

The following minutes have not been approved. They are in draft only. Following the next meeting of the Little Missouri Scenic River Commission, approved minutes will be published.

Little Missouri Scenic River Commission Meeting

September 12, 2023
Cowboy Hall of Fame – Medora, ND

FINAL MINUTES

Chair Hestekin called the meeting to order at 2:05 pm MT and asked committee members to introduce themselves.

Committee members in attendance were:

Pam Hestekin – Bowman County
Joe Schettler – Dunn County
Paul Taylor – ND Parks and Recreation
Mike Sonsalla – Slope County
George Weinreis – Golden Valley County
Nick Lonski – McKenzie County attended virtually
Carl Rockman Department of Environmental Quality
Audrey Kroll – ND Parks and Recreation – recording secretary.

Absent: John Hild, Billings County

Approval of the Agenda:

Chair Hestekin called for approval of the agenda and entertained a motion to accept the agenda as presented.

Motion to approve the agenda was made by Mike Sonsalla. second by Joe Schettler. Motion carried.

Chair Hestekin called for approval of the September 13, 2022 minutes and entertained a motion to accept the minutes as presented.

Motion to approve the minutes of the September 13, 2022 minutes was made by Joe Schettler. Second by George Weinreis. Motion carried.

Election of officers:

Chair Hestekin asked for nominations for the position of Chair. George Weinreis nominated Joe Schettler. Second by Mike Sonsalla. No additional nominations were presented. Nick Lonski made a motion to cast a unanimous ballot for Joe Schettler for the position of Chair.

Joe Schettler was elected Chair by unanimous ballot.

Chair Hestekin asked for nominations for the position of vice chair. Joe Schettler nominated Nick Lonski. Second by Mike Sonsalla. No additional nominations were presented. Joe Schettler made a motion to cast a unanimous ballot for Joe Schettler for the position of Chair.

Nick Lonski was elected Vice Chair.

Reports:

Bryce Klasen provided the Dept of Water Resources presentation highlighting the water flows ranging from near normal to drought conditions per the Palmer Drought Index. The gage at Marmarth Bridge indicated there were no water supply concerns. There is also a camera at the Marmarth Bridge in addition to the water gage on the USGS water website now. The Medora gage indicated there were no water supply concerns there either. The Watford City water gage also has a camera. Flows at this gage that are lower than 30 feet per cubic second, trigger shut down for industrial water flow usage. Water conditions there also did not indicate any concerns. The State Water Commission authorized funding for a new USGS gaging station at the Highway 22 bridge north of Killdeer. It is in the development stages now. Bryce recapped the PRESENS – Pushing RESource CENSors. There are currently 3 surface water sites on Little Missouri River, 17 observation well sites in the basin, and 5 precipitation/soil moisture sites in basin. He shared they are looking for more sites, so if there are any landowners willing to allow access to please contact him. Lake Sakakawea elevation was a little below normal in January 2023 and went above normal in May. It is expected to be above normal through the end of the year. George Weinreis asked if the water department does any water quality. Bryce indicated that the Department of Water Quality provides that information.

Paul Taylor provided an update on the ND State Parks. Pembina Gorge will be added as a state park with development occurring in the next two years. He highlighted the developments for Sully Creek State Park including a campsite redesign, construction of a multi-use building, and the potential addition of Conestoga wagons for unique accommodations. Little Missouri State Park, mainly utilized by those wanting access to the trail system, is looking to replace a staff cabin. The park in 2022 had significant trail damage due to heavy rains so some trails were closed. Three Affiliated Tribes purchased land to the north of Little Missouri State Park and to the west of Highway 22 to establish their version of a state park. ND Parks and Recreation will be entering into talks to utilize a shared trail system with them. George Weinreis asked if the trails in the Pembina Gorge are utilized for snowmobiles as well as ATVs. Paul indicated some yes others no. Turtle Mountain area is a better place for both OHV and snowmobile trails.

Jeremy Easum with Civil Science Inc, provided information on the Medora Business Loop Road construction. Civil Science Inc was hired by NDDOT for road construction in Medora between exit 24 and 27. The road from the park entrance to Chateau Road will be widened to match width of downtown. The bridge over the Little Missouri River will be widened as well. Mill and overlay of pavement will take place as well as changes to address ADA accessibility issues. Construction is set Fall 2024 to spring 2026. They are still conducting analysis and gathering data through environmental permitting/GEO tech. Paul Taylor asked if there was an estimated timeline in relation to the ribbon cutting for the Theodore Roosevelt Presidential Library in 2026. Jeremy indicated it will be completed before the opening of the library.

Amy McCann updated the Commission on the progress of library. Groundbreaking started in June 2023. As of August 2, the first concrete pours for the East building footings and retaining wall were being worked on. Work on the footings and retaining wall for the west building will begin soon. Construction is ramping up now that musical is over. Geothermal lines are being placed under the parking area. July 4, 2026 is still on track for opening date. First couple of bid packages have gone out. Ninety Eight percent of the contractors are local coming from Dickinson; some from Watford City, Beach and Bismarck. All materials and labor are local. Specialty pieces – including rammed earth walls - will need consultants to come in and instruct companies on how to do them. The Medora community has been meeting to address what they feel is needed as the project progresses. George Weinreis inquired about the rammed earth walls. Amy explained they are interior walls and are mostly works of art – not supporting walls. These rammed earth walls also help with humidity control. Rammed earth walls take time to do but are very beautiful. Paul Taylor asked how the plugs are going for the prairie restoration plantings. Amy explained 32 different species have been delivered to the Hettinger NDSU field. They are doing well and are harvesting seeds. They are learning how to clean, sort, and store the seeds. There hasn't been much of a crop failure there. There may be a couple of plants that will need to be resupplied. Two additional seed collections will be done. At the end of October they will assess if another collection will be needed. Paul Taylor asked who is producing the plugs. Amy replied their contractor is producing the plugs. NDSU Students tried but the learning curve was more extensive than what they anticipated. It was a transfer of property of the plants and plugs and they have a contract to get a certain percentage of the seeds from the plugs. Irrigation will be installed to establish the plants, then turned off. Paul Taylor asked if any documentation is being done of the construction such as time lapse photography. Amy said they have a photographer come out to periodically to take photos, and staff is documenting the construction in written form. They will use time lapse to create a video and have a book to document the design and construction. Amy also indicated a PR and marketing team is on board to get interviews and market the process of building the Library to the media. All mass steel and timber will be delivered this spring. Joe Schettler asked what is being used as a water source for the irrigation for the establishment of plants. Amy replied the plan was to use the SW water allotment. There are tanks near the walls and those will be used. Currently, they have been using the Medora foundation well to manage construction dust control on site. They will be drilling their own well to manage the dust control and possibly use this for irrigation, but water quality would be in question. The project has sustainability rules they are working to remain within. George Weinreis asked if there is anything in the construction plans to do anything with Teddy's cabin. Amy replied that the cabin is owned by the National Park Service and they are not in favor of giving it to the Library. George Weinreis asked about the possibility of duplicating the Elk Horn Ranch Cabin. Amy indicated there were at one time plans to have it done and have that on site, however plans have changed and there is longer a plan to build a replica Elk Horn Ranch cabin. Inside the Library in the museum experience they intend to have a facade of the Elk Horn Ranch cabin but will it will not be to scale of the original.. Amy offered to provide a tour of the facility next year during the meeting.

Other business:

Representative comments:

Carl Rockman with the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) reported the DEQ has multiple water quality projects going on. Ambient monitoring sampling is conducted 8 times per year. On the Little Missouri River there are 2 sites – one at Medora and one south of Watford City. They are monitored monthly during the spring, summer, and winter. National sampling is done every 5 years across the state for more in depth information to include bugs, mud, etc. There is a fact sheet on their website with information on water quality around the state. DEQ updates from this past year include soil conservation staff being available to help with education and information. DEQ responds to any spills and has reached a settlement on the Ashe Coulee spill including penalties. Remediation is still in the works. The stream in that area is in good shape. There are some structures used to contain the spill that are still in place and need to be removed. George Weinreis asked about the comparison of the quality of water from last year to 5, 10, 15 years prior. Carl replied that generally they see improving trends. The adoption of no till farming has made a big difference as well as improved grazing practices. The Little Missouri River will never have a crystal-clear water flow due to the fact it carries a lot of sediments. E.coli from animals will always be present. Chemicals are being tested for by the Dept of Agriculture and their current monitoring indicates no concerns. Joe Schettler asked about the difference in water quality between upper and lower basin to which Carl did not have an answer but indicated that he will see what he can find.

2023 commission vacancies:

Golden Valley and Dunn County representative seats will expire in October of 2023. Audrey will send letters to ask for representatives to be designated.

Floor open for public comments:

Shannon Straight with the Badlands Conservation Alliance introduced himself and his organization. They are looking for ways to help ranchers and grazers to keep families on their land. He enjoyed hearing our questions and likes the area. He appreciated being able to attend the meeting and looks forward to learning more about the conservation of the area in addition to enjoying more of the recreation opportunities.

Future meeting date

The next meeting will be September 10, 2024 at 2:00 pm in Medora at Cowboy Hall of Fame.

There being no other business to come before the commission. Chair Hestekin asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Joe Schettler made a motion to adjourn, second by Mike Sansalla. Motion carried.

The meeting adjourned at 4:32 pm MT.