

**Dickinson County Conservation Board special meeting**

**4 p.m. Monday, Sept. 24, 2018**

**Dickinson County Nature Center, Okoboji**

**Chair: William Mueske**

**Vice chair: Eric Stoll**

**Board members: Steve Anderson, Kathy Kleen, Joan Gronstal joined by phone at 4:25 p.m.**

**Board of supervisors members: Pam Jordan, Mardi Allen**

**Employees: Lee Sorenson, Kiley Roth**

**Call to order at 4:01 p.m.**

**Agenda approval: Anderson motion, Stoll second. Approved.**

**Discussion/action on Francis Sites maintenance**

-Allen said the Water Quality Commission grant applications were revamped in 2018 and a section for maintenance was added. The commission has granted hundreds of thousands of dollars and has not required a maintenance agreement, even though it is often needed.

This Francis Sites project has been in the works since 2016, with members of the area starting to come to Dickinson County Board of Supervisors meetings in 2012, but that requires that a maintenance agreement must be reached.

Anderson said, "I am fine with the vegetative side of it, but the structural side of it worries me. We would have to hire an engineer." He added that the conservation board has maintained a similar site at East Okoboji Beach and has had to deal with structural issues that it does not have equipment for. Allen asked if it would work for the conservation board to be in charge of reporting to the board of supervisors if the structure needs maintenance/repair. However, vegetation specialists may not be able to address if there is a problem, and Anderson said the engineer's office would be able to address problems better than conservation employees. Perhaps a maintenance agreement needs to address that the engineer's office would need to check for issues a certain number of times per year, and it would be contracted out if that office's employees could not fix a problem.

Allen said she has an issue having two departments trying to diagnose problems, that it would be "too many hands in the pot." The city of Spirit Lake and county would be financially liable for any maintenance.

Anderson and Mueske expressed concerns about being stuck in the middle. Allen said, "Yes, you'd probably be in the middle, but you'd have a lot more to say."

Sorenson said he does not have a problem with reporting issues to the board of supervisors but, for instance, sediment removal would have to be done outside of the conservation board because

employees are not qualified and do not have the equipment to address these kinds of issues. Allen said she thinks all of those issues are already addressed in the grant application.

There is an agreement with the connecting landowner to provide an easement around the site.

Kleen said she would like more specifics such as “We don’t do this,” so there is no argument about what the conservation board can and cannot do. She also asked if the conservation board cannot do something, is it then up to the board of supervisors to contract out a third party or is it up to the conservation board? She asked if the conservation board has the manpower and finances to address these issues. Allen said it’s like having a maintenance person that can’t do a job and has to contract it out, and she has talked with the auditor about adding a fund to cover the costs associated with water quality projects. Sorenson said more manpower is probably needed, but there is not enough work for these people to do in the winter. He thinks that it might be better for these people to work for the engineer’s office in the wintertime, because they could then plow snow. He thinks it could also be a seasonal position but wages would need to be increased to pull better qualified candidates.

There will be a development around this drainage district eventually.

Anderson said that a resolution could be passed by the conservation board to say that certain things can be done, like vegetation management, but other things will not be addressed by conservation board employees. It could be a policy about how this area will/will not be maintained.

“Do we want to review it every three years? Will that be helpful?” Stoll asked. “I’m assuming if we commit to this we are committing to the lifetime of the project.”

Sorenson said that the beginning of the project will be the most intensive. “I think we leave it at, if we see something we can’t handle, we say, ‘We’re not equipped to handle this,’” he said.

The project would be shovel-ready in 2020, but the maintenance agreement needs to be in place by Dec. 1. The city of Spirit Lake has not approved any type of maintenance plan yet either.

If the maintenance duties were clarified, the board expressed positivity toward the project. Sorenson said the maintenance could also be put into a periodic budget as well.

The board plans to put together a policy about how the area would be maintained.

**Update on REAP Grant:** REAP scoring day was Wednesday, Sept. 14. Dickinson County was awarded unofficially about \$90,000, which is about half of the project. The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation thinks that it should be accepted and will try to find more monies to match the grant and complete the purchase from the INHF.

**Water access grant approval:** A grant application will be submitted for the new Ainsworth-Orleans Beach boat ramp and dock to the Iowa Department of Natural Resources water access program. The grant application is due Sept. 30. Anderson motion to approve the grant application, Kleen second. Approved.

**General discussion**

-Allen asked how Pollinator Paradise and the former Pride Group projects were coming. Pollinator Paradise exhibits are scheduled to be finished November 2019, although about \$300,000 is left to raise.

-An engineer suggested tearing down the former Pride Group building and rebuilding a shelter rather than renovating the building. Plans are being prepared within a certain dollar amount that has been verbally committed by an anonymous donor. The asbestos had to be removed whether the building was torn down or renovated. Once plans are finalized, Sorenson will attend the board of supervisors meeting to see about shutting utilities off at the building to save money since the building is not being utilized.

-Allen asked if plans were still in the works to create cabins at Horseshoe Bend and if the heaters from the former Pride Group could be used for such a project in the future, but they would be too big.

**Adjournment: Motion by Anderson, Kleen second. Approved. Adjourn at 5:11 p.m.**