

STARKE COUNTY PARK BOARD
Meeting Minutes
December 9, 2025

I. Call to Order

The meeting of the Starke County Park Board was called to order by President **R. Ballard**.

II. Roll Call

Members present:

- R. Ballard-present
- T. Busch-present
- S. Byer-absent
- D. Sinn-absent
- T. Trout-present

A quorum was present.

III. Approval of Minutes

Motion: T. Busch moved to approve the minutes of the November 10, 2025 meeting.

Second: T. Trout

Vote: Passed 3–0.

IV. Starke County Forest Update

Bruce Wakeland provided an update on the Starke County Forest. He reported increased winter visitation, evidenced by numerous tracks in the snow.

Mr. Wakeland discussed *A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold, sharing reflections on the parallels between Leopold's life and his own experiences as both a forestry student and later a professor at Purdue University. He noted that the book was required reading during his studies and that a recent re-reading revealed deeper personal connections. Mr. Wakeland provided copies of the book to board members present and expressed interest in having the Parks Department read it as well.

Discussion followed regarding the possibility of selling copies of the book at a modest markup as a fundraiser. Additional ideas included hosting a book discussion after World Environment Day next year.

Mr. Wakeland also discussed constructing a fireplace mantel for the Bass Lake Beach House using wood from a walnut tree that had blown down during a spring storm. The wood was dried using a solar kiln he built on his property.

President Ballard raised the importance of engaging youth and encouraging young people to visit the Forest and other county properties. **Superintendent Amie Flora** discussed potential educational programming, including wetland lessons based on the DNR's *Wonders of the Wetlands* presentation. Additional ideas were discussed.

Mr. Wakeland noted that existing walnut trees at the Forest represent long-term financial sustainability for the Parks Department.

V. Bass Lake Campground Electrical Upgrade

The Board discussed the ongoing issue of upgrading electrical infrastructure at Bass Lake Campground. A report prepared by **Starke County Building Inspector John McCurrie** was reviewed and deemed helpful in identifying potential paths forward and available options.

Superintendent Flora and **Rick Green** met with six area electricians. Two declined to submit bids without a formal electrical study (RFP) being completed first. Several others expressed interest, but only one bid has been received to date, from **Live Oak (Culver, Indiana)**.

The Board discussed next steps and the urgency of the project. President Ballard stated that it is important to communicate the seriousness of the issue to the County Council. He recommended that the Board request placement on the January County Council meeting agenda and encouraged multiple board members to attend.

T. Busch requested that Superintendent Flora contact the Board's attorney, **Justin Schramm**, to clarify legal requirements related to issuing an RFP, particularly if the project cost exceeds a specific monetary threshold. The Board agreed this information is necessary before proceeding.

VI. Bass Lake Beach and Campground Renovation Update

Superintendent Flora reported that **Brown and Brown** still needs to return to seal several doors at the beach house. The Board expressed dissatisfaction with the length of time taken to complete the renovation project.

It was noted that **The Troyer Group** terminated the project manager assigned to this renovation prior to project completion. The Board expressed concern that the project manager did not adequately assist in ensuring a high-quality final product.

Superintendent Flora stated she is eager to complete the project, noting that grant reimbursement cannot be requested until the final bill from Brown and Brown is paid and remaining tasks are completed. These tasks include ordering a **Mobi-Mat** to provide wheelchair accessibility to the beach.

VII. Superintendent's Report

Superintendent Flora provided the following updates:

1. Seasonal campground agreements have been mailed along with one reminder letter. All deposits are due by **December 15**.
2. The **Highway 23 Kayak Launch** project is complete. The final invoice has been submitted. A grand opening is planned for spring.
3. Event planning is underway:
 - The **Starke County Forest** will host an **Arbor Day Celebration** coordinated by **Gwen Rentz** and the Starke County Historical Society.
 - A **Boston Tea Party Reenactment** event is planned for Mother's Day at Bass Lake. This event is being organized by area Masonic groups, the 250th Committee, and the Starke County Parks Department, and will serve as a fundraiser for both the 250th Committee and the Parks Department.
 - Superintendent Flora will also be meeting with the **Luau on the Lake** committee later this month.
4. Superintendent Flora thanked **Bruce Wakeland** for crafting the fireplace mantel from the storm-downed walnut tree and for demonstrating the solar kiln drying process.
5. Appreciation was extended to **Bruce Bennett** and **Mike Starke** for volunteering to clear overgrown areas near the beach playground. Mr. Starke, who owns a tree farm on 25 N, has begun removing invasive species and has offered ongoing assistance in managing the area.

VIII. Public Comment

There was no additional business from the audience.

IX. Adjournment

There being no further business, **President Ballard adjourned the meeting.**