

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES  
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT  
August 25, 2021**

PURSUANT to written notice given all members of the Board, the above meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by 1<sup>ST</sup> Vice-President Bendsen

Board members present: President Schneller (remotely), 1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President Bendsen, Treasurer Castor and Secretary Beckhart  
Board Members absent: 2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President Allen

Trustee Beckhart MOVED to approve the Minutes of the July 21, 2021, Regular Public Meeting. Trustee Castor SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Beckhart, "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 \$184,482.31 and additions to disbursements in the amount of \$57,483.34 as presented. Trustee Beckhart SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Beckhart, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

**COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE:**

No comments from the audience.

**PRIOR BUSINESS:**

**1. Appoint Foundation Liaison**

Due to the absence of Trustee Allen, the newest Trustee who normally assumes this position, the decision was tabled until the next Board meeting.

**2. Trustee Tour Agenda**

The Trustee Tour Agenda scheduled for October 13, 2021, was presented by Shane Ravellette as follows:

8:00	Meet at Nature Center
9:00	Rock Springs Cattail Pond
9:15	Rock Springs Maintenance Building
10:00	Griswold Conservation Area – Future Restoration Discussion
11:00	Willow Branch II – Prairie Restoration Progress
12:00	Fort Daniel – New Acquisition Area Restoration
12:30	Lunch
1:30	Sand Creek – New Wetland Project
2:00	Return to Rock Springs

All were in agreement with the schedule and Trustee Bendsen thanked Shane for the nice job in creating the schedule. Jerry Culp will share the schedule with the Foundation Board and invite them to join the tour.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**1. Audit Presentation:**

Jene Row with MCK CPAs & Advisor presented the outcome of the FY2021 Audit. She said that it was a straight forward audit with no deficiencies reported. Their opinion is that the financial statements presented fairly, in all material aspects, the respective modified cash basis financial position of the governmental activities in accordance with the modified cash basis of accounting. There were no problems in conducting the audit and staff were cooperative in providing the information requested. Jene briefly gave an overview of the audit. The District is a rather significant sized governmental organization. Trustee Bendsen thanked Pam Smith for her hard work. No questions were asked by the Board.

Trustee Castor MOVED to approve the Macon County Conservation District FY21 audit as presented by Jene Row with MCK CPAs & Advisors. Trustee Beckhart SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; and Trustee Beckhart, "AYE". Motion carried.

**2. Approval of Audit payment to MCK CPAs & Advisors:**

Pam Smith explained that this was the final year of the current contract and the contract fee for this audit was \$11,500.00. The Board had recently approved another three year contract with MCK CPAs & Advisors combining the Foundation Audit with the District. No further questions were asked.

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the payment to MCK CPAs & Advisors in the amount of \$11,500.00 for the Conservation District's FY2021 Audit. Trustee Beckhart SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Beckhart, "AYE"; and Trustee Bendsen, "AYE". Motion carried.

**3. Review of Campground Recommendations presented by Campers:**

Shane Ravellette briefly reviewed the document presented to the Board addressing the concerns of the campers from Friends Creek Campground and asked if the Board had any questions. He addressed the question raised regarding the map at the entrance to assist emergency vehicles and if a map was going to be sent to the dispatch. Jerry Culp said that he would reach out to dispatch to see if they needed a map of the campsite for responding to emergencies. One of the biggest concerns raised regarded the pollinator patches at the campground. Shane explained that pollinator patches take time to develop. Seeding usually takes place in November-December timeframe. Staff were hoping that those pollinator patches would seed themselves but staff are continually addressing the patches. He highlighted that thousands of dollars are being spent on improving the lighting in that area and there will be lights to light the drive through the campground. Shane addressed each of the concerns raised in his document presented to the Board, and the Board commended him on the good job of addressing the concerns.

#### **4. Friends Creek Easement**

A map was presented to the Board showing the right of way needed for the new electric service to the Friends Creek new electrical supply in the picnic area. Board approval is needed to approve the legal agreement between Corn Belt Energy and the Macon County Conservation District. The easement is a 10' wide strip of land as shown on the map whereby the District agrees that no trees, buildings or other structures will be placed on the easement area. This is the cost of doing business and part of the process of separating out two electrical services to the campground.

Trustee Castor MOVED to approve the right-of-way easement at Friends Creek Conservation Area with Corn Belt Energy as presented. Trustee Beckhart SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Beckhart "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; and Trustee Bendsen, "AYE". Motion carried.

#### **5. Nature Center Upper Level Office Remodel:**

Jerry Culp presented a new layout of the Nature Center upper level stating that he felt the current layout was disjointed making it difficult to meet with management staff. Jerry met with management staff to address his concerns about the current layout and asked for their input into the new layout of the upper and lower level of the Nature Center. In sharing the new layout, the management staff would all be located in the north wing out of the public view. The plan was to move the collections (artifacts) room to the lower level and create an office for Pam Smith, Alysia Callison and Joy Potter. The library and the current office of Jerry Culp would switch giving more public access to the library and hopefully to entice more public use of the library. Two of the Program Services Staff would move into the offices currently occupied by Pam Smith and Alysia Callison with one of them being the Volunteer Coordinator. The Volunteers would move to the current reception area. The Ski Room would move downstairs to the old Executive Director's office. The plan would be to move current staff in the lab to the office once occupied by the two Program Services staff that will be moving to Pam and Alysia's offices. This would free up more room to increase the size of the Washburn Classroom. The downstairs would eventually be used for larger meeting rooms to maximize use of the building and keep staff in functional spaces. Long term plans will be to redesign the "cloud" which is occupied by the Volunteers. Jerry is hoping to keep construction at a minimum but it may involve removal and addition of walls and some windows. Staff would be used for much of the reconstruction during their downtime and then when they have the opportunity to work inside. The next step will be to get estimates on the construction and to bite off little junks at a time. Ideas have been presented to the staff and all are in agreement. Board were all in agreement to proceed with the remodel plans.

#### **6. Rock Springs Nature Center Hours:**

The current Nature Center Hours are Monday – Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. with the exception of Thursday which is open until 8:00 p.m. Alysia Callison presented the idea of changing the hours back to the normal hours on Thursday from 8:00 – 5:00 p.m. Part of this request was the result of a part-time staff resignation who was scheduled on Thursday nights and also staff reporting that Thursday evenings

were not busy. The plan would be to have staff scheduled on Thursday nights when the Camera Club meets or other organizations meet such as the Audubon Society to accommodate their meeting schedules. Alysia suggested that the schedule could be adjusted later if it appeared that there would be more traffic in the Center at any point in time, especially after the ECO Center Remodel. The Camera Club had changed its meeting time to coincide with the District's hours on Thursdays, meeting 6:00- 8:00 pm instead of 7:00-9:00 pm. The Board asked Trustee Castor if he was in agreement with changing the hours on Thursdays since he was part of the Camera Club and he supports the change. The Board asked that the public be given plenty of notice and Alysia assured them that it would be posted on Facebook and the marketing specialist would write a press release announcing the change in hours.

#### **7. Staff Reports:**

Jerry Culp reported that he was learning all about Prairie Pedal and that things were moving right along. Sponsorships were coming in and flyers, banners and posters had been completed. He and Katherine Unruh had driven the route and made some small adjustments to the route. Registration had opened up for the riders and the next step was to begin gathering supplies for the event. Jerry met with the Oglesby Mansion Board and reviewed the status of existing projects and additional work that they were requesting. He attended an Illinois Parks and Recreation Association (IPRA) Forest Preserve and Conservation Committee zoom meeting. This is a new committee formed to focus more on the conservation field. He attended the annual Volunteer Recognition Dinner remarking that it was a great event and he enjoyed meeting and talking to many of the volunteers.

Shane Ravellette gave an Operations update. Staff were able to order materials and start the work on the first phase of the electrical project at Friends Creek. The availability of materials has become a problem for many projects. A certified electrician will be hired to make all the connections. The upper level conference room at the Nature Center is 90% complete. Shane worked with Jerry on the future remodel of offices at the Nature Center. He also worked on the design for the Friends Creek Shop addition which is long past due. Friends Creek Shop was one of the first buildings built and is over 50 years old. Natural Resources was able to conduct some small growing season burns at Rock Springs. Shane commended his staff on all their hard work and Ethan Snively commended his staff for pitching in and helping in his absence.

Alysia Callison gave the Program Services update for the month of July. July was a busy month wrapping up Summer Camp. Despite a COVID case the last week of camp, there were no major issues all summer and camp went very well. Only the last three days of camp had to be canceled due to the COVID case. The camp was well attended. She commended her staff for the excellent job they had done this summer and stepping up and assisting when needed. One of the most popular programs "Bats in the Barn" was well attended and was a success. The ECO Center remodel is moving into the final graphic design phase and if all goes well should begin installation at the beginning of December. The Volunteer Recognition Dinner was well attended with over 100 volunteers attending.

Pam Smith spent most of the month of July preparing for the audit and gathering documents for the auditors that was just presented. The District just rolled over a certificate that had been earning 1.75% to a certificate earning .40%. Last year

most of the certificates were earning 1% and now they are all under 1%. Interest rates will more than likely remain low for some time. All the District and the Foundation signature cards have been updated with Jerry Culp at all applicable banks. An update to the District's online registration software (RecTrac) is being upgraded to a web-based format planned for mid-September. This will require a lot of work from the staff to learn the new software. The Foundation's donor database "Exceed" will also be undergoing an upgrade and we are in the process of working on that upgrade. Pam is currently researching a new GASB Statement on the accounting for leases that becomes affective for the next Fiscal Year beginning April 2022.

**8. Other:**

Trustee Castor announced that the Camera Club would like to donate a fountain for Richie Wolf's memorial. He will work with Ethan and the Master Naturalist gardeners in designing and placing a fountain in the corner of the native plant garden at the Nature Center. There would be no expense to the District and the gardeners would maintain the fountain. All Board members liked the idea. More information will be forthcoming after the Camera Club meets again.

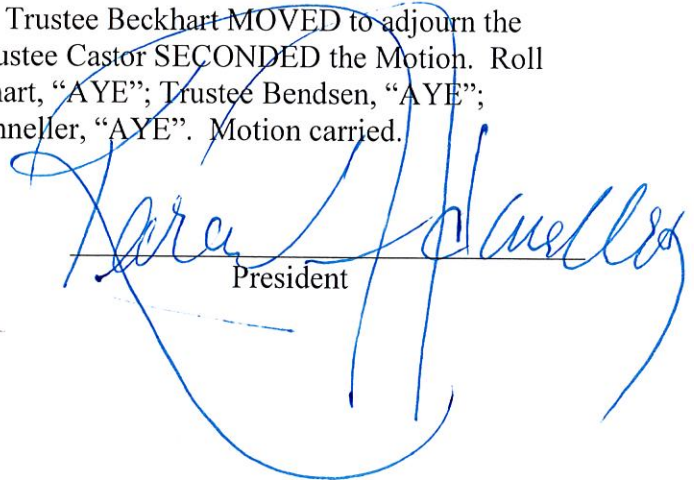
**COMMENTS FROM TRUSTEES:**

No further comments.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

There being no further business, Trustee Beckhart MOVED to adjourn the Special Public Meeting at 6:40 p.m. Trustee Castor SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Beckhart, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

  
Secretary

  
President