



DUBUQUE COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD

13606 Swiss Valley Road
Peosta, IA 52068
563.556.6745
www.dubuquecountyia.gov

Brian Preston, Director

Board Members:

George Davis
Mark Wagner
Jim Pfeiler
Stacy Conforti
Nick Callahan

JULY 16, 2026 MEETING MINUTES

Dubuque County Conservation Board meeting was called to order by Chair George Davis at 4:01 P.M. In person meeting held at the Swiss Valley Nature Center with a Zoom link, <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88947308848?pwd=zJLtdWOYwob8VXJPbDG5qRcklihdZV.1>
Meeting ID: 889 4730 8848 Passcode: 453103

ROLL CALL:

Board Members Present: George Davis, Mark Wagner, Jim Pfeiler and Stacy Conforti.

Absent: Nick Callahan

Staff Members Present: Brian Preston, Nate Sisler, Ray Martin, Jason Denlinger and Lisa Schroeder.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Laura Quade Gudenkauf, 13385 Swiss Valley Rd., Peosta, IA 52068, addressed the Board regarding proposed data center development near Old Davenport Road in Dubuque County.

- She expressed concerns regarding potential impacts to agricultural land, groundwater, energy use, noise, lighting, wildlife and surrounding environmental resources.
- She reported that citizens had met with the Dubuque County Board of Supervisors regarding a potential ban or additional restrictions on data center development.
- She provided informational material.

Gudenkauf encouraged the Conservation Board to consider potential impacts of data center development on county conservation properties and natural resources.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

Motion to approve the June 18, 2026 meeting minutes was made by Wagner and seconded by Pfeiler. Motion carried 4-0.

Motion to approve the June 24, 2026 special meeting minutes was made by Pfeiler and seconded by Conforti. Motion carried 4-0.

PUBLIC HEARING ON PLANS, SPECIFICATION, FORM OF CONTRACT, AND ESTIMATED COST FOR THE DUBUQUE COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD, RT-C031(132)--9H-31 HERITAGE TRAIL BRIDGE#30 REPLACEMENT:

Motion to open the public hearing on plans, specification, form of contract, and estimated cost for the Heritage Trail Bridge#30 replacement was made by Pfeiler and seconded by Wagner. Motion carried 4-0.

Public hearing opened with Preston presenting an overview of the proposed project:

- The existing timber pile bridge is more than 100 year old.
- The bridge will be replaced with a concrete slab bridge.
- The proposed design will provide additional hydraulic capacity during flood events.
- Riprap revetment will be installed to protect the bridge abutments.

- The project is supported by a state recreational trail grant.
- The estimated project cost was discussed as approximately \$240,000.00, with approximately 80% anticipated to be grant-funded.
- Approximately \$50,000.00 has been budgeted locally.

No public comments were received.

Motion to close the public hearing on plans, specification, form of contract, and estimated cost for the Heritage Trail Bridge#30 replacement was made by Wagner and seconded by Conforti. Motion carried 4-0.

PERMISSION TO SOLICIT BIDS FOR RT-C031(132)--9H-31 HERITAGE TRAIL BRIDGE #30 REPLACEMENT:

- Bridge #30 is located east of Cemetery Rd. near Farley.
- Bids would be received by August 11, 2026.
- A public bid opening will be conducted, and bids will be forwarded to Origin Design for review and recommendation.

Motion to approve soliciting bids for RT-C031(132)--9H-31 Heritage Trail Bridge#30 replacement was made by Wagner and seconded by Pfeiler. Motion carried 4-0.

SPECIAL EVENT APPLICATION:

Preston presented the application for the Dubuque County Democratic Party scheduled for August 16, 2026 at Swiss Valley Park, Sycamore Pavilion. Discussion included:

- The event will be open to the public and focus on the importance of clean water.
- Approximately 100 attendees and 25 vehicles anticipated.
- Planned activities include speakers, family activities, a food truck, and live music.
- The Board discussed insurance requirements live music. Event end time is 5:00 P.M.
- Preston will confirm applicable insurance requirements for the live music.

Motion to approve the special event application for the Dubuque County Democratic Party, subject to required insurance coverage was made by Conforti and seconded by Wagner. Motion carried 4-0.

PERMISSION TO SOLICIT BIDS FOR THE TREE PLANTING SITE PREPERATION AT WHITEWATER CANYON, MILLER MCGRATH AND STRATHMAN-HERITAGE TRAIL ADDITION:

Preston presented the following.

- The projects are part of the Iowa Forest Resiliency Grant.
- Approximately 15,000 trees are anticipated to be planted.
 - Strathman Heritage Trail Addition – approximately 20 acres
 - Miller-McGrath approximately 4 acres
 - Whitewater Canyon – approximately 6 acres
- The selected contractor will perform site preparation, spraying, tree acquisition and tree planting in accordance with project specifications.

Motion to solicit bids for tree planting site preparation at Whitewater Canyon, Miller McGrath and Strathman was made by Conforti and seconded by Pfeiler. Motion carried 4-0.

AWARD BID FOR FENCE REPLACEMENT AT WHITEWATER CANYON WILDLIFE AREA:

Three bids were reviewed for the replacement of deteriorated fencing on the North side of Whitewater Canyon.

- Hulscher Fencing Inc. for \$11,800.00
- Thoma Fencing for \$14,700.00
- Heiar Fencing for \$16,300.00

Preston recommended awarding the project to Hulscher Fencing Inc.

Motion to award the fence replacement at Whitewater Canyon Wildlife area to Hulscher Fencing Inc. for \$11,800.00 was made by Conforti and seconded by Pfeiler. Motion carried 4-0.

APPOINT A REAP COMMITTEE MEMBER AND REVIEW DUBUQUE COUNTY CONSERVATION FIVE YEAR PLAN:

Resource Enhancement and Protection (REAP) is a grant and funding program created in 1989 that invests in Iowa's natural, cultural and historic resources.

Stacy Conforti volunteered to serve as the Conservation Board's representative for REAP.

Motion to appoint Stacy Conforti as the Dubuque County Conservation REAP committee member was made by Pfeiler and seconded by Wagner. Motion carried 4-0.

- The Board reviewed the five-year REAP plan.
- The Board discussed moving existing projects forward one fiscal year and adding Locher Lake area as a future priority.
- The revised priorities were discussed:
 - FY2027 – Locher Lake
 - FY2028 – Whitewater Canyon Wildlife Area
 - FY2029 – Heritage Trail
 - FY2030 – Swiss Valley Nature Preserve
 - FY2031 – Finley's Landing Park

Motion to approve the updates to the five-year plan for REAP was made by Davis and seconded by Conforti. Motion carried 4-0.

DUBUQUE COUNTY CONSERVATION DEPARTMENT POLICIES:

Preston presented two policies for board approval:

- Chainsaw and Tree Felling Program
- Heat Illness Program
 - Chainsaw and Tree Felling Program establishes procedures for safe tree-felling operations, including use of a directional notch and back cut for trees five inches or greater in diameter at breast heights.
 - The Heat Illness Prevention Program establishes procedures for employee safety during periods of elevated heat, including daily assessment, schedule adjustment, employee monitoring, and additional precautions during heat advisories or warnings.

Motion to approve the Chainsaw and Tree Felling Program and Heat Illness Prevention Program policies was made by Pfeiler and seconded by Wagner. Motion carried 4-0.

PUBLIC INPUT:

Erica Reiss, 7509 Prairie View Ln., Dubuque, IA 52003, addressed the board on Zoom regarding potential data center development near the Interstate Power Preserve. Reiss expressed concerns regarding potential impacts to:

- Wildlife habitat and movement.
- Noise and lighting.
- Stormwater runoff and erosion.
- Prairie and woodland resources.
- Conservation and recreational trails.
- Reiss asked what role the Conservation Board could have in addressing potential data-center development near conservation properties and whether measures could be taken to protect county parks and preserves.
- The Board explained that its role is primarily to receive public input and that the Conservation Board does not have authority to enact ordinances or prohibit development.
- Reiss requested that the Board consider becoming involved in discussions regarding potential data-center regulations and provide input to the Board of Supervisors concerning protection of county conservation properties.
- Board members acknowledged the concerns and indicated that the matter may need to be further reviewed. No formal action was taken on public comment.

Eiko Wood, 1749 Churchill Dr., Dubuque, IA 52001, proposed Eagle Scout project involving restoration of Spring Mill Cemetery, located near Bankston Park. The project would restore the historic cemetery and improve its condition as a respectful and accessible historic site.

Proposed work includes:

- Clearing overgrown vegetation and invasive plants around the cemetery.
- Rebuilding the perimeter fence, if feasible.
- Preserving existing headstones, monuments, and signage.
- Cleaning monuments and headstones using appropriate materials and methods.

The project was presented as a four-phase effort.

- Volunteers would be required to follow appropriate safety procedures, including the use of gloves, long pants, closed-toed footwear, and appropriate eye and hearing protection when using power equipment.
- Only adults would operate power tools.
- The project is anticipated to begin in mid- to late August.

The Conservation Board discussed the project and expressed general support. Because the project was not included on the meeting agenda, no formal motion or action was taken. Staff and Board members indicated that formal approval could be considered at a future meeting.

The Board also discussed the status and maintenance of pioneer cemeteries and indicated that additional research into cemetery law and maintenance responsibilities may be appropriate.

STAFF REPORTS:

Staff members provided updates on various projects and activities.

DIRECTOR REPORT: Preston reported:

- Completion of Finley Landing HMA (Hot Mix Asphalt) paving project and related road and shoulder work.
- The trail crew completed fish habitat structures at Locher Lake Recreation Area, with approximately 42 structures constructed and placed with assistance from the Iowa Department of Natural Resources.
- Provided an update on the Heritage Trail/Highway 3 construction project, including concerns regarding trail closures, signage, drainage, construction debris, and safety issues. Preston has been communicating with the Iowa Department of Transportation, local legislators, and the district engineer regarding these concerns.
- OSHA - reduction of the assessed penalty by 40 percent and the reduction of the violation classification. Settlement from the incident at Whitewater Canyon on February 9, 2026.
- Receiving positive comments from out-of-town trail users regarding the condition and maintenance of the Heritage Trail.
- Washington Neighborhood Community Garden is seeking to acquire vacant lots on Washington St. for development of community gardens. There is potential for the Conservation Board to partner with them and the City as partners and property owners. The project would support goals identified in the Board's long-range plan.

Board members expressed general support for the concept but emphasized the need for a clear agreement establishing responsibilities for maintenance, upkeep, and care of the property.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR REPORT: Sisler reported:

- Recent maintenance and improvement projects at Conservation Board properties, including trail maintenance, boat ramp repairs, mowing, tree removal, shelter maintenance, and other facility improvements.
- The North boat motor was replaced.
- Volunteers assisted with staining shelters at Swiss Valley.
- Playground maintenance was completed.

GREEN SUPERINTENDENT REPORT: Martin reported:

- Updates on golf course operations and his return to work following his recent absence.
- Expressed appreciation to staff for maintaining the golf course operations during his absence.

The Board welcomed Martin back and recognized the efforts of staff who assisted with golf course maintenance and operations.

NATURALIST REPORT: Denlinger reported:

Program statistics for June:

- 42 programs, 675 participants
- Summer programming has been very active, including summer camps, caving camps, overnight programs, and other educational activities.
- Nature Night program for English language learners, which had 32 participants.
- Outdoor adaptability program, which provided opportunities for individuals with mobility limitations to participate in outdoor recreation.
- Upcoming programs: additional summer camps, kayaking programs, a fungi program, glass repurposing, animal tracking, a family open house, and a paddle program for University of Dubuque.

No formal action was taken; reports were informational.

OLD BUSINESS:

The Board continued discussion regarding potential data-center development and its implications for county conservation properties.

- Board members noted that data centers have been discussed at several consecutive meetings and that the Board should determine its appropriate role and next steps.
- Staff was asked to research how other County Conservation Boards are addressing data-center development and whether any have experienced impacts from facilities located near conservation properties.
- Preston indicated that the subject would also be discussed at the upcoming Iowa County Conservation Directors Association meeting and that information from other counties could be obtained.

APPROVAL OF BILLS:

Motion to approve the July 2026 payables and June 2026 Procurement Cards was made by Wagner and seconded by Conforti. Motion carried 4-0.

NEXT MEETING:

Thursday, August 27, 2026, at 4:00 P.M., Swiss Valley Nature Center, 13606 Swiss Valley Rd. Peosta, Iowa 52068.

ADJOURN:

Motion to adjourn was made by Pfeiler and seconded by Conforti. Motion carried 4-0 and the meeting adjourned at 5:30 P.M.



DUBUQUE COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBER



DUBUQUE COUNTY CONSERVATION BOARD MEMBER