

**MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES
OF THE MACON COUNTY CONSERVATION DISTRICT
January 21, 2026, 5:30PM**

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

Board members present: President Schneller, 1st Vice President Reed, 2nd Vice President Chapman, Treasurer Allen, Secretary Rade
Board Members absent: none

Trustee Rade MOVED to approve the Minutes of the Regular meeting as presented on December 17, 2025. Trustee Allen SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Schneller, "AYE", Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Rade, "AYE", Trustee Chapman, "AYE". Motion carried.

Trustee Allen MOVED to approve the Treasurer's Report and Disbursements from December 2025, in the amount of \$197,889.99 as presented. Trustee Rade SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Allen, "AYE"; Trustee Rade, "AYE", Trustee Chapman, "AYE", Trustee Schneller, "AYE", Trustee Reed, "AYE". Motion carried.

IV. COMMENTS FROM AUDIENCE:

No comments.

V. OLD BUSINESS:

No Old Business.

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

1. 2025 Campground Report

Operations Director Phil Julius presented the 2025 Campground Report. This year we had the pleasure of having Tiffanie Harley as our new camp host. She did a great job keeping the campground clean and welcoming campers. Total Revenue for 2025 was down from previous years in both Pavilion fees and Camping fees. Revenue was \$84,578.85, expenses were \$49,824.00, with a profit of \$37,754.85. Attendance was down from 2024 with 2168 people, but this is higher than all previous years otherwise. There could be reasons for this drop, including that this summer had many days when temperatures were in the nineties with heat indexes over one hundred degrees. Also, during the fall camping season Macon County was under a burn ban, so no open fires were allowed, concerning many campers. The revenue is still within the top three years since the campground has been in operation. It is also possible that the economy influenced this camping season as well. With higher cost of living, campers may have had to cut back on their time spent camping. Campers enjoy the seclusion and quietness of Friends Creek campground. One of the biggest compliments we get from campers is the cleanliness of the comfort station and the campground grounds. Staff did a great job keeping the campground clean and well-manicured. The extended season through December allowed hunters and travelers passing through and some regular campers the opportunity to camp a little longer at Friends Creek for a second year. Finally, the campground software change from Firefly to Vermont Systems Rec Trac took place. This allows staff to have control of the reservation system. The Firefly program was operated by a third party. As with any transition, staff had to deal with minor issues. Staff are learning more each day about the RecTrac program, and the system seems to

be running smoothly. The 2026 camping season with RecTrac should be much easier to navigate. The campground will open the weekend of May 1, 2026.

Staff recommend that consideration needs to be made to make improvements to the comfort station or possibly replace the comfort station. This building is original to the campground and is showing some age having been built in the 1970's. Another area of concern is the hardness of the well water. The water discolors the showers, sinks and stools. A water softener system and filter would help with this issue. Staff have investigated such a system, but it physically won't fit in the existing structure. Staff plan to look for grants to fund either an update to the comfort station or a complete rebuild.

Trustee Reed asked what the plan was to make sure that the suggested improvements were made. Executive Director Culp said they would put together a plan and present that in the future.

2. Budget Study Session and Hearing Schedule

Executive Director Culp proposed the following Budget Study Session and Hearing Schedule: (1) Budget Study Session: **February 18, 2026, 4:30PM** with dinner provided followed by the regularly scheduled Board Meeting and (2) Budget Hearing: **March 25, 2026 5:15PM** prior to the specially scheduled Board meeting (fourth Wednesday). All Board Members agreed.

3. Auditor Contract Approval

Director of Finance and Human Resources Nicky Besser discussed The District is required to do an annual audit and the contract for our current auditor ended in 2025. An RFP was sent to the following local firms that perform audits: Forvis; MCK CPAs; McGuire, Yuhas, Huffman, and Buckley, PC; and Sikich. The amount of the contract does not trigger a formal bid process, but a professional RFP was sent to give several firms the option to respond. Only one firm, MCK CPAs, submitted a proposal. This is our current auditor. The contract includes increases from previous years due to rising costs, increased District activity, and increased audit responsibilities largely due to grants. The previous bill from the audit ending 2025 was \$15,800. The proposed costs for the next three years are as follows: (1) FY 25-26: \$20,000; (2) FY 26-27: \$21,000; (3) FY 27-28: \$22,000. There is also a \$1,100 fee, increased from \$1,000, to the Macon County Conservation Foundation to file its AG990. This is paid for by the Foundation. This expense comes directly from the Audit Fund. The District anticipates it has an adequate fund balance to absorb the increase in the upcoming year and will adjust the Tax Levy accordingly moving forward.

Trustee Reed MOVED to approve the Auditor Contract as presented. Trustee Chapman SECONDED the Motion. Roll call vote was as follows: Trustee Rade, "AYE"; Trustee Schneller, "AYE", Trustee Chapman, "AYE"; Trustee Reed, "AYE"; Trustee Allen, "AYE". Motion carried.

4. Staff Reports:

Phil Julius, Director of Operations

Operations Director Julius discussed that the staff was busy with snow removal and other projects. They are still moving forward with the contract at Ft. Daniel and hope that seeding will be done too. Our other contract at Fort Daniel for hedge row removal is also moving forward. Staff enjoyed attending the Volunteer Christmas Party. He and Ashton are working on hosting the IACD conference with Boone County and they are excited for it. Long Creek water was connected to the Ulrey House. The Archery Deer

Hunt had 57 does and 21 bucks this year, which is very successful. He also spent time working on the budget.

Director Reed said that the Volunteer Christmas Party was outstanding and the volunteers appeared to appreciate it as well as the Board.

Ashton Dukeman, Marketing Specialist

Marketing Specialist Ashton Dukeman thanked the Board for the time off during the holiday season. She brought a visual of the 60th Anniversary Logo. The theme is Conservation, Community, and Connection. They came out with “The Wildside”, a monthly e-newsletter. This will increase the staff’s ability to write more articles and communicate between Prairie Islanders. Dukeman was invited to join the Visitor’s Bureau Board and she accepted. She is excited about that partnership. She and Brock did a program at Eisenhower High School and it was well-received and they were invited back. She wrote an article on mushroom hunting for Decatur Magazine, updated staff digital cards, and did a lot of year-end work. For social media, she did a year-end review in her report.

Director Schneller commented that she would be a great ambassador for the District with the Visitor’s Bureau.

Nicky Besser, Director of Finance and HR

Director of Finance & HR Nicky Besser discussed extensive work on the budget as well as year-end and year-beginning work including renewals, healthcare, and payroll. She also participated in collective bargaining mediation, onboarded a new employee, attended the volunteer holiday party, and supported staff Christmas Party Organization. She discussed a few payments and revenues, including the first payment for the new healthcare premium to Blue Cross Blue Shield.

Alysia Callison, Director of Program Services

Director of Program Services Alysia Callison discussed that December is a pretty slow time for programs, and some programs had to be cancelled due to weather. A few programs did run, including some homeschool programs, Mini Camp, and Holiday Day Camp. All were well-received. There were several school programs as well. The biggest event was the Holiday Christmas Party, on which Jenny Garver, Volunteer Coordinator, did a great job. We also had our staff Christmas party, and everyone had fun. She did an interview for WAND’s “Stem Minute” which aired in January and featured the Star Lab. A lot of emails have come in, and 6 Star Lab programs have already been booked. Program Services staff have also been doing a lot of planning including for the Pancake Breakfast, Summer Camp, Spring Programs, Field Trips, and of course budgeting. She also attended Collective Bargaining Mediation.

Trustee Reed suggested that the Community Foundation and in particular Natalie Beck should be invited to a Star Lab presentation as she and the Foundation are great supporters of our work and gave the grant for the Star Lab.

Jerry Culp, Executive Director:

Executive Director Culp discussed that operations staff finished the final conference room downstairs which has the bottom half of the window of wildlife in it. He has also gotten great responses from the logo. At Ft. Daniel contractors are still moving dirt. We are still lining up contracts, waiting for warmer weather. We are hoping to get a large portion of the seeding done this winter. We want it to be ready for Wine in the Wild in June. He met with an engineer about the Scovill Park West Bike Trail Connection, and a survey is being done. Once it’s done, they will meet with the Park District. Next year we are hoping both bike trail grants will be worked on in July or August when it’s dryest. For the PARC grant we just need to get an audit done next month to get our final reimbursement. For the Foundation, the date is June 13th for Wine in the Wild. The Foundation also turns 45 this year. He met with some members of the City of Decatur about creating a greenway or greenways in the City. Both they and the District

are working on our Master Plan, and we are hoping to coordinate that work. The update on the labor relations bargaining is that we are working on getting an arbitration set up. There has also been a group of people that filed to decertify the union, and so we are waiting to see what happens with these motions. We are working with PDRMA on updating our policies. The budget process is moving forward as well.

Director Schneller asked about how the greenway worked and if there would be a visual. Director Culp said that oftentimes Conservation Areas are destinations, and the focus here is finding both safe and beautiful areas that are accessible to everyone while maintaining public safety. This can also be something that could create more connections for people needing other forms of transportation to connect areas. Director Schneller suggested visuals of this concept will be helpful. Trustee Reed says it is good that we are part of these conversations as the City has been looking at these properties and how to use them.

VII. COMMENTS FROM THE TRUSTEES

No comments were made.

IX. ADJOURNMENT:

There being no further business, Trustee Rade MOVED to adjourn the Public Meeting at 6:10 p.m. Trustee Chapman SECONDED the Motion. Trustee Rade, “AYE”; Trustee Allen, “AYE”; Trustee Reed, “AYE”; and Trustee Schneller, “AYE”. Motion carried.

President

Secretary