



Commission Meeting Minutes

South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks

523 E Capitol Avenue | Pierre, South Dakota 57501

March 5-6, 2026 | State Library Commons, Pierre, SD

REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING

Call Meeting to Order

Chair Rissler called the meeting to order at 1 pm CST at the State Library Commons, in Pierre, SD on March 5, 2026. Commissioners Stephanie Rissler, Bruce Cull, Robert Whitmyre, Travis Theel, Dean Kirkeby, Chuck Spring, Kevin Nyberg, and Julie Bartling were present. With eight commission members present, a quorum was established. The public and staff could listen via SDPB Livestream and participate via conference or in person, with approximately 103 total participants attending via Zoom or in person.

1. Conflict of Interest Disclosure [Action Item]

Chair Rissler requested the disclosure of any potential conflicts of interest, but none were brought forward.

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes [Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for any additions or corrections to the regular minutes of the January 2026 meeting. Minutes are available at <https://gfp.sd.gov/commission/archives/>.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE JANUARY 2026 REGULAR COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Additional Salary Days [Action Item]

Chair Rissler called for additional salary days from the Commissioners. No additional days were submitted for approval.

4. Election of Vice Chair [Action Item]

Chair Rissler opened the floor to nominations for the Commission Vice-chair Position due to vacancy of the position.

MOTIONED BY THEEL SECONDED BY BARTLING TO NOMINATE COMMISSIONER CULL FOR VICE-CHAIR. The motion carried unanimously.

5. New Staff Introductions [Info Item]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation, introduced two new employees:

Dayton Gooder was hired as the new District Park Supervisor for the Oahe Downstream Park District. Dayton comes to GFP with a BS degree in Natural Resource & Rangeland Watershed Mgmt. from UW. He has extensive experience in the commercial outdoor recreation business.

Joe Gollither was hired as the new Park Technician for Angostura Recreation Area. Joe has an extensive background in mining and heavy equipment operation in the Wyoming and Rapid City areas. Joe and his family reside in Hot Springs.

Tom Kirschenmann, Director of Wildlife, introduced one new employee:

Brennen Hanes works out of the Mobridge office and is a habitat conservation technician.

6. 2026 Legislative Update [Info Item]

Department Secretary Robling gave a brief update on the legislative items during the 2026 Legislative Session.



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Public Hearing

Deputy Secretary Scott Simpson opened the floor at 2:04 pm CST for discussion from those in attendance on matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda as “finalization.”

2:05 pm- 2:06 pm: Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, SD representing Prairie Hills Audubon Society testified virtually in support of the finalization, Public Water Zoning and Iron Creek Lake Access Improvements.

Deputy Secretary Scott Simpson closed the public hearing closed at 2:07 pm.

Open Forum

Deputy Secretary Scott Simpson opened the floor at 2:07 pm CST for discussion from those in attendance on matters of importance to them that are listed on the agenda, not as a finalization, or may not be on the agenda.

2:08 pm – 2:12 pm: Paul Lepisto of Pierre, SD, representing the Izaak Walton League, testified in person in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

2:12 pm – 2:13 pm: Hannah Welker of Pierre, SD, testified in person to make comments and suggestions on preference points.

2:14 pm – 2:17 pm: Nancy Hilding of Black Hawk, SD, representing Prairie Hills Audubon Society, testified virtually in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program and Wildlife Damage Management Plan.

2:18 pm – 2:20 pm: Janet Moore of Rapid City, SD, testified virtually in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

2:21 pm – 2:24 pm: Susan Nolan of Rapid City, SD, testified virtually in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

2:24 pm – 2:26 pm: Dana Rogers of Hill City, SD, representing the South Dakota Wildlife Federation and Jerauld Co Sportsmen, testified virtually in support of the Black Hills Elk Management Plan and also supporting jackrabbit hunting season.

2:26 pm – 2:29 pm: Alexey Egorov of Brookings, SD, testified virtually in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

2:30 pm – 2:32 pm: Jill Fritz representing Humane World for Animals, testified virtually on in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

2:32 pm – 2:35 pm: Julie Anderson of Rapid City, SD, testified virtually in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program and the Wildlife Damage Management Plan.

2:37 pm – 2:37 pm: Shawn Walters of Rapid City, SD, representing the Izaak Walton League, testified virtually in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

2:38 pm – 2:38 pm: Helen McGinnis, representing Prairie Hills Audubon Society, testified virtually in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

2:39 pm – 2:40 pm: Carol Merwin of Rapid City, SD, testified virtually in opposition of the Nest Predator Bounty Program.

Deputy Secretary Scott Simpson closed the open forum at 2:40 pm CST.



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7. Public Water Zoning and Iron Creek Lake Access Improvements [Action Item: Finalization]

Sam Schelhaas and Trenton Haffley presented the finalization to establish Iron Creek Lake in Lawrence County as a no-wake zone. There has been significant work done with the locals around the lake over the last year, which included a survey of the property. Additionally, there were many dilapidated docks and other structures in and around the lake that were removed. This lake is 24 acres in size and is used primarily by kayaks and paddle boards.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

8. Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge [Action Item: Finalization]

Jacque Ermer, Regional Wildlife Supervisor, reported there were no recommended changes to the proposal nor were there any public comments regarding the removal of state waterfowl refuge status from Lake Albert Waterfowl Refuge in Grant County. Eight landowners whose property make up the refuge had formally requested the refuge status be removed.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE LAKE ALBERT WATERFOWL REFUGE STATUS. Motion carried unanimously.

9. Hunt for Habitat [Action Item: Finalization]

Chad Switzer, Wildlife Deputy Director, provided background on the codified law granting the Commission authority to promulgate rules for the Hunt for Habitat raffle. From 2019 through 2025, the Hunt for Habitat program generated more than \$2 million in revenue for habitat development and management on public lands. The Commission proposal included the removal of specific license packages from administrative rule and replacing them with a provision allowing “no more than ten big game licenses”. This change will now give the Commission the authority to modify and finalize future raffle packages through administrative action.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY NYBERG TO APPROVE THE HUNT FOR HABITAT FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

For 2026, the Hunt for Habitat raffle will include a total of ten licenses offered in the following packages: one Custer State Park Trophy Bison; one Custer State Park Trophy Bison and any white-tailed deer package; one any-deer license (statewide, excluding Custer State Park); and three any-deer (statewide, excluding Custer State Park) and elk packages.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE HUNT FOR HABITAT RAFFLE. Motion carried unanimously.

10. Application for Licenses [Action Item: Proposal]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, presented antelope and turkey draw information and the commission proposed to allow an individual to select a second choice within the first Antelope draw if they chose the Special Antelope hunting unit. This will result in a delay to the Special Antelope draw from mid-April to early July, and it will be included as a unit option in the firearm Antelope Hunting Season draw. The Nonresident Archery Antelope on public and private land draw will also be delayed to early-July. The commission also proposed a rule clean-up to the antelope and turkey draw structures and a change to remove the 3rd antelope draw, which has not been necessary because no licenses are available after the second draw.



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MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO APPROVE THE PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

11. Deer Hunting Seasons

[Action Item: Proposal]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, presented recommendations to the commission for deer hunting seasons. The commission proposed changes to administrative rule to align the Landowner Free Antlerless Whitetail unit to match the Archery and Muzzleloader Antlerless Whitetail units. GFP staff also recommended a change to Archery and Muzzleloader licenses to restrict those to buck only and recommended a reduction in 700 East River Deer Hunting Season licenses that will occur across 12 hunting units in southeast South Dakota. The changes to deer license types and license numbers would occur via administrative action at the April meeting.

MOTIONED BY THEEL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. The motion carried unanimously.

12. Elk Hunting Seasons

[Action Item: Proposal]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, and Andy Lindbloom, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented information to the commission regarding elk populations and management recommendations. The commission proposed changes to allow Landowner-Own-Land Antlerless Elk licenses to be available to qualifying resident landowners in any Prairie Elk Hunting unit. The commission also proposed creating an East River Elk Hunting unit, excluding Crow Creek Sioux Reservation, and standardizing all Prairie Elk Hunting Season dates to September 1 to December 31. In Custer State Park, the commission proposed to open the CSP Special Antlerless Elk Hunting Season. License number changes for all elk seasons were recommended, and the commission is scheduled to take administrative action on these license numbers at the April meeting.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE APPLICATION FOR ELK LICENSE PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY NYBERG, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE SPECIAL CUSTER STATE PARK ANTLERLESS ELK PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY SPRING TO APPROVE THE PRAIRIE ELK PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

13. Waterfowl Hunting Seasons

[Action Item: Proposal]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, presented information to the commission regarding waterfowl populations and management recommendations. The commission proposed changes to reduce the daily bag limit from fifteen to eight for the August Management Take and Early Canada Goose Hunting Season. In addition, the commission proposed removing five counties from the August Management Take to reduce Canada goose harvest in those areas.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY THEEL TO APPROVE THE AUGUST MANAGEMENT TAKE PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.

MOTIONED BY NYBERG, SECONDED BY CULL TO APPROVE THE EARLY FALL CANADA GOOSE PROPOSAL FOR APRIL FINALIZATION. Motion carried unanimously.



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14. Bighorn Sheep Hunting Season

[Action Item: Proposal]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief, and Chad Lehman, Senior Wildlife Biologist, presented a recommendation to increase the number of bighorn sheep licenses from seven to eight. No action was needed on the proposal. The commission is scheduled to take administrative action on the final license numbers for the Bighorn Sheep Seasons in April.

NO ACTION WAS TAKEN ON THE BIGHORN SHEEP HUNTING SEASON PROPOSAL DUT TO NO CHANGE. THE FINALIZED VERSION WILL BE BROUGHT BEFORE THE COMMISSION IN APRIL 2026.

15. Canada Goose Action Plan

[Action Item: Wildlife]

Andrew Norton, Wildlife Program Administrator, presented information about the South Dakota Giant Canada Goose Action Plan Revision. The revised plan will span 2026-2030, at which time another revision will be completed. Minor changes to management options are meant to simplify and clarify options for field staff. The focus of the action plan is to provide objectives and strategies for hunting season recommendations based on biological survey information ,and to optimize hunter access and opportunities while mitigating agricultural damage.

MOTIONED BY CULL, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO ADOPT THE ACTION PLAN. The motion carried unanimously.

16. WDM Action Plan

[Action Item: Wildlife]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief, provided a summary of the revision of the Wildlife Damage Management (WDM) Action Plan. The WDM program offers a variety of assistance tools and programs to help mitigate wildlife conflicts. The revised action plan includes the following four goals: 1) Support landowners in minimizing damage to livestock, crops, and property by delivering practical and responsive wildlife damage management services; 2) Promote strong landowner and stakeholder relations through effective communication; 3) Deliver excellent customer service and maintain program transparency; and 4) Strengthen and expand partnerships with landowners to promote habitat enhancement and increase public hunting access on private lands. Each goal has respective objectives, strategies, and action items. The planning team reviewed public comments and recommended the Commission adopt the plan as presented at the January meeting. Unanimous vote by the Commission to formally adopt the revised action plan.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO ADOPT THE ACTION PLAN. The motion carried unanimously.

17. Nest Predator Bounty Program

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Tom Kirschenmann, Director of Wildlife Division, provided background on the Nest Predator Bounty Program and went over recent discussions by the legislature wherein SB 148 was sent to the 41st Day. SB 148 was a bill introduced to cease the Nest Predator Bounty Program. The committee recommended to the Department and Commission to consider changes to that program such as for youth only, limit total expenditures to \$250,000, and limit the amount of bounty each youth could obtain.

Through discussions with legislators, Governor's Office, and the GFP Commission, it was determined to make some adjustments to the program. First, essentially the Nest Predator Bounty Program would be re-branded to the Youth Trapping Recruitment Program with a maximum of \$200,000 available for the program and only resident youth under the age of 18 can participate. Other aspects of the program remain the same as structured in the Nest Predator Bounty Program. Also, the other \$300,000 remaining from the funds used for the bounty program would be switched to create a coyote bounty program. Bounties would be \$30 per coyote, program would run from April 1 through July 1, and tails turned in under the same process as Youth



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Trapping Recruitment Program. The time period for coyote bounty coincides with peak calving and lambing as well as when deer and antelope are fawning.

RESOLUTION 26-01

Transition from Nest Predator Bounty Program to Youth Trapping Recruitment Program & Initiate Coyote Bounty Program

WHEREAS, pursuant to SDCL 40-36-9, SDCL 41-2-16, and SDCL 41-2-34, the Department of Game, Fish and Parks may conduct programs to control wild animals. Furthermore, such programs have proven to expose people to South Dakota's outdoors and trapping tradition; and

WHEREAS, predator removal efforts on properties with habitat to increase nest success of pheasants and ducks has been used as a management technique in South Dakota for decades; and

WHEREAS, intensive predator removal efforts can enhance nest success of pheasants and ducks at localized levels when implemented at high intensities during the nesting season; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Game, Fish and Parks has previously operated this program and paid all expenditures for this program from the fund established in SDCL 41-2-34 (license dollars); and

WHEREAS, the Department of Game, Fish and Parks recommends to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission to transition the Nest Predator Bounty Program to the Youth Trapping Recruitment Program; and

WHEREAS, the Department also recommends to the Game, Fish and Parks Commission to initiate a Coyote Bounty Program; and

WHEREAS, the Department of Game, Fish and Parks will cover expenditures for the Coyote Bounty Program from the fund established in SDCL 41-2-34 (license dollars) and not Animal Damage Control funds as described in SDCL 40-36-15; and

WHEREAS, the additional removal of coyotes through a bounty program will assist with livestock depredation issues at a statewide level; and

WHEREAS, providing a bounty on coyotes during the time of year when the fur is not prime and that coincides with parturition season for deer and antelope will also enhance deer and antelope fawn survival by increasing coyote harvest participation during that time period.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, the Game, Fish and Parks Commission rescinds the resolution adopted in 2023 which provided the approval to the Department of Game, Fish and Parks to implement the Nest Predator Bounty Program through 2026.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Game, Fish and Parks Commission recognizes the Department of Game, Fish and Parks' desire to conduct the Youth Trapping Recruitment Program in 2026 and proposes the following: 1) an expenditure of ten dollars per tail for red fox, opossum, raccoon, striped skunk and badger, not to exceed \$200,000 for the Youth Trapping Recruitment Program; 2) participation is limited to South Dakota residents under the age of 18; 3) participants under the age of 18 harvesting eligible species are not required to have a license; and 4) the program will run from March 1 through July 1.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Youth Trapping Recruitment Program shall be operated from March 1 to July 1, 2026, to coincide with spring activity/movements of nest predators and the primary



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nesting season of pheasants, ducks, and other ground nesting birds. The method of take includes the trapping of eligible species in South Dakota.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Game, Fish and Parks Commission recognizes the Department of Game, Fish and Parks' desire to conduct a Coyote Bounty Program in 2026 and proposes the following: 1) an expenditure of thirty dollars per tail not to exceed \$300,000 for the Coyote Bounty program; 2) participation is limited to South Dakota residents; 3) participants under the age of 18 harvesting eligible species are not required to have a license; and 4) the program will run from April 1 through July 1.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Coyote Bounty Program shall be operated from April 1 to July 1, 2026, to coincide with the Department's focused time period where Wildlife Damage Specialists conduct coyote control measures to reduce impacts of livestock depredation and the primary fawning time for white-tailed deer, mule deer, and pronghorn. The method of take includes the shooting and trapping of coyotes in South Dakota.

MOTIONED BY WHITMYRE, SECONDED BY SPRING TO APPROVE THE RESOLUTION. The motion carried unanimously.

18. Elk Action Plan

[Info Item: Wildlife]

John Kanta, Terrestrial Section Chief, reviewed the draft elk action plan with the commission. Changes in the draft plan include removing the any elk license threshold and adjusting the any elk archery allocation from 25% to 30%. The commission asked the department to seek input on changing the current black hills elk population objective of 6,000 to 8,000 elk to an increased objective of 6,000 to 9,000 elk. As of the commission meeting, the department has received over 200 comments on the action plan and increased population objective. About 80% of the comments supported increasing the population objective. The commission directed the department to add the increased population objective to the draft action plan and put it out for another 60 days of public comment.

19. Lake Sharpe Fishery Update

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Bob Hanten, Wildlife Division Fishery Biologist, provided an update on the Lake Sharpe fishery. The 2025 Lake Sharpe walleye population is near the long-term average for abundance and suggests stable conditions in the coming years. Last fall, approximately 25% of sampled walleye exceeded the 15-inch minimum length limit, and growth rates approached 15 inches by age three, indicating moderate growth. Overall fish conditions remains stable, and fishing pressure and catch rates are consistent with historical averages. Strong incoming year classes are expected to support the fishery in 2026. In addition, paddlefish stocking efforts appear successful, with stocked fish exhibiting good condition; a new study is planned for 2026 to further evaluate the population. Zebra mussels are now present throughout Lake Sharpe, stressing the importance to clean, drain and dry watercraft to slow the spread.

20. Habitat Stamp Projects and 2025 Accomplishments

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Jake Davis, Fisheries Program Administrator, and Ryan Wendinger, Habitat Program Administrator, presented the project accomplishments for calendar year 2025 that were funded with Habitat Stamp funds. This included terrestrial, aquatic, and hunting and fishing access projects. Additionally, staff presented on the 2026-2028 Habitat Stamp Strategic Approach document that was developed to update the 2023-2025 document. The updated strategic approach document will guide efforts in the coming years using Habitat Stamp funds. The presentation identified the Habitat Stamp funding priorities, goals, and strategies for both aquatic and terrestrial projects.



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21. License Sales Reports

[Info Item: Wildlife]

Director Kirschenmann provided a brief overview of license sales from December 15 through February 28. Overall license sales going well, with small game ahead of last year, however fishing is slightly behind. Great weather and hunting conditions existed throughout January, but the ice fishing season was shortened due to the nice weather. Kirschenmann also reported that the Hunt for Habitat raffle is doing well, almost twice as much as last year when comparing same time period. Also, the Habitat Conservation license plate sales are doing better than expected with over \$158,000 coming in for decals.

22. Custer State Park Resort Lease RFP

[Action Item: Parks]

Sean Blanchette, Parks Division Business Administrator, was joined by consultant firm CHM Government Services to present the recommendations for prospectus and draft lease for the Custer State Parks concession business opportunity. Blanchette provided an overview of the history of the current lease, explained the expiration provisions that require the current process, and gave a brief update on the progress to this point. CHM provided a PowerPoint presentation to explain the prospectus underwriting process and background on valuation and assessment work completed as inputs to the draft contract structure. CHM provided a summary of the minimum lease term and fee structure recommended for advertisement and provided an overview of the principal selection factor themes on which proposals will be evaluated. CHM also provided information on a site visit for potential bidders, the planned messaging process for the prospectus, as well as a timeline for future process milestones of proposal receipt and evaluation, proposal selection, and contract award. Blanchette explained that the prospectus would be released by no later than March 10, 2026, with a target deadline to receive proposals of June 5, 2026. Blanchette requested authorization to advertise the prospectus with the recommended minimum lease terms, proposal selection criteria, and advertisement timeline as discussed.

MOTIONED BY NYBERG, SECONDED BY BARTLING TO APPROVE THE CUSTER STATE PARK RESORT LEASE RFP. The motion carried unanimously.

23. 2026 Park Outreach Programs

[Info Item: Parks]

Rachel Comes, Parks Volunteer Coordinator, provided an update on South Dakota State Parks outreach efforts and programming. In 2025, parks hosted 2,236 programs and events with a total of 92,252 participants statewide. Outreach initiatives—including Library Checkout SD Parks, Go Fourth, and Park Rx—continue to introduce new audiences to state parks while promoting outdoor recreation and improved health. Comes also highlighted the 2026 park theme, Adventure 250: Make Your History in South Dakota State Parks, along with the upcoming Run for the Trees: Happy Little Virtual 5K new event planned for 2026.

24. DOT Collector Funds Program

[Info Item: Parks]

Adam Kulesa, Planning and Development Administrator, provided a brief overview of the DOT collector road program and asked for approval from the Commission on proposed FY27 collector road project list. Approval was affirmed and no formal action was taken/needed.

25. South Dakota Parks and Wildlife Fundraising Campaign

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation provided the Commission with an update on the SDPW Foundations campaign to raise \$10M to complete 30 projects across 19 state park and recreation areas. To date, over \$500K has been raised and the Parks Division received permission from the Foundation Board to complete 5 of the 30 projects by the end of this year with the hopes that these projects will encourage additional donations from the public. Planning and clearance work will also be completed this year on 4 additional projects in preparation when additional funding becomes available.



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26. YTD Camping Unit and Revenue Reports

[Info Item: Parks]

Jeff VanMeeteren, Director of Parks & Recreation shared the YTD camping unit and revenue report information with the Commission. The Parks Division has seen a 34% increase in the YTD camping units for 2026 over 2025 with the nice weather SD has experienced this winter. Revenue YTD for 2026 is also up 4% over last year at this same time with annual park entrance license sales remaining strong for the year and camping units up 1%. Advance booking information for 2026 lodging was shared along with a comparative summary of 3-year averages for revenue and camping units.

24. Adjourn

[Action Item]

A Regular Commission Meeting will be held on April 9-10 at the Matthews Training Center, Pierre, SD starting at 1 pm CST.

MOTIONED BY BARTLING, SECONDED BY WHITMYRE TO ADJOURN THE MEETING AT 10:43 AM CST ON March 6, 2026. Motion carried unanimously.

Submitted respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kevin Robling".

Kevin Robling, Department Secretary