

**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
March 22, 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 (remotely), Secretary Allen and Treasurer Reed.

Board Members absent: None

Trustee Allen MOVED to approve the Minutes of the February 15, 2023, Public Meeting and the February 15, 2023 Special Budget Study Session. Trustee Castor SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; and Trustee Bendsen, "AYE". Motion carried.

Pam Smith noted two minor corrections to the minutes: Minutes stated President Schneller called the meeting to order and should have been President Bendsen. The second correction was a typo on page 1 where "Pam Smit" should have been "Pam Smith." Corrections were made prior to the President and Secretary signing the approved minutes.

Trustee Reed MOVED to approve the Treasurer's Report and disbursements in the amount of \$173,112.83 and additions to disbursements in the amount of \$2,549.54 as presented. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE:

No comments from the audience.

PRIOR BUSINESS

Jerry Culp updated the Board on the public comments raised at the February 15, 2023 Budget Study Session. He contacted Beverly Ritter the very next day to talk about her complaint and review the situation. After walking the Sand Creek Conservation Area, Jerry was able to determine an explanation to address her concerns. The staff had cut a firebreak and in doing so had cut down some young cottonwood trees. He assured Beverly that staff would be more careful in the future. There were no larger trees cut down but apparently in the past a neighbor along the property had marked trees to cut down on the District Property to create a path but staff had put a stop to that, however, the paint used to mark the trees still remains on the trees. Jerry followed up with Beverly explaining the situation and followed up with her by sending a postcard thanking her for her concern.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. FY2024 Budget & Appropriation Ordinance Approval:

The FY2024 Budget and Appropriation Ordinance hearing was held prior to the meeting with no changes being made. No further comments from the Trustees.

Trustee Allen MOVED to approve the FY2024 Budget and Appropriation Ordinance as presented. Trustee Castor SECONDED the motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; and Trustee Bendsen, "AYE". Motion carried.

2. Employee Handbook Update Approval - Insurance:

While reviewing the employee handbook for updates that needed to be made, staff recommends changing the eligibility period for obtaining insurance which includes health, dental and vision from 30 days from the date of hire to the first date of employment. Pam Smith explained that this has become the standard with many organizations and would allow the District to more easily attract qualified individuals.

Trustee Castor MOVED to approve removing the waiting period for insurance eligibility from 30 days to upon first date of employment. Trustee Reed SECONDED the motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE" Trustee Castor, "Aye"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; and Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

3. Griswold House Review:

Jerry Culp conducted some research on the house located on the Griswold Conservation Area property, which currently is vacant. The house is a manufactured home that was moved to Griswold in 2005 and housed a full-time employee until 2015. The house is aging and has been vacant since last fall. Jerry explained that there is no need to have staff in the house for security purposes as the District has a good relationship with the Blue Mound police who monitor the property. Staff recommend removing the house and auctioning or selling it. Eliminating the cost of utilities and repairs are just a few of the benefits of removing the house. If any security problems develop in the future without having a resident guard on property, security cameras can be installed on the property.

Trustee Reed MOVED to declare the house at Griswold Conservation Area as surplus property and allow the District to remove it and sell it through an auction service. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

4. Transfer of Contingency Funds Approval:

As per recommendation from the auditor last year, any contingency expenses should be expensed through a budgeted line expense and move budgeted funds from the contingency line in the General Fund Budget to that line item within the General fund. To move budgeted contingency funds to another line item requires Board approval. Staff recommends transferring \$4,729.00 from the contingency line budget to the rental line budget within the general fund. These funds were payment for property taxes on the newly acquired Fort Daniel Property. The budgeted contingency funds are \$50,000.00 and to date this \$4,729.00 was the only contingent expense. Since there was not enough budgeted in the rental line, the contingency budgeted funds need to be moved to the rental budget line. At the time of creating the budget, this was unforeseen. The net budgeted dollars for the general fund remained unchanged.

Trustee Castor MOVED to approve the transfer of budgeted funds from the Contingency line item to the Farm Rental line rental for the payment of taxes on the newly acquired Fort Daniel Property. Trustee Reed SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

5. Staff Reports:

Jerry Culp announced that the OSLAD Grant that was submitted to purchase 47 acres of land adjacent to the Bois du Sangamon Nature Preserve was approved. The estimated cost of the acquisition of the property is \$600,000.00, of which the grant will reimburse the District 50% of the acquisition cost. The purchase of this property next to the Nature Preserve will allow access to the area for interpretation while limiting foot traffic on the nature preserve itself. Once the state sends the contract, staff will begin working on the acquisition. After several interviews and great candidates, the decision was made to hire Phil Julius as Director of Operations, who is a past employee of the District and left to gain valuable experience managing staff. Phil will start March 27th. Staff continues to work with the Boys and Girls Club and the Salvation Army of Decatur to finalize the number of children from each organization that will attend summer camps at Rock Springs Nature Center. The Rock Springs Ramble is just around the corner on May 20th, so staff are making preparations. The Macon County Conservation Foundation will be operating a concession stand during the Festival of Spring as a fundraiser. Staff continue to work with consultants on the conversion of the old offices on the lower level of the Nature Center. Concept plans are being completed for the proposed outdoor classroom that will be presented to the Board at the April meeting.

Jerry Culp gave an update on the various projects with the Operations Department. Staff have been very busy with burn season ramping up with burns completed at Fort Daniels, Friends Creek, and Rock Springs. Staff are also assisting the City of Decatur and the Decatur Park District with prescribed burns. The contractor has completed the demolition of the Xanders house and begun on the demolition of the barn. Staff completed the removal of the barn on the north end of Friends Creek Conservation Area. Volunteers working with staff completed seeding the final 45 acres of the Seay Property at the Fort Daniel Conservation Area. With the opening of the Friends Creek Campground just a little over a month away, staff have begun to clean up and prepare the campground for the opening.

Ethan Snively, Manager of Natural Resources, gave a report of the projects conducted by the Natural Resources department. The Conservation District has treated 943.5 acres of invasive species including 12 different species at five different sites. Ethan explained the importance of controlling these invasive species while making safety a top priority when it comes to the removal of the invasive species. He spoke about various methods of removal including chemical treatments using Foliar application, cut stump treatment, and Basal barking. Mechanical and manual removal is another method using chainsaws, forestry mowing and prescribed burns. Ethan reviewed the various types of invasive species that were targeted at the various Conservation areas including Autumn Olive, Black Locust, Bush Honeysuckle, Sericea Lespedeza, Crown Vetch, Sweet Clover, Thistle, and a few more. With the help of volunteers, the District harvested just under 15 pounds of native seed worth approximately \$2,820.00. These seeds are used to supplement larger plantings as well

as to diversity prairies. A total of 54 acres of native prairie was planted in the winter of 2022/2023. Trustee Reed complimented Ethan on the well done report and suggested that the District think about establishing a goal or target that they wish to accomplish. Jerry Culp did say that the District was beginning to work on putting a plan together.

February was a busy month for Pam Smith completing the interview process for the Director of Operations. An offer was made and accepted by Philip Julius and we are anxiously awaiting his arrival. New hire paperwork was also completed on a new weekend Naturalist, Jenna Ward, who had previously worked for the District as a part-time naturalist. We are happy to have such a good employee back. In honor of Employee Recognition Day, the admin team planned a pizza party on March 3rd for all employees. It seemed all had a good time of food and fellowship. Staff continues following up with the HR Consultant for assistance in developing a plan for improving and implementing processes within the District's Human Resources. Pam met with the Foundation's Finance Committee to develop a budget to present to the Board at their March meeting. An amount of \$270,382.36 will be transferred from the Foundation to the District for Natural Resource Projects, the annual Auer Property distribution, the Stifel sponsorship for the Summer Concert Series, an anonymous donation for the excavator and Program Services as well as grant funds for the Rock Springs Nature Center Library. The District recently invested in certificate of deposits from certificates that were redeemed earlier in the summer. A certificate in the amount of \$285,000.00 was invested with Hickory Point Bank for twelve months at 4.23% and \$439,000.00 with Commerce Bank for six months earning 4.7%. Staff continue to learn the new Firefly online registration software for the Campground. Staff participated in a demo and have the opportunity to use a demo for a month to upload all details and learn how to operate the system. Hopefully soon we will be able to go live with the new cloud-based software.

Alysia Callison shared the Marketing Specialist report with the Board giving website statistics as well as listing the press releases and press coverage that went out for advertising programs. The District continues to see an increase in the use of social media. The Board was delighted with the report and wishes to continue receiving a report from the Marketing Specialist.

February was a busy month for Program Services. Alysia Callison said several of their public programs were successful such as Maple Syrup Program, Photography Workshops, the Snake and Turtle Show, and more. In addition to these public programs, there were several booked programs including a booth at the Mudpuppy Festival in Monticello, a talk about Interpretation for the Master Naturalists, and Into the Wild workshop for a local Cub Scout troop and more. The marketing specialist has been busy planning the Rock Springs Ramble, creating a new Volunteer brochure, a new Nature Center Brochure and updating social media, making press releases and more. The Animal Care Naturalist Position was filled in February. Taylor Buley, a weekend Naturalist was offered the position and started on February 27th. She has had several years of experience as a zookeeper and has already made some great changes and suggestions to the animal care routine. Alysia pointed out to the Board the large increase from last February to this February with total public contacts going from 1264 last year to 2475 this year. Registration for summer camp goes live on April 3rd. March is shaping up to be a very bush month.

6. Other:

No other business.

COMMENTS FROM TRUSTEES:

No comments.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Trustee Castor MOVED to go into Executive Session at 6:25 p.m. for the purpose of

- 1. The purchase or lease of real property for the use of the public body. 5 ILCS 120/2 (c) (5)**
- 2. 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 Reed SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; and Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Reed MOVED to return to the Regular Public Meeting at 6:45 p.m. Trustee Castor SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; and Trustee Bendsen, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Castor MOVED to approve the Executive Session Minutes of March 22, 2023. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; and Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, Trustee Reed MOVED to adjourn the Public Meeting at 6:47 p.m. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Bendsen, "AYE"; and Trustee Castor "AYE". Motion carried.


President



