

The Mahaska County Conservation Board (MCCB) held its regular monthly meeting on Monday, February 26, 2024, at the Environmental Learning Center (ELC) at Caldwell Park. Board Chair Steve Dixon called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Also present at the meeting were Board Members Curt Jager, Linda Fox, Jennifer Peterson, and Chuck Webb. The members of the staff present were Director Chris Clingan, Administrative Assistant Dorothy Wedgewood, and Naturalist Laura DeCook. Present from the public was Rodney Anderson, President of Friends of Mahaska County Conservation.

Board Chair Dixon asked if there were any changes to the agenda. Clingan stated there were no changes. Fox made a motion to approve the agenda as presented. Webb seconded this motion. The motion passed unanimously.

The Minutes were discussed.

- I. Fox made a motion to approve the Minutes of the January 22, 2024, regular board meeting as presented. Peterson seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously.

The Expenditures were reviewed.

- I. Clingan discussed several items on the expenditures listing.
- II. Jager made a motion to approve the expenditures as presented. Webb seconded this motion. The motion carried unanimously.

The Breckenridge Estate was discussed.

- I. Clingan advised the Board that MCCB received legal documents from the Estate of Jennifer Jo Breckenridge.
  - A. Clingan stated the documents are contesting the will of Jennifer Jo Breckenridge objecting to several listed beneficiaries i.e., Mahaska County Conservation (under the name Mahaska County Commission), the Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation, and others.
  - B. Clingan advised the Board that there is a Notice of Hearing and an Order Setting Hearing on the Application set for March 29, 2024, at 9:00 a.m. in the Courtroom for the Mahaska County Courthouse, Oskaloosa, Iowa.
  - C. Clingan told the Board that he had contacted Mahaska County Attorney Andrew Ritland regarding this matter. Ritland said that with the Board's approval, he can file an objection and attend the court hearing. Clingan said that he also talked with Ross Baxter, Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation and they are planning to file an objection.
  - D. Discussion ensued.
  - E. Webb made a motion to pursue the objection. Jager seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

The Cabin Donation Request was addressed.

- I. Clingan stated that the Mahaska Chamber and Development Group have requested a cabin donation.
  - A. The donation will go for either "Painting the Lights" raffle or as a prize donation for the golf tournament for scholarships to Mahaska County high school seniors.
  - B. Fox made a motion to approve the cabin donation request.
  - C. Discussion ensued.
  - D. Fox modified the motion; to approve the cabin donation request with the stipulation that the Mahaska Chamber and Development Group use it towards the prize donation for the golf tournament for scholarships for the Mahaska County high school seniors. Jager seconded the motion, and the motion was carried unanimously.

The ELC Hours were discussed.

- I. Clingan advised the Board that he has been tracking ELC usage for a year this April.
  - A. In discussions with staff and the ELC Hosts, it was recommended that the hours for the ELC be modified. The following are the recommended hours:  
Monday through Wednesday 12:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Thursday and Friday 12:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m.  
Saturday 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.  
Sunday Closed
  - B. DeCook informed the Board that she is working on her summer programs and is modifying her schedule so she will be available at the ELC until 7:00 p.m. She plans to have programs to draw people into the ELC.
  - C. Peterson made a motion to approve the modification of hours as recommended by Clingan. Fox seconded the motion, and the motion was approved unanimously.

The Employee Compensation Plan was discussed.

- I. Clingan explained to the Board that the Mahaska County Board of Supervisors adopted a new employee compensation plan that Paul Greufe, Mahaska County Human Resources, and the wage compensation board have been working on.
  - A. Clingan went over the worksheets provided by Greufe and the wage compensation board.
  - B. Clingan informed the Board that he changed staff numbers according to current wages because what was provided was neither current nor accurate. Clingan said that he had contacted Greufe about this issue and had troubles getting any guidance on how to move forward.
  - C. Clingan recommended adopting the employee compensation plan.
  - D. Webb explained how the wage compensation board was picked and how the wage charts were configured. He went on to explain how the step raise and the cost-of-living raise would take effect.
  - E. Discussion ensued regarding, but not limited to following the guidelines and not having the funds to follow the guidelines, step raise, and cost of living raise.
  - F. Jager made a motion to follow the wage compensation guidelines schedule if their budget will allow. Fox seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.

Park Planning was addressed.

- I. Clingan told the Board that he and staff met with students from the University of Iowa Engineering program. They visited several MCCB areas to assess infrastructure.
  - A. Clingan said that the first group visited White Oak and measured all the amenities of the park. Clingan stated that the focus will be to improve infrastructure in the park.
  - B. Clingan added that this group will also gather information on the sediment that will need to be removed from the lake and mitigation ponds.
  - C. Clingan advised that the second group looked at areas along the Des Moines and Skunk rivers. This group is going to focus on water trails and amenities for the water trails.
- II. Clingan stated that the first public planning meeting for the Master Plan for Mahaska County Parks was a success. Many turned out for this and participated in the activities used to gather input.
- III. Clingan notified the Board that he spoke with Diane Crookum-Johnson. Crookum-Johnson told him about a grant through the Iowa Ornithologist Union for up to \$100,000.00. This grant is due March 31.
  - A. Dixon asked if this grant could be used to redo Maskunky Marsh.
  - B. Peterson added that depending on the amount of the grant, it could be spread over several areas.
  - C. Clingan said that he would like to build a platform in the north parking lot at Maskunky Marsh for people to access for viewing the marsh.
  - D. Jager made a motion to have Clingan pursue the Iowa Ornithologist Union grant and bring a plan to the next meeting. Fox seconded this motion. The motion carried unanimously.

Setting the March Board Meeting was addressed.

- I. The regularly scheduled monthly board meeting is March 18, 2024.
- II. Discussion on dates ensued.
- III. Webb made a motion to change the meeting to March 19, 2024, starting at 6:00 p.m. Peterson seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

In Other Business:

- I. Webb shared that MCCB should make sure that any work at Maskunky Marsh can be done without plans completed by Shive Hattery.
- II. Jager talked about birdwatching.
  - A. Jager said that Maskunky would be a nice place for bird watching. He mentioned that there are places along the river where one can view all sorts of river birds, marsh birds, woodpeckers etc.
  - B. Fox mentioned looking into a REAP grant for these areas.
  - C. Jager advised that MCCB should be looking into a multi-year, multi-area scenario for improvements.
- III. Fox asked about completing long range plans for each area.
- IV. Peterson discussed a couple items.
  - A. Peterson asked about recreation grants.
  - B. Peterson informed the Board that the Mahaska Veterinary Clinic has someone that will take the fence out between MCCB's property and their property.
- V. Anderson touched on several matters.
  - A. Anderson said that FMCC is applying for the Build with Bags grant to be used toward benches for the ELC and trash receptacles.
  - B. Anderson advised FMCC will be working on the Walmart grant.
  - C. Anderson informed the Board that e-cycle (electronic recycling) is scheduled for April 27, 2024.
  - D. Anderson stated the annual meeting for FMCC is April 22, 2024.
  - E. Anderson told the Board that the glass for the bobcats is done.
  - F. Anderson discussed different grants.
- VI. DeCook talked about a couple items.
  - A. DeCook informed the Board that the volunteer dinner was a success. She added that Brooke sells was awarded volunteer of the year.
  - B. DeCook notified the Board that she has planned Summerfest for June 1, 2024. The Board asked if the setup will be the same as the previous year. She answered that it would be. The stage will be on the east end of the east side of Eveland Access.
  - C. DeCook said that she has several upcoming programs i.e., OWLs, Bison program, and she will be speaking on KBI2 in Ottumwa about maple syruping.
- VII. Wedgewood discussed an upcoming meeting with the Master Gardeners regarding landscaping out at the Eveland Access cabins.
- VIII. Dixon talked about working on the lower-level main doors.

Jager made a motion to move into closed session. Webb seconded the motion.

- I. Roll call was taken; Curt Jager – aye, Steve Dixon – aye, Chuck Webb – aye, Linda Fox – aye, and Jennifer Peterson – aye. The motion to move into closed session was approved unanimously at 7:16 p.m.

Jager made a motion to move out of closed session. Peterson seconded the motion.

- II. Roll call was taken; Curt Jager – aye, Steve Dixon – aye, Chuck Webb – aye, Linda Fox – aye, and Jennifer Peterson – aye. The motion to move out of closed session was approved unanimously at 7:40 p.m.

Webb made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Fox seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Chairman \_\_\_\_\_

Secretary \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_