

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
January 15, 2025, 5:30PM**

PURSUANT to written notice given all members of the Board, the above meeting was called to order at 5:30 p.m. by President Castor

Board members present: Treasurer Allen, President Castor, 1st Vice President Reed, and 2nd Vice President Schneller
Board Members absent: Secretary Sams

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the Minutes of the December 18, 2024, meeting. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Allen MOVED to approve the Treasurer's Report from December 2024; disbursements from January 7, 2025, through January 9, 2025, in the amount of \$132,737.44; and additions in the amount of \$75,097.40, as presented. Trustee Reed SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

IV. COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE:

1. Citizen Roslyn O'Conner

- a. Thank you for allowing comments. She is an environmental studies and biology professor at Millikin. Her family has lived in Decatur and has enjoyed a lot of MCCD programs. She has seen first-hand that invasive species are a problem and that our resources are not enough. The MCCD mission is supposed to help to conserve the land for the future. The District should commit to the budget and resources needed to prevent invasive species to prevent our children and their children from losing our natural areas.

2. Mack Thompson

- a. He has been here many times, and the board knows how he feels. The Board is about to engage in the next budget cycle. Clearing 100 acres a year may be an issue. The district owns several acres. It would take 20 years for the District to clear invasive species at the rate of 100 acres a year. Saying that we don't have the money today says that we will never have the money; and saying that means that we will not solve the problem. I strongly encourage you to consider this in the budget cycle for the sake of our children and their future.

3. Martha Parish

- a. She is a horticulturalist and has noticed that Central IL is being overrun by bush honeysuckle and is concerned. She is sure we are all aware. She would also like to point out that it's a matter of economic development as people want a nice outdoor space. If everything is overgrown, it's a problem. Maybe one organization is not a problem, but if we can work together to make everyone understand what's happening it would be good. Once we destroy the natural vegetation, it's hard to get it back. It's also a safety issue - if we get an overwhelming amount of brush it can lead to fires. It's an economic

and safety issue for our community and we need to preserve our environment.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

1. No Old Business was addressed.

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

1. Campground Report

9 years in a row we have increased FCCA revenue and hopefully we can increase that next year. The overall revenue was \$95,416.90. The District added 3 new tent sites this year and that went well. There was a bit of a poison ivy problem initially, but FCCA Staff took care of it quickly. Expenses increased to \$52,603. The District also oil and chipped the campground for \$19,875. Overall, 2,583 people including 400 return campers stayed at Friend's Creek. Staff plan to continue operating the campground. Staff recommends updating the comfort station as it's original from the 1970s. Also, the water is well water, and it is high iron. Staff has looked into a softener system, but the physical size of the system is larger in the comfort station. So, that is an area that needs improvement. Staff extended the season this year. The Campground usually closes in October, but stay open until December this year, profiting about \$845. Staff feels that this extra time was useful and would like to continue that in 2025. Finally, Staff are in transition from Firefly to our Vermont Systems (RecTrac), which is what we also use to book and receive revenue for the programs at the District.

2. Set Budget Study Session

The Budget Study Session was set for Wednesday, February 19th at 4:30, prior to the Regular Public Board Hearing.

Citizen Mack Thompson asked how the public comment works on the budget session. Director Culp will get back to him.

3. Approval of Christy-Foltz Payout #4

Executive Director Culp explained that The Macon County Conservation District applied for and received an Illinois Park and Recreation Facility Construction grant to construct an Indoor/Outdoor classroom at Rock Springs Nature Center. The Board of Trustees approved a contract with Christy-Foltz in the amount of \$750,578 to complete the interior portion of the project. Christy-Foltz has completed approximately 30% of the work related to their contract including demolition, rough in electrical and plumbing, new partition walls, lower-level offices and collection room. Christy-Foltz has submitted their fourth payout request for this project in the amount of \$20,700 for work completed. Funds are budgeted in the Capital Fund Account 6800-700 for this Project. There are sufficient funds in the Capital Account 6800-700 for this expense totaling \$20,700.

Trustee Castor confirmed this was all budgeted money.

Trustee Schneller moved to approve the Christy-Foltz Payout #4 as presented. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor; "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE". Motion carried.

4. Financial Reporting Update

Finance and HR Director Nicky Besser discussed that in the past, financial reports have been dated from approximately the day following the previous Board meeting until the day before the next Board meeting. However, it is industry standard to report in full-month increments (for example, January 1-31 at the February Board Meeting; June 1-30 at the July Board Meeting). There would be no change to transparency or to

compliance with the purchasing policy, including spending limits or purchases/disbursements requiring Board approval. This would be a more cohesive financial report as the period of reporting would be uniform across bank statements, District disbursements, and District financial statements. The Board will still have full visibility of every purchase made by the District. Although there is no direct financial cost, making the reporting more cohesive and will decrease the amount of staff labor needed to generate, collaborate on, and verify reporting every month.

Trustee Reed spoke in favor of this and thanked Besser for the suggestion and leading the change. The board had no concerns and appreciated the efficiency.

5. Staff Reports

Jerry Culp, Executive Director:

Executive Director Culp discussed that Department budgets have been submitted for review. Department budget meetings are being scheduled to review budgets in preparation for board review. Just a reminder that the Board will have a budget study session before the February board meeting. Staff is updating the District Goals for the Year. The Goals will be presented as part of the budget process. The goals were established as part of the employees' Vision and Values document created to show advancement of the District's mission. The goals will be updated yearly to show progress on long- and short-term goals. Winter has finally arrived, and the outdoor work has slowed considerably. Before the snow moved in the contractor started placing boulders for the water play area and completed additional concrete work associated with the walkways and seating areas. The interior work continues with the contractor finalizing the majority of the mechanical and electrical work in the main program space. The contractor has also started remodeling the former collection room making space for additional offices. Staff have been busy reviewing submittals and working with the contractor and architect to finalize product selection and to ensure project stays on schedule. Engineering drawings are moving forward on the OSLAD grant. Staff is working with drainage consultants to finalize the site drainage plans and seasonal wetland locations. The current plan is to finalize engineering this spring and bid the project to start construction this summer. Staff has started working on the Rock Springs Ramble 5K run/walk. Registrations for the event have already started, The event is scheduled for May 17th, 2025. Staff is currently working with the Foundation on a new event at Woodbine Farm. The event is tentatively scheduled for June 14th, and more info is to come as event progress is made. The Foundation approved the funding for a seasonal position to assist with fund raising events. The position will work for the District and be reimbursed by the Foundation. The Recreation Trails Program (RTP) grant was approved by IDNR for Rock Springs Scovil Park West Bike Trail Connection (RTP Grant). Staff will be working with the IDNR on contracts for this grant and begin preparation for construction of the trail. The project is estimated at \$218,000 and the grant will match 80% or a total estimated cost to the District is \$43,600. The District is continuing to work though the collective bargaining process with The American Federation of State County & Municipal Employees Union. The next collective bargaining meeting is scheduled for late January. Staff will keep the board informed as progress is made.

Phil Julius, Director of Operations

Operations Director Phil Julius informed the Board that December was quite busy for the Operations department. Setting up for Trees on the Tees at Hickory Point Golf Course involved several staff members as well as one of the District's Skid Steers. The Skid Steer had a tree planting attachment on it to go along with our theme of "Back to Nature". We had several trees that looked like we had planted them thus rebuilding the forest. This is a great team building event and all District departments work together to

make the display happen. Staff also volunteered at the event one Friday night, helping move carts and get patrons loaded to see the display. All Operations staff helped put on the annual volunteer Christmas party along with Program Services staff and Administrative staff. Staff enjoy being able to give back to the volunteers in appreciation for the many hours of work the volunteers give to the district. Staff helped carry in canned goods, desserts, assisted in filling plates, filled drinks and had great conversation with the volunteers. The event was well-attended and once again “Thank You” to our wonderful volunteers. Natural Resources has had a contractor working on two restoration projects at Fort Daniel and Griswold. The project at Fort Daniel is a hedge row removal restoration. This tree line had massive hedge trees (two-to-three-foot diameter) that are an invasive and non-native to Macon County. The contractor removed these large trees and piled them so they can be burned later to clean up the debris. District staff then followed up forestry mowing other invasive plants and clearing debris off the nearby trail. The removal of this Hedge row will improve the transition of the future Penhallegon property pothole prairie restoration and the connection to the existing Fort Daniel woods. The second contractor restoration project is at Griswold. This is continuation of the cleanup of the old trailer site as well as removing invasive plants on about 5 acres. The contractor removed concrete, removed and piled invasive trees and shrubs. Then a finish grade was done, and this this fresh grade is a more manageable slope than previously existed. Staff again came in behind the contractor to do more forestry mowing invasive plants. Phil met with his Natural Resource Manager to create a plan for 2025. Sites will be seeded in the near future with native seed. The archery deer herd management hunt ended December 26, 2024. Hunters were successful in harvesting several deer on district property. This program is very important in balancing deer herd numbers and maintaining the habitat the district provides these animals. Final totals will be tallied for the February board meeting. More details on the work done on each site are in the packet.

Trustee Allen said that the Operations guys were doing an amazing job down near Friends Creek, especially as the weather was freezing. They were out there working in freezing temps cutting and burning and doing a great job.

Alysia Callison, Director of Programs

Director of Programs Alysia Callison discussed that December tends to be a quiet month as we move into the holiday season, and this year was no different. They had one school group visit for a field trip – a group of preschoolers from All God’s Children Preschool. They learned about birds that visit in winter and made their own pinecone bird feeders to hang outside. Staff also hosted several weekend birthday parties and a few public programs, including Winter Animal Adaptations, the Geminid Meteor Shower, and the monthly Acoustic Music Jam. There has been an increase in Birthday Party requests which is great.

December’s big event was the annual Volunteer Holiday Party. This event is held to show appreciation for our volunteer base and celebrate the holiday season. 111 people attended this year’s event at St. Paul’s Lutheran Church. Kudos to Jenny Garver, the District’s volunteer coordinator, for pulling off a successful and fun event, and kudos to all the staff that assisted that day.

Much of December was spent working on the budget. This is often a lengthy process as staff work to build responsible budgets and grow the programming we offer.

A few other notable things occurred. Jenny held a Behind the Scenes program for volunteers so they could learn a bit about the inner workings of the Nature Center including animal care and collections. Kudos to Brent as he hit the ground running on the Collections room – it only took 1 day to move the items in the Collections room, and he has been working hard on getting everything settled in the new room – it looks great. The District held a Staff Holiday Party at the Beach House, with roughly 35 staff

and their spouses in attendance. Staff assisted with Trees on the Tees, both to set up and tear down our tree, and to volunteer one night at the event. Volunteers helped staff decorate the Nature Center for the holidays. Recently, the County has had some snow and there has to be at least 4 inches on the ground to be able to have cross-country skiing. The District did around \$1,100 in ski rentals in about a week's time, which is great, especially considering that last year there was only 1 day that skiing could be done. It's interesting to hear where people have heard about it and it's especially fun to talk to first-time skiers. This is something nowhere else offers within a large range and it's a really fun activity we get to offer.

Ashton Nunn, Marketing Specialist

Marketing Specialist Ashton Nunn was present, but Director of Programs Alysia Callison gave this report. There has been an increase in social media followers. There is a decrease on the website, but it's hard to know the rhyme or reason for that. Ashton compiled a 2024 recap. 83,000 individual views on our website. 134 more followers on Facebook and 85 followers on Instagram. Ashton hosted 19 different booths at community events. She loves doing them and does a great job. She estimated that she engaged with about 3,500 people. One of our goals is to engage with the public to increase interest and involvement with the community, so it's great she is working toward this. Trustee Castor wants to thank her for doing it as he has seen her at several events.

Nicky Besser, Director of Finance and HR

Director of Finance and Human Resources Nicky Besser discussed that she was mostly working on Budget Facilitation, Health Care Open Enrollment, Payroll adjustments for 2025 including IMRF and Unemployment rates and healthcare deductions, and W2 preparation. She also assisted with coordinating the Staff Christmas Party, worked on coordinating Employee Appreciation Gifts for years of service, and attended Collective Bargaining Negotiations.

Other Business

a. No New Business.

VII. COMMENTS FROM TRUSTEES:

Trustee Reed wanted the guests to know that they see them and hear them, and they will be looking at this from the budget. She wanted to make sure they understood it was a journey, not destination (we kill invasives and they grow, etc.), but the Board does hear and see these concerns.

EXECUTIVE SESSION:

Trustee Allen MOVED to go into Executive Session at 6:01p.m. for the purpose of:

1. 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)
2. 2(c)(5) The purchase or lease of real property for the use of the public body, including meetings held for the purpose of discussing whether a particular parcel should be acquired.

Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE"; and Trustee Castor, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Allen MOVED to return to the Regular Public Meeting at 6:35 p.m. Trustee Schneller SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Allen, “AYE”; Trustee Reed, “AYE”; Trustee Schneller, “AYE”; Trustee Castor, “AYE”. Motion carried.

Trustee Schneller MOVED to approve the Executive Session Minutes of September 18, 2024, as read aloud in closed session. Trustee Reed SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Castor, “AYE”; and Trustee Allen, “AYE”; Trustee Reed, “AYE”; Trustee Schneller, “AYE”. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, Trustee Schneller MOVED to adjourn the Public Meeting at 6:36 p.m. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, “AYE”; Trustee Castor, “AYE”; Trustee Allen, “AYE”; Trustee Reed “AYE”. Motion carried.

President

Secretary