

## **Allamakee County Conservation Board Minutes November 7, 2023**

The Allamakee County Conservation Board met in regular session November 7, 2023 beginning at 1 p.m. at the Driftless Area Education and Visitor Center in Lansing, Iowa. Board members who were present were: Marilyn Clark, Jeanie Carroll, and Jesse Delaney. Attending from the Allamakee County Conservation Board staff was Ross Geerdes, Erin Cubbon, and Emma Jacobs. Present from the Allamakee County Board of Supervisors was Mark Reiser.

The meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. and the agenda and minutes from the October 7, 2023 regular board meeting were approved with a motion by Carroll and a second by Clark with all members in favor.

There was no public comment.

The Board reviewed and approved claims and revenues with a motion by Clark and a second by Carroll. All in favor.

The upcoming budget for fiscal year 2024/2025 was discussed. Director Geerdes stated that the staff has been having work sessions regarding the upcoming budget process. Potential projects and equipment purchases have been discussed with some of the ideas including repair of a kiosk at the New Albin Roadside Park, the purchase of a new three-point post hole digger for the John Deere tractor, a laminating machine for the Driftless Area Education and Visitors Center and completing signage at all of the areas to be uniform. In further discussion the need for maintaining the aging vehicle fleet was discussed with both the county owned mini van and one of the light duty pickups needing to be replaced in the coming year. The Director thought it to be best to keep ahead of the needs in order to get the best trade in value and limit costly repairs on the aging vehicles. The need for requesting the addition of another full-time position was discussed. Director Geerdes noted that all of the staff is having to work multiple weekends in a month along with their regular work. The need for a staff person who is able to help in the field as well as with education was discussed. Naturalist Cubbon noted that the education programs are continuing to grow with both in-school programming, field trips and public programs. The possibility of a permanent part time employee was discussed as a possibility.

Management agreement contracts with the Iowa Department of Natural Resources were discussed. Management agreements at the Harpers Ferry Boat Landing and Shop, Nobles Island, Harpers Slough, and Heytman's Landing are set to expire on December 31, 2023. An agreement is in place with Village Creek Boat Landing through 2042. The benefits of the management agreements were discussed including the use of the shop at Harpers Ferry as well as tools and money that is available for maintenance of the areas that would not be possible without the management agreements. The Harpers Ferry location has a house that is currently used and managed by the Iowa DNR Law Enforcement Bureau, but the state is terminating state owned housing and will be a part of the management agreement. Board President Delaney requested Director Geerdes to invite a representative from the Iowa Department of the Natural Resources to the next scheduled meeting to address concerns with the contract agreements. Supervisor Reiser inquired about himself and the other Board of Supervisor members touring the areas and the infrastructure that is included in the management agreements.

The 2024 appointment of ACCB members was discussed. Steve Weymiller's term will expire on December 31, 2023. Weymiller has been encouraged by the staff and the board to consider reappointment to the board. Weymiller has expressed his interest in being reappointed to the board and his paperwork will be filed with the county auditor prior to the deadline in December 2023. Board members are appointed to five-year terms. The county auditor will advertise for any open board positions as the terms expire and the board members will be appointed at the first Board of Supervisors meeting in January 2024.

Education, Operations, and Visitor updates were given by the staff. Office Manager/Assistant Naturalist noted that visitation was up in October as the highest October visitation since the opening of the Driftless Center. Naturalist Cubbon has hosted several field trips and has made visits to all of the elementary schools in Allamakee County. She is planning a Fall Driftless Birding Festival for Saturday, November 18, 2023 to include a speaker from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service and self-guided field trips to area birding locations. The shelter house at Volney park has seen progress. Staff has the roof trusses in place and is working completing the installation of the metal roof.

In informational items the status of the EMC insurance recommendations was given and have been completed at this time. Director Geerdes attended the REAP Assembly in Calmar on October 26 and has been selected as the REAP delegate for the county. He will represent the county in Des Moines in January of 2024. The Driftless Area Education and Visitors Center will be closed on November 10 for the county's observance of Veteran's Day, as well as November 23-26 for the Thanksgiving weekend and December 24 and 25 for Christmas.

The time and date for the next meeting was set for December 5, 2023 at 1 p.m. in the Driftless Area Education and Visitor Center.

With no additional business the meeting was concluded at 1:46 p.m. with a motion by Clark and seconded by Carrol to adjourn. All in favor.