

Iowa Association
of
County Conservation Boards

Board Member Handbook



Pictured: Rolling Thunder Prairie, listed among Iowa's state preserves, is a 282 acre native prairie with some timbered area in Warren County.



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WELCOME

As a member of a county conservation board, you're participating in one of the most successful county conservation programs in the United States. Board members serve as policy and decision makers on conservation and recreation programs in your county. There are 495 board members across the state of Iowa representing 99 counties. While not paid for your time, you do receive compensation for expenses incurred while serving as a board member.

Conservation boards are responsible to the taxpayers of the county to provide the best conservation, outdoor recreation, and education programs possible with the resources and finances available. Boards have to listen to and respect many points of view; determine the overall benefits to the citizens of the county; be aware of state and federal statutes, county rule ordinances and policies implemented by the board in the past; then make decisions and set the direction of the board.

This booklet will provide the basic information to guide board members in their duties. It won't answer all the questions, but is meant to serve as a reference. The success of Iowa's county conservation board program is based on good decision-making and the establishment of quality, professional programs for everyone living in each county.

COUNTY CONSERVATION LAW, CHAPTER 350

The five members of the county conservation board are a decision-making and policy-making body appointed by each county board of supervisors. The board's authority includes the acquisition and development of land, adoption of rules and regulations, comprehensive planning of an overall county conservation board program and specific site plans for individual areas. Other functions of the board include hiring an executive director and staff, developing a budget, and working with other governmental subdivisions to provide programs for the public.

The primary consideration of the board should be to provide a balanced conservation, recreation, and education program to the citizens of the county through proper planning and identification of needs and demands. The county conservation board can be the primary county agency dealing with natural resource issues in its county.

History

Iowa's county conservation board program began in 1955 when the 56th General Assembly passed the County Conservation Law, Chapter 350 of the Code of Iowa. This law created a conservation-outdoor recreation program that was unique at the time. Since 1955, more than 20 other states have developed similar programs. Iowa has the most successful county conservation board program in the U.S., based on participation and variety of programs.

Establishing the boards was approved by the voters of each county. In 1956, 16 boards were approved. In 1989, Allamakee County was added as the state's 99th county conservation board. Today, county conservation boards own and/or manage more than 1,700 areas, encompassing in excess of 181,000 acres of land. The counties have filled a gap that once existed between community-managed public recreation areas and the state's outdoor recreation facilities.

Iowa Trust for Local Conservation (Iowa TLC)

On April 2, 2005, a new not-for-profit organization, the Iowa Trust for Local Conservation, held its inaugural meeting. The mission of the Iowa TLC is to enhance Iowa's local quality of life and natural resources through combined social and financial capital.

The Iowa TLC is a charitable 501c3 organization that exists to assist the statewide county conservation board program through public awareness and education, through training and professional development, and through research and financial support of innovative projects.

Purpose

The purpose of the county conservation boards is "to acquire, develop, maintain and make available to the inhabitants of the county public museums, parks, preserves, parkways, playgrounds, recreational centers, county forests, wildlife and other conservation areas, and to promote and preserve the health and general welfare of the people, to encourage the orderly development and conservation of natural resources and to cultivate good citizenship by providing adequate programs of public recreation."

Obviously, the purpose established for county conservation boards is extremely broad. This allows each county to establish a program that meets the needs of their citizens. Subsection 350.4(1) also assigns the responsibility to the conservation board, "to study and ascertain the county's... needs for such facilities, the extent to which such needs are currently met, and to prepare... a coordinated plan of areas and facilities to meet such needs." This planning requirement is extremely important in that it sets long-range direction for the board and prevents uncoordinated development.

The Board

County conservation board members are appointed by the county board of supervisors to five-year, staggered terms. The conservation board must hold monthly public meetings. Three board members shall constitute a quorum with business only being conducted when a quorum is in attendance at a regularly scheduled monthly board meeting or a special meeting called by the president of the board as required in Section 350.3 of the Code.

The job of a board is two-fold: Policy making and Administration. In setting policy, the board decides what it wants to accomplish. Administration is finding ways to carry out the policy. There are five questions a good board should ask:

1. *What do we want to accomplish to help the organization fulfill its purpose?
(Setting policy and establishing goals)*
2. *What is the road map to follow? (Formulating guidelines, making plans,
suggesting alternatives, considering public input)*
3. *How will we pay for it? (Getting and spending money)*
4. *How will we reach our goals? (Identifying activities, establishing priorities,
delegating responsibilities)*
5. *Did we succeed or fail? (Evaluation)*

Remember that planning is synonymous with survival, and a good board provides for the good of the organization, natural resources, county, and the public.

One of the board's major responsibilities under Subsection 350.4(6) is to hire and fix the compensation of a director, "who shall be responsible to the county conservation board for the carrying out of its policies."

Board members are not responsible for the day-to-day operations or supervision of the staff below the director. These are the responsibilities of the director.



Main bridge on Union Bridge Trail in Woodbury County.

Land Acquisition and Development

Section 350.4 gives the conservation board the authority "to acquire in the name of the county... suitable real estate within or without the territorial limits of the county." The board is also given the authority "to plan, develop, preserve, administer, and maintain all such areas, places, and facilities, and construct, reconstruct, alter, and renew buildings and other structures, and equip and maintain the same." Input involves the public in goal setting and planning, but the conservation board has the final decision. In addition, 350.4 also gives the board custody, control and management of all real and personal property acquired to carry out its program.

Funding

The conservation board can adopt several methods of raising funds. The board can accept in the name of the county gifts, bequests, contributions, and appropriations of money and personal property for conservation purposes. The board can also adopt a policy to charge and collect reasonable fees for the use of facilities and may operate concessions or lease concessions to raise funds and provide a service to the public.

The primary source of funds for conservation boards is county taxes. Approximately 60-70 percent of the total statewide county conservation budget comes from this source. Chapter 331.401-437 of the Code of Iowa discusses powers of the county board of supervisors relating to county finances and budgets. As part of this process, a conservation board must annually adopt a budget to be submitted to the board of supervisors for their review and later for review by the public at budget hearings. Other funding options include state and federal grants and monies from private foundations.

Rules and Regulations

Establishing rules and regulations are another part of the function of the board, according to Section 350.5. Rules and regulations should be adopted for the protection and control of all county conservation board areas and the public. Any special rules that are adopted by a county conservation board cannot be inconsistent with or contrary to the laws of the state of Iowa. If a board does not adopt its own rules and regulations, Sections 461A.35 through 461A.57, the state park laws automatically apply. However, a board may amend or supersede these particular sections to fit its own situation.

Cooperative Efforts

A county conservation board may work with other governmental subdivisions either under the auspices of Chapter 28E, Joint Exercise of Governmental Powers, or Chapter 350.7 of the Code.

BOARD MEMBER DUTIES

The responsibilities of a conservation board are spelled out in Chapter 350 of the Code of Iowa, but in addition, board members have personal responsibilities as a member.

They must be responsible and willing to conserve local natural resources, to provide as well as utilize these resources, and to promote the health and welfare of the local people through an organized program of public recreation.

The board is made up of individuals, and the knowledge and past experiences of each of these individuals is needed in order to make sound judgments on conservation matters. These individuals need to be willing to make decisions and follow through with them. Once the board has made a decision, each member must stand behind the majority decision.

Regular attendance at board meetings is necessary. Conservation board members may be removed by the board of supervisors for failure to participate in board activities.

The good of the conservation program should be placed ahead of any personal gain and potential conflict of interest situations should be avoided.

Good Board Members

Characteristics and the roles of good board members include:

1. *Having the conviction that the board has the responsibility to conserve local natural resources, to provide for use of the resources for recreation and education.*
2. *The ability and willingness to make decisions, at times against the sentiment of the local public or elected officials.*
3. *The ability to make your position known to the rest of the board.*
4. *The ability to disagree without being disagreeable.*
5. *Taking the time and energy to devote to the board's activities - not just a few hours at the monthly meeting, but special meetings, visiting with local elected officials, visiting with local legislators, attending meetings and seminars.*
6. *The ability to work with your executive director, respect the staff and a willingness to stand behind them when carrying out the policy established.*
7. *Establishing policies for the operation and direction of the board's programs.*
8. *Approving the board's annual budget, goals and objectives.*
9. *Insuring the board's programs are communicated to the proper authorities and to the public.*
10. *Being accountable for your actions.*
11. *Balancing recreation with the conservation and protection of natural resources.*
12. *Educating and influencing public opinion about the direction and function of the board and its programs.*
13. *Studying issues prior to attending board meetings and conducting professional board meetings.*
14. *Attend IACCB Annual Fall Conference and attend the annual Spring conference.*

Board Member Legislative Duties

The Legislature meets annually, convening on the second Monday in January of each year. In advance of the legislative session, members may wish to invite their lawmakers to a conservation board event or meeting and enter into a dialogue concerning issues that may arise during the fourth-coming session.

Such meetings open a line of communications and also provide an opportunity for board members and employees to get to know their Legislators on a personal basis, to renew old acquaintances with officials who have been re-elected or to meet with new Legislators in their home districts. The personal relationship is the type of relationship that builds trust - a most important element in issue persuasion.

Keeping Informed

As a board member, you have an obligation to keep fully informed about the conservation board, its program, finances and total operation. Some information needed to do your job may include: the history of the organization, a copy of Chapter 350 of the Iowa Code, a copy of policy manuals, an explanation of state and local organizational relationships, last year's annual report, a definition of the purpose, goals and objectives of the board, a copy of the multi-year plan, board and committee members, addresses and phone numbers, the schedule of meeting dates, organizational chart of staff, personnel policies and practices, financial structure and budget, meeting agendas received before board meetings, minutes of previous board meetings, order of business for conducting meetings, and a working knowledge of parliamentary procedure.

PLANNING

Planning is basic to any organization whose goals, public pressures and working relationships are as complex and challenging as those of the county conservation board. The board and executive director are responsible for the development of policies and the implementation of programs to meet a wide range of public needs and resource management

responsibilities. There will never be enough money and time to do everything that everyone feels the board should be doing. Planning is the principal means for making tough decisions and for backing up those decisions. Without a solid plan, gaining financial, political, and general public support for programs is impossible.

Hitchcock Nature Center, Pottawattamie County.



Long-Range Planning

While not required by law, it is recommended that a long-range plan be on file and reviewed on an annual basis. Thoughtful review, discussion and official adoption of your board's long-range goals help everyone understand the overall goals of the board. The more thoroughly the board plans, the better the offense and defense of board programs and their associated budget requests.

Short-Range Planning

Short-range planning involves looking ahead less than five years. While keeping long-range goals in mind, this type of planning is action and budget oriented and should include specific objectives the board wants to accomplish. Both plans need to be in writing in order to ensure continuity following changes in employees and board members.

Goals and Objectives

Goals are statements of purpose and direction which identify the results the board desires to achieve. Objectives are the work elements reviewed by the board to measure the progress of attaining its goals. Priorities are goals the board believes to be the most important to act upon. An action plan is developed after establishing these goals, objectives, and priorities. The plan should include an analysis of time, personnel, equipment, and financial resources. Then the projects and programs are placed with the plan, with a phasing in of the larger projects over a number of years when necessary.

A board should re-evaluate the plan on an annual basis as a guide to see what has been accomplished, what is on schedule, and what projects need to be adapted and changed.

Points to Remember

1. *Setting goals is the process by which the board exercises leadership.*
2. *Goals provide the foundation on which a program is built. They are vital if a position meets with vocal public opposition.*
3. *It is important to establish specific and attainable goals and objectives in a reasonable time frame.*
4. *It is essential to monitor and evaluate the progress made toward reaching goals. They should be revised or adjusted to address the changing resource and user needs.*

POLICIES

A conservation board without a written policy is like taking a trip without a map. The board has no idea where it is going or where it has been.

Without policy, a board has no answers to allowing a church to hold Easter services at a picnic area, or a wedding on a nature trail, or a youth group wanting to sponsor a party and rock band, or a political group holding a fund-raiser at a shelter. Without a policy, the board will do little else at the regular meeting than consider these and similar situations.

It is matters of this kind that can be effectively addressed by a comprehensive set of policy statements.

A policy is a written record of what the board stands for and believes in. Procedural policy explains how goals are established. Policy in writing assures the board of consistent actions in a rational manner, depersonalizing problem solving. Written policy helps the board avoid confusion in handling requests. The result of these written policies is that matters become fairly routine and don't require direct board action.



Policy System

A complete policy system will call for several different types of policy designed to fit different situations. Examples include:

1. *Full policy statements - These are usually written in a comprehensive manner in an attempt to address fairly sophisticated and fundamental problems. The board must approve policies of this nature.*
2. *Position papers - These are somewhat narrowly defined and will usually address some special situation explaining what the conservation board's position is with respect to a certain matter. Position papers usually require the approval of the board.*
3. *Administrative bulletins - This type of policy is more procedural in nature and attempts to explain how goals and objectives set by the board will be achieved. It is optional as to whether or not such bulletins require the approval of the board. Some boards leave the development of bulletins entirely up to the director.*
4. *Operational bulletins - Such material is usually handled by the staff.*

Points to Help Write Policy

1. *All policy should be proposed in writing after consultation with the director.*
2. *Develop a system, which requires that policy statements be read at two or perhaps three regular board meetings before adopted. Provisions for giving policy immediate implementation is desirable.*
3. *Research policy problems. See what other conservation boards have done. State and federal organizations can help solve some problems. Check the files and minutes and see if the problem has surfaced before. Finally, check the Iowa Code, which may already address some aspects of the problem.*
4. *Keep the materials in a policy manual as a reference resource. Make it simple and easy to change.*

Subjects Covered by Policy Statements

Each board should decide what to cover in policy statements and what should be in the policy manual. The following list is a suggestion on items that are important enough to be considered for policy statements:

1. *A general statement of the board's position on conservation, parks and recreation programs.*
2. *Personnel policy.*
3. *Use of equipment and facilities.*
4. *User fees.*
5. *Sale of products and permits.*
6. *Purchasing.*
7. *Capital improvement program.*
8. *Uniforms.*
9. *Table of organization and organizational structure.*
10. *Land acquisition.*
11. *Non-game species.*
12. *Law enforcement equipment and weapons.*
13. *Internal and external communications.*

Remember, these are only examples and other subjects may be in the policy form. Avoid writing policies so general that they provide no guide whatsoever. At the other extreme, avoid policies in such great detail that they are only applicable in certain special situations and are of no value if a few elements of the problem should change. No matter how carefully policy is considered and written, there is a need to annually review and update the material.

SPECIAL EMPLOYMENT LAWS

29A.28 Leave of Absence of Civil Employees (for Military Service)

All officers and employees of (a public agency) other than employees employed temporarily for six months or less, who are members of the national guard, organized reserves or any component part of the military, naval, or air forces or nurse corps of this state or nation, or who are or may be otherwise inducted into the military service of this state or of the United States, or who are members of the civil air patrol, shall, when ordered by proper authority to state active duty, state military service, or federal service, or when performing a civil air patrol mission pursuant to section 29A.3A, be entitled to a leave of absence from (the public agency) without loss of status or efficiency rating, and without loss of pay during the first thirty days of such leave of absence. These provisions shall also apply to a leave of absence by a member of the national disaster medical system of the United States when activated for federal service with the system.

A (public agency) may hire a temporary employee to fill any vacancy created by such leave of absence.

Upon returning from a leave of absence under this section, an employee shall be entitled to return to the same position and classification held by the employee at the time of entry into (military service) or to the position and classification that the employee would have been entitled to if the continuous civil service of the employee had not been interrupted by (military service).

35C.1 Appointments and Employment - Applications (Veterans Preference).

In every public agency of the state, veterans as defined in section 35.1 who are citizens and residents of this state are entitled to preference in appointment and employment over other applicants of no greater qualifications.

In all jobs of the state and its political subdivisions, an application form shall be completed containing an inquiry into the applicant's military service during the wars or armed conflicts as specified in subsection 1.

In all jobs of political subdivisions of the state which are to be filled by competitive examination or by appointment, public notice of the application deadline to fill a job shall be posted at least ten days before the deadline in the same manner as notices of meetings are posted under section 21.4.

For jobs in political subdivisions of the state that are filled through a point-rated qualifying examination, the preference afforded to veterans shall be equivalent to that provided for municipal civil service systems in section 400.10.

Discharge of Veterans:

County employees in Iowa are generally "at-will" employees, meaning that they can be fired at any time for any lawful reason. But some county employees are "veterans," a term with a specific meaning under Iowa Code chapter 35C. If they are veterans, they can only be terminated "for incompetence or misconduct, shown after a hearing." That's Iowa Code section 35C.6. It does say in Iowa Code section 35C.8 that 35C.6 does not apply to those with the title of "deputy," so they are still considered at-will employees.

PROGRAMS & SERVICES

It's the board's responsibility to decide what programs and services the county board should offer. The range of what could be offered is almost unlimited.

Conservation boards manage at least a dozen different kinds of areas, ranging from parks to botanical preserves, forest areas, and greenbelts. No two counties have precisely the same kind of a program due to differences in resource bases and local interests of its citizens.

Activities on county conservation areas are as diverse as the interests of the people in Iowa. Camping is available on more than one-third of all county areas and more than one-half of these are equipped with electricity and water. All conservation boards provide the usual outdoor park activities such as picnicking. There are over 380 areas offering camping, and 34 counties now have cabin rental. There are trails for biking, hiking, mountain biking, equestrian, snowmobile and cross-country skiing. Sixteen areas offer Archery and 57 areas have baseball fields. Fourteen golf courses have been constructed and many boards provide for outdoor recreation activities such as hunting, winter sports, shooting ranges, horseshoe, sledding, ice skating, etc. Fifty seven conservation boards have nature centers and operate formal conservation education programs employing over 115 naturalists.

Remember:

1. *Put quality into the programs and make sure it can be maintained after construction.*
2. *Don't try to be all things to all people - learn to say no when necessary.*
3. *Plan the board's programs and think them through.*
4. *Be original, but follow the needs of the county.*

Program Evaluation

To better evaluate how your conservation board is doing, ask these questions:

1. *What are the board's specific goals to be accomplished?*
2. *What program is the board currently operating? Are the results satisfactory?*
3. *What comparable services are being offered elsewhere in the county or region? Is there a duplication of services or a conflict?*
4. *What gaps in the services and facilities provided exist? Who should fill the gaps?*
5. *Are there adequate monies to operate and maintain the program now and in the future?*
6. *What are the strengths and weaknesses of the organization?*
7. *Are the programs and facilities of the board readily available to the public served?*

BOARD MEETINGS

The conservation board is required by law to hold regular monthly meetings. It is recommended that the board maintain a consistent monthly meeting date, time and location whenever possible. Some meetings may be better served by being held at a field location such as a proposed development site or potential land acquisition area. Emergency meetings may be called by the county conservation board president, or at the request of a majority of the members.

The meeting location must be easily accessible by all county residents. A central location within the county is preferred.

Chapter 21 of the Iowa Code refers to "Official Meetings Open To the Public." The law states that notices shall be given at least 24 hours prior to the commencement of any meeting of a governmental body unless for good cause such notice is impossible or impractical, in which case as much notice as is reasonably possible shall be given. Each meeting shall be held at a place reasonably accessible to the public, and at a time reasonably convenient to the public, unless for good cause such a place or time is impossible or impractical. Special access to the meeting may be granted to persons with disabilities.

Procedure and Agenda

To be considered an "official" or legal meeting, a county conservation board meeting must be attended by a minimum of three (3) of its five (5) board members, which constitutes a quorum. Observing sound parliamentary procedure during board meetings permits orderliness and uniformity in carrying out the meeting. It is important that the general board meeting procedures or protocol be consistent from one meeting to the next.

It is customary for conservation boards to adopt a standard order of business for meetings that will fit their needs. One sample follows:

1. *Call to order*
2. *Roll Call*
3. *Reading and Approval of Minutes*
4. *Public Participation and Communications*
5. *Monthly Reports of Field Staff and Director*
6. *Reports of Special Committees*
7. *Current Old/New Business Items and Proposals*
8. *Program or Presentations to the Board*
9. *Review of Claims (Bills)*
10. *Other Informational Items*
11. *Adjournment*

To expedite your business meeting, be sure the executive director provides copies of previous meeting's minutes and a tentative agenda to all board members at least a week prior to the next regular monthly meeting. The board should also be provided with other informational items that require review prior to the meeting. Having this information in advance aids in reducing the amount of time spent asking questions regarding unfamiliar issues and agenda topics.

Closed Meetings

As a public agency, conservation boards may hold closed meetings by an affirmative vote of two-thirds of its members or all of the members present at the meeting. The following are three of the eleven reasons listed in the code, a public hearing may go into closed session:

1. *To evaluate the professional competency of an individual whose appointment, hiring, performance, or discharge is being considered when necessary to prevent needless and irreparable injury to that individual's reputation, and if said individual requests a closed session.*
2. *To prevent premature disclosure of a real estate transaction which could affect the price or outcome of the transaction. The minutes and a tape recording of a session closed for this purpose shall be available for public examination when the transaction discussed is completed.*



Nishna Bend Recreation Area in Shelby County.

3. *To discuss strategy with legal counsel in matters that are presently in litigation or where litigation is imminent and its disclosures would place the conservation board at a disadvantage in such litigation.*

The vote of each member on the question of holding the closed session and the reason for holding the closed session shall be announced publicly at the open session and entered in the minutes. The board shall not discuss any business during the closed session that does not directly relate to the specific reason given as justification for the closed session. Detailed minutes of all discussion, persons present and action occurring during the closed session must be kept, as well as a tape recording. The recording and minutes must be kept on file at least one year from the date of the meeting.

Additional information can be found in Chapter 21A of the Code, the Open Meetings Law. Final action by any governmental body on any matter shall be taken in an open session unless some other provision of the Code expressly permits such actions to be taken in closed session.

Minutes

Conservation board minutes constitute the official record of all board actions. It's recommended that only pertinent board action be incorporated into the official minutes. General discussion is usually considered unnecessary for final documentation. The following is an example of an outline of items that should be included in the minutes:

1. *Name of the meeting, date, place and time.*
2. *Names of the members present and absent, employees and guests.*
3. *A separate paragraph on each motion including the wording of the motion, disposition of the motion, amendments to the motion, name of the mover, second and voting record, points of order or appeals brought before the chair and the chair's ruling.*
4. *Time meeting was adjourned.*
5. *Signature of the secretary and chair to acknowledge approval.*
6. *Addendum to show corrections to previous meetings minutes.*
7. *Date, time and place of next regular meeting.*



It is essential that the staff and general public be kept informed of the official action of the board. This can be achieved by distributing a typed version of the minutes to selected individuals. The person who takes minutes during a board meeting should be an employee rather than a board member. This helps eliminate distractions when conducting business.

Public Participation

Public communication \ participation should be a standard item on the agenda for every regular meeting. It is important that they be given the opportunity to speak. List public participation as one of the first agenda items, so they don't have to sit through the entire meeting before recognizing them.

When approached by a group, it's easiest to speak with only one representative. Make sure they identify the group name, as well as individuals in attendance. The board may want to establish a time limit for each speaker so their comments can be kept concise. Above all, remember that for whatever reason, these people have taken the time and effort to attend the board meeting and show them courtesy and respect. When members of the public speak on an issue not on the agenda, it is best to receive their comment and then consider the discussion at another board meeting.

Keeping the Meeting Orderly

Meeting etiquette is essential to the operation of a good board meeting. Efficiency depends upon a combination of things - an organized agenda, a board chair who moves the meeting along, and cooperation among the board members. Board member review of agenda items prior to the meeting will also help to ensure that the meeting moves along in an efficient manner.

WORKING WITH THE DIRECTOR

The executive director is the board's chief administrative officer. The most important single service that a conservation board renders is to see that a qualified and capable individual administers the program. It is the conservation board's responsibility to assure the program is run properly. It is not, however, the board's responsibility to administer the program. Its prime role is the setting of conservation park and recreation policy with guidance from the professional administrator. Any attempt by either board or administrator to take over the other's functions can bring conflict and even disaster in which the entire system suffers.

The director may advise the board on policy matters, but the board has the final authority in policy determination, program content and direction.

The director stands between the board and staff, except when specifically requested by the director, no staff member should go directly to a board member first. If the next individual in the chain is unavailable or does not produce the desired results, it may be necessary to move on to the next link in the chain. This formal grievance procedure should be strictly adhered to and spelled out in an employee personnel manual. Likewise, board members should respect the authority of the director and should not contact a staff member directly.

Board-Staff Relationship

Section 350.4 (Paragraph 6) gives county conservation boards the power to employ a director. It is the director's responsibility to determine staff needs and hire additional employees. The conservation board staff at the office, field and administrative levels, can serve as consultants and advisors to the board. Staff people are the conservation and outdoor recreation professionals in the field. Board members must rely on the professional staff.

Actual staff size depends on three points - program diversity/intensity, acres under management, and budget size. It is vital that staff size is adequate to carry out a quality conservation program. Remember that a county conservation board can only be as good as the staff members that are selected to implement its programs.

It is the board's responsibility to ensure that employees are paid a wage that is commensurate with their education, training and work responsibilities. It is also the board's duty to see that employees receive continuing education while on the job. Employee attendance at county conservation district meetings is recommended to foster association with other professionals in the field. Attendance of instructional courses or meetings sponsored by the County Conservation Peace Officers Association, County Conservation Directors Association, Iowa Association of Naturalists, Iowa Department of Natural Resources, Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Soil and Water Conservation, and other agencies should be encouraged.

A written personnel policy should be prepared by the director, approved by the board and made available to all employees. It is important that employees know what is expected of them, what their benefits are, and what the consequences of their actions will be.

Remember that the boards are employers. They should never give up responsibility, but delegate it.

COMMUNICATIONS

The board has information to be communicated to various groups - to fellow board members, to staff, to the board of supervisors, to the IACCB, to the general public and to other county boards. A formal communication program consists of four basic elements:

1. *A written policy to guide internal communication between the board and staff. Use a chain of command method of staff and board communication aids in keeping all necessary individuals informed. Some boards find a monthly report on staff activities helpful. Communications and position statements that relate to the board should be shared with all board members.*
2. *A written policy to guide external communications with the public. This involves the director reviewing and clearing news articles, brochures, radio \ TV appearances, any communication that makes a position statement, etc. This process enables the board to speak as a coordinated voice to the public.*
3. *A written policy to guide communications with other governmental offices. It's important the board speak with one voice when dealing with the board of supervisors, other county offices, or state and federal agencies. Proposals, plans, budgets and position statements should be reviewed and authorized by the board before presentation.*
4. *Funds committed for necessary correspondence, publications, and photographic materials.*

There are four reasons why a board should formalize their communication procedures:

1. *The need to be accountable for its actions.*
2. *The board's role of balancing recreation, conservation and education interests in the county.*
3. *The need to educate and influence public opinion about the direction and function of county conservation boards.*
4. *The board's obligations to communicate the reasons for its actions to the staff and public.*

The communications program is important to public relations and the board's image in the county. Take good meeting minutes and send highlights of actions to the local media. Develop quality brochures on your areas and programs. Use the media to publicize programs and keep the public informed. Prepare programs for presentation to local organizations. Distribute your annual report to the media, organizations, board of supervisors, interested public and the Iowa DNR (a report on any land acquisition is required by law.)

LAND ACQUISITION

Land acquisition is one of the most important components of the county conservation board's activities. Without a plan, the board can't provide the outdoor recreational opportunities that the public desires.

It is important that the board members ensure an acquisition program that complements existing areas or meets newly identified needs. The plan should identify future acquisition areas and their relative importance, with consideration for the cost of area maintenance after acquisition.

A well-prepared comprehensive plan not only identifies the direction of the land acquisition program, but can also be used to justify acquisitions to the board of supervisors and public. Care should be taken to avoid the potential for conflict of interest questions through an approved land acquisition plan and reliance on appraisals for establishing land values. Any other questions should be brought to the county attorney. Advice and financial assistance may be available from organizations such as the Natural Heritage Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Pheasants Forever, Ducks Unlimited, Wild Turkey Federation, White Tails Unlimited, to name just a few.

BUDGET AND FINANCE

The annual budget is a combination of long-range planning and the specific standards of performance for the upcoming year that helps the board meet its long-term objectives. Developing a budget is a major policy statement. Before the monies can be expended, a very specific budget must be prepared and meet public approval.

There are many ways of developing a budget. The most common method is for the director to construct a preliminary budget that identifies administrative needs, land acquisition and capital development expenditures for the upcoming year as well as necessary operation and maintenance costs. This budget is presented to the conservation board at a regularly scheduled or special meeting for review, revision and final approval.

The proposed budget must be submitted to the county auditor no later than January 1 of each year. The specific procedures for budget review and approval are outlined in Chapter 24 of the Code of Iowa.

After review by the board of supervisors, a public hearing is conducted at which time the general public may make critical review and comment on the budget.

Budget is different than appropriation. At budget hearing time and prior to July 1, the board of supervisors will approve a budget for the conservation board. Before any money can be expended, the board of supervisors must appropriate it. If money is not appropriated, the conservation board has no money to spend.

Once the budget is approved and money appropriated, all the expenditures of the conservation board are under the board's control if the expenditure is legal and within the board's total budget. Bills should be reviewed at monthly meetings to ensure proper expenditure of the funds.

The budget process makes it imperative that the board maintains a good line of communication with the board of supervisors and auditor.

STATE ASSOCIATIONS & AFFILIATES

Iowa Association of County Conservation Boards (IACCB)

The IACCB is a nonprofit association assisting member county conservation boards in areas such as board member education, public relations, and legislation. The Association's main purposes are to promote the objectives and supplement the activities of conservation boards, exchange information, assist boards and members in program development and provide a unified voice in the legislature. A nine-member board elected by member counties governs the IACCB. <www.iaccb.com>

Iowa Trust of Local Conservation (Iowa TLC)

The Iowa TLC is a 501c3 charitable organization who's mission is to enhance Iowa's local quality of life and natural resources through combined social and financial capital for county conservation board initiatives. <www.IowaTLC.org>

Iowa Association of County Conservation Board Employees (IACCBE)

The IACCBE is an organization composed of county conservation board staff with the purpose of providing a forum to encourage statewide cooperation and communication among all county conservation employees. The IACCBE encourages statewide programs of conservation and the self-betterment of the professional abilities of members. www.MyCountyParks.com

County Conservation Directors Association (CCDA)

An organization composed of county conservation board executive directors, the association strives to increase the professionalism of directors through educational programs and represent Conservation Boards in the Iowa State Association of Counties.

County Conservation Peace Offices Association (CCPOA)

An organization composed of county conservation board law enforcement personnel; the association provides continuing education programs and communications about law enforcement trends. <<http://ccpoa2002.5u.com>>

Iowa Association of Naturalists (IAN)

An organization composed of county conservation board and non-conservation board interpreters and educators, the association strives to improve communication between and increase professionalism of its members. <www.ianpage.20m.com>

Association For Integrated Roadside Managers (AFIRM)

Established in 1992 to provide organization to the expanding roadside vegetation management program in Iowa. AFIRM orchestrates a couple of training opportunities each year and provides industry updates and news for its membership. Contact information for the organization is available through the IRVM program at the University of Northern Iowa. <www.uni.edu/irvm/index.html>

Iowa State Association of Counties (ISAC)

The Iowa State Association of Counties is a private, nonprofit corporation whose members are elected and appointed county officials from all 99 counties. ISAC's mission is to promote effective and responsible county government for the people of Iowa. ISAC's vision is to be the principal, authoritative source of representation, information and services for and about county government in Iowa. <www.iowacounties.org/>

Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation (INHF)

The Iowa Natural Heritage Foundation builds partnerships and educates Iowans to protect, preserve and enhance Iowa's natural resources for future generations. As a member-supported, nonprofit group, we've helped protect more than 100,000 acres of Iowa's prairies, wetlands, woodlands, greenways, trails and river corridors. <www.inhf.org/>

GOVERNMENTAL AGENCIES

Farm Service Agency

The Farm Service Agency of the U.S. Department of Agriculture ensures the well-being of American agriculture, the environment and the American public through efficient and equitable administration of farm commodity programs; farm ownership, operating and emergency loans; conservation and environmental programs; emergency and disaster assistance; domestic and international food assistance and international export credit programs. <www.fsa.usda.gov>

Iowa Department of Natural Resources (DNR)

This is the state agency with primary responsibility for state parks and forests, environmental protection, managing energy, land and water, fish, wildlife, and geological resources. <www.iowadnr.com>

Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship, Division of Soil and Water Conservation

The state agency that strives to insure the long-term protection of soil and water resources by integrating conservation measures into the production of agricultural crops. <www.agriculture.state.ia.us/>

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Each county in the state has a board of soil and water conservation district commissioners that makes decisions on cost-share money available to private landowners. These commissioners also make policy decisions on designation of certain kinds of habitat under the slough bill law. <www.swcs.org>

United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&G)

The lead federal agency in the conservation of the nation's migratory birds, certain mammals, and sport fishes. The Service administers federal aid to state governments; provides technical assistance to state and foreign governments; serves as lead federal agency in international conventions on wildlife conservation; and operates a program of public affairs and environmental education to inform the public of the status of America's fish and wildlife resources.
[<http://riceinfo.rice.edu/armadillo/Endanger/AOS/usfws.html>](http://riceinfo.rice.edu/armadillo/Endanger/AOS/usfws.html)

Natural Resource Conservation Service

The NRCS has district conservationists in all Iowa counties. Staff gives assistance primarily to private landowners on soil erosion prevention measures and provides some cost-share money. The NRCS also administers the P.L. 566 watershed program, which can provide cost-share money to conservation boards for recreation development associated with watershed lakes. <www.nrcs.usda.gov/>

STATUTES AND LAWS

The county conservation law is not the only code section with which boards must deal. Board members need to be aware of the statutes that affect any decisions they need to make. The director will have up-to-date information on the Code and its legal concerns. Boards should also turn to the county attorney for legal advice.

CONCLUSION

This handbook does not have all the answers for conservation board members. Reading the handbook is a start, but board members need to keep up to date through attendance at conservation district and statewide meetings and educational programs.

You have an important role in the future of your county. Do your best and the rewards of your efforts will be felt by county residents for years to come.



The 106' public observation tower at Cordova Park in Marion County.