

Commissioners not accepting Champion Lake, Park just yet

Written by Wauneta Breeze
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By Carolyn Lee

The Imperial Republican

During a meeting Tuesday morning, the Chase County Commissioners came to an agreement with Kirk Nelson of the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission (NGPC) to come up with a binding agreement concerning Champion Mill State Historical Park and State Recreation Area.

The commissioners want an agreement that states that “if something happens the Game and Parks will take it back,” according to Commissioner Don Weiss Jr.

Wording to that effect was originally in LB739, the bill that approved the transfer of ownership of the park from the NGPC to Chase County, but was left out in the final draft.

Weiss said Wilson, the West Regional Manager of the Parks Division, didn't have a problem with the proposed change.

Weiss himself wants to take some time to make sure the county has a binding agreement that ensures the county isn't carrying the responsibility of the park if, say, there's not enough money to manage it.

He said NGPC may have to go back to the Legislature to make the change. He said Sen. Mark Christensen of Imperial will be contacted to see if “there is a way around it.”

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The effort to obtain a binding contract may take several months or a year, Weiss said. In the meantime, the county and NGPC will work together to maintain Champion Mill State Historical Park.

NGPC plans to shingle and paint the mill building next month. Employee Jean Welch will continue as a guide at the mill.

The county will move dirt onto the dike in front of the dam and NGPC will seed it to grass. The county will spray for weeds.

Weiss said that as the county budget year doesn't begin until June 1 there is not yet a budgeted amount for the park's upkeep.

"We won't be spending any amount of money that matters," he noted.

NGPC approached the commissioners last year to see if the county was interested in taking over ownership of the park, as part of a budget-cutting move.

The commissioners indicated interest, adding that it had the "right to return the property to the State in the future." The Legislature passed LB739 on March 8, leaving out the "right to return" phrase.