability insurance for damage caused to our security system after the storm. Pictures were uploaded to the new camping reservation system, "Firefly", as well as working on the final details to go live. Staff commend Ashton Nunn on the great logo that she created for the Campground! A new copier was purchased after our main copier "died". The maintenance vendor retired and sold his business to Tom Day Business Machines. Staff decided to lease a new Ricoh copier instead of purchasing it. After an analysis was completed, purchasing would save us a minimal amount and leasing gives us the freedom to update technology every five years or so. They have provided great customer service. Auditors kept staff busy the first week of June gathering documents. After

they return to the office, they will continue to work on the audit through July and will present the audit to the Board at the August meeting.

Alysia Callison gave an update on Program Services and Marketing. May was busy with field trips and finalizing plans for the summer camp. In addition, field trips, library programs have been very popular. By the end of the month, almost every single camp we offer had reached its maximum registration with many weeks having a waitlist. Staff is happy to announce that the return of History Camp has been very popular. The only unfortunate happening thus far with summer camp is that the Boys and Girls Club will not be joining us this year but the Salvation Army is bringing out campers. Staff assisted with the Rock Springs ramble which was very successful. Staff had a follow-up meeting to note changes that would make next year's even better. Staff will now transition to the Prairie Pedal. Staff met with a representative from the DPS Extended Day Program about bringing some staff and students out this fall and met with the Macon County Piatt Regional Office of Education to set up a teacher's workshop at our sites. The new city bus route began making daily trips to the Rock Springs Conservation Area. To date, at least one individual has rode the route. Staff have planned guided walks to entice more of the public to take the transit and visit Rock Springs. Marketing staff has been busy marketing the new service and what Rock Springs has to offer. The District will be placing an ad on the back of one of the buses. The Summer Concert Series has been off to a great start with 150 attending the first concert and 200 attending the second concert. Marketing staff provided an informational table along with the Park District for "Parks Day" at the Capitol. A new volunteer was recruited and it happened to be Doris Turner who signed up to volunteer. Social media continues to increase. The main marketing focus had been on the Rock Springs Ramble but now that it is over staff are moving toward other areas, including Prairie Pedal.

6) Other

Jerry Culp informed the Board that a neighbor to the Sand Creek property was wanting the District to trim trees near a power line and were threatening to sue if nothing was done. Jerry provided a map of the location and contacted legal counsel for advice. Legal counsel confirmed that the District is not obligated to trim the trees and even Ameren has refused to trim the trees since they are not actually touching the power lines. Jerry wanted to keep the Board apprised of the situation in case legal action was pursued. Staff did tell land owner that they would help but won't maintain the trees as staff cannot do it safely and would have to hire someone to actually trim the trees.

COMMENTS FROM TRUSTEES:

The President of the Board, Nina Bendsen, congratulated Trustee Schneller on her five years of service with the District by providing her with a clock with her name engraved on it. President Bendsen commended her for leading the Board and staff through some tough times and keeping everyone together. She will be missed on the Board.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Trustee Castor MOVED to go into Executive Session at 6:45 p.m. for the purpose of

- 1. The appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance or dismissal of specific employees of the public body, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee to determine its validity. 5 ILCS 120/2 (c) (1)**


Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; and Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Castor MOVED to return to the Regular Public Meeting at 7:11 p.m. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; and Trustee Castor, "AYE". Motion carried.

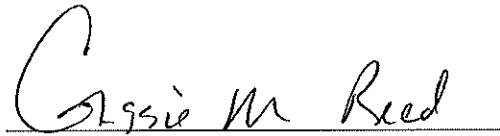
Trustee Allen MOVED to approve the Executive Session Minutes of June 21, 2023. Trustee Castor SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, Trustee Schneller MOVED to adjourn the Public Meeting at 7:13 p.m. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; and Trustee Castor "AYE". Motion carried.



President



Secretary