

# Nickless pleads guilty to drug and firearm charges

Nathan Nickless, 40, from Dakota City, pled guilty on April 1 in federal court in Sioux City. Nickless was convicted of two counts of possession with intent to distribute methamphetamine, one count of possession of a firearm by a prohibited person and one count of failure to appear.

Nickless had multiple prior felony convictions which prohibit a person from possessing a firearm including a prior 2008 drug felony possession of marijuana with the intent to deliver.

At the plea hearing, evidence showed that on Aug. 12, 2023, in Fort Dodge, law enforcement attempted a traffic stop on a truck Nickless was driving. Nickless ignored and



Nathan Nickless

attempted to evade law enforcement onto a river road. After ramming his truck into a non-law enforcement vehicle, Nickless stopped his truck and fled on foot but was apprehended while trying to climb a river embankment.

During the flight, Nickless was in possession of a backpack. In the backpack, law enforcement found a loaded 9 mm pistol, multiple bags of narcotics including approximately 200 grams of methamphetamine, marijuana,

psychedelic mushrooms, pills, THC gummies, ammunition in sanitizing wipes, a scale, and multiple small baggies.

Nickless was federally charged but was allowed to remain released pending his July 8, 2024, federal trial. Nickless failed to appear as required for trial and absconded from law enforcement over the next several months.

On Sept. 28, 2024, in Humboldt County, law enforcement became aware Nickless was in the area. Law enforcement located Nickless and attempted to stop the vehicle he was driving. He refused to stop and began a vehicle pursuit with law enforcement where he again abandoned the vehicle he was driving in a

field by a river.

The abandoned vehicle was seized and a search warrant was granted. Law enforcement searched the vehicle and found methamphetamine, multiple baggies of marijuana, pills, a scale, empty baggies for distribution, a methamphetamine pipe, and a marijuana pipe.

On Oct. 2, 2024, Nickless was found hiding inside a residence in Humboldt County and was arrested.

Sentencing before United States District Court Judge T. Strand will be set after a presentence report is prepared.

Nickless remains in the custody of the United States Marshals Service and will remain in custody pending sen-

tencing. Nickless faces a mandatory minimum sentence of 15 years imprisonment and a possible maximum sentence of life imprisonment, a \$20,000,000 fine and at least ten years of supervised release following imprisonment.

The case is being prosecuted by Assistant United States Attorney Patrick T. Greenwood, and was investigated by the Webster County Sheriff's Office, Humboldt County Sheriff's Office, Fort Dodge Police Department, Iowa DCI Laboratory, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, Iowa Division of Narcotics Enforcement, and the U.S. Marshals Service.



The Humboldt FFA Program held their annual "Drive your tractor to school day" on April 8. A tradition that FFA programs throughout the country participate in each year. As a part of this event, Humboldt FFA members visited Taft Elementary and St. Mary's school. Photos by Kylie Portz. To see these photos or more from our gallery visit [www.humboldt-news.com](http://www.humboldt-news.com).

## Assessments

CONTINUED FROM FRONT

area," Fridolfson said.

Homeowner Laura Heider said she had challenged her assessment several years ago and the amount was lowered only to return to the higher assessed value several years later.

"It does cost the county a lot of money and I hate to say it but we just have to follow the path. It costs you guys money, it costs us money," Loney said.

Supervisor Bruce Reimers admitted that he would like to complain about taxes too.

"I would like to sit on the other side of the table and complain that my taxes (are too high) but by the same token when we are sitting up here and we are trying to figure out how we make our budget come together, somehow we have to have the ability to use the things, the services we provide," Reimers said.

"I'm just asking that our properties be assessed in line with market value and to me it seems like the more successful or assuming the higher-end stuff is getting more valuation than the stuff that's actually selling," Fridolfson said.

He stated that homes in the \$100,000 to \$125,000 range are selling very well. He said the problem is that when a house assessed at \$150,000 sells for \$225,000 for some reason, it drives up all the assessments across the board, when in actuality the \$225,000 house was an anomaly.

Loney reminded Fridolfson that there have been major changes due to legislation passed last year in Iowa.

House file 718 passed

through legislation last year limits the levy percentage that the county can apply. The levy must be at 3.5% by 2029.

Heider reiterated "There are some homes that are valued at \$7.00 a square foot and I haven't seen any comps to justify that. I think that is more the concern, the different valuations in the higher-end homes."

Humboldt County Assessor Linda Fallesen returned at the end of the meeting to discuss how she assesses property. She stated that there are several things that the assessor uses to calculate the amount of the assessment.

These include using the Iowa Real Property Appraisal Manual and looking at local sales of other properties in the area.

Fallesen also stated that many times, they have to guess at the interior of the house as they are not allowed entry into the building, forming their opinion by the outside and by building specs when it is built.

She also stated that certain things will change a valuation such as geothermal heating and other improvements.

Fallesen stated that many of her actions are dictated by the state. If she does not fall within a certain percentage, the state will intervene and raise taxes across the board on everyone until the county falls within a certain percentage.

"With that statement, everyone thinks that it is just your office doing this, but if it isn't done then it is done by the state," Reimers said.

Fallesen stated that the information is analyzed at the state level and if they feel corrections need to be made, they will send a formula to the Auditors that raises the tax assessments for everyone.

She also stated that there is a rollback that is applied by the state which affects the amount of taxes each person pays.

"The Department of Revenue will recalculate the rollback rate to limit growth across the state to 3%. Since most of the state is experiencing similar increases, this rollback will offset a large amount of the increase and curb inflation," Fallesen said.

She stated that anyone who feels their assessment is not correct can dispute the amount first to the assessor and then to the Property Assessment Appeal Board (PAAB) which is free to both citizens and the county.

PAAB will take all of the information presented from both sides and decide on what they feel the correct amount should be.

If either side does not feel that the amount is still correct, they have the option to file a court case to dispute the ruling.

Fallesen admitted that the process can be confusing and encouraged those who have questions on how their assessment is reached to come into her office so that they can explain them one one-on-one.

### RWE Wind Energy

Bri Erskine with RWE introduced two of her colleagues to the Supervisors.

Sue Hanson, Developer and John Douglas, Land Team Support.

Erskine told the supervisors that they have been researching the questions that have been brought up since the previous meetings.

Reimers questioned how repowering is handled. He stated that windmills in Webster County that are being repowered are using longer blades which he feels would add more weight to the blades. He stated this would tear up the roads more when they are being transported.

He also questioned what happens when the windmills are decommissioned and who is in charge if the company goes bankrupt?

Loney said, "I keep saying it is a landowner issue. I'm not going to say I'm for or against it. Once it becomes enough landowners that have signed up then of course it is up to us to make sure we have proper setbacks and making sure we are covered."

Reimers also questioned what would happen if subsidies were not available from the government anymore?

Erskine informed the Supervisors that RWE is privately funded and while they do receive subsidies, they are not strictly essential to the operation.

She admitted they are still researching some of the questions asked by the Supervisors and will continue to bring back information as they learn the facts.

### Drainage Trustees

The Supervisors convened the Trustees for Drainage to discuss a Memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Wright County.

The Humboldt County Su-

pervisors joined a conference call with the Wright County Supervisors to discuss an MOU for an agreement that each county could approve projects that border the other county up to \$15,000 on each side. The counties will still keep each other informed on the work being done, however they do not need to wait for approval if the amount of the repairs falls under \$15,000.

The MOU was approved unanimously by both Boards of Supervisors.

Drainage District Clerk Terry Stufflebean also discussed the work to be done in DD 11 Sub 1 in Rutland Township seven and eight.

The Supervisors accepted a petition for repairs to the tile on the land owned by Archer Farms. They need to replace the old tile and increase the drainage co-efficient to do pattern tiling.

The Supervisors appointed the engineering company of Jacob Westergard & Associates, Inc. to draw up plans for the improvements.

### In other action:

- Accepted and placed on file the Auditor's Quarterly Report ending March 31, 2025.
- Accepted and placed on file the Recorder's Quarterly Report ending March 31, 2025.
- Approved a special event Class C Retail Liquor License with outdoor sales for Top of Iowa Lucky Wife, LLC.
- Approved a cigarette/ tobacco/vapor retail permit for April - September 2025 for the Humboldt Country Club.

## Nature Area

CONTINUED FROM 2A

The breakdown of the land uses for the 390 acres are 277 acres of native prairie, 75 acres of timber or riparian habitat and 38 acres of wetlands.

"It's a unique piece of property because of the diversity of habitat types that are present. Anyone from a waterfowl hunter, to a pheasant hunter to a deer hunter could go there and do their thing," observes Lee.

Trapping is also plentiful. A trapper can go there and expect to catch anything that is legal to catch.

"There are two oxbow restorations on the property. The Iowa Soybean Association is very progressive-minded in working with groups in helping to control nitrogen and phosphorus runoff and oxbows provide a great area to dissipate such concentrations and they are interested in being able to have an area to statistically measure how oxbows play a part in the agricultural ecosystem," Lee reported.

The Iowa Soybean Association and Nature Conservancy paid for the work.

"It's a win-win because it's not only good for soil and water conservation but oxbows are excellent wildlife habitat areas for everything from frogs and minnows to coons, muskrats, etc. The Nature Conservancy is also interested in the health of the Topeka Shiner, a tiny minnow not more than three

inches long. They can sample and they did find Topeka Shiners present," Lee said.

The small fish is considered endangered but the Nature Conservancy reported this fall that the tiny minnow is making a comeback in southwestern Minnesota where oxbows are present.

The area is environmentally important because Prairie Creek drains into the Boone River which is 111 miles long and drains 895 square miles, feeding into the Des Moines River and eventually into the Mississippi River and on to the Gulf of Mexico. For years scientists have been studying how hypoxia (low levels of oxygen due to the overgrowth of algae) negatively affects fish and other forms of aquatic life.

The nature area is important for a number of reasons and also because of the changes in agrarian lifestyle and farming ownership during the past 40 years. Today, ownership is more diverse and dispersed and there are less rural areas to gain permission to hunt.

Lee said the county has been careful about signage while the Kiburz property was in the process of being sold.

Now that Humboldt County is the sole owner of the property and the lands have been developed, feedback is being received on what hunters are experiencing.

"We've received reports of nice deer being taken and people have reported some successful pheasant hunts," Lee said. "Trapping has occurred with some success."

There will be some long-term maintenance that will be required. "There will be some mowing and native prairie will need to be burned every three to five years. There will need to be some pruning of trees where we don't want them," the conservation director said.

"It will be a time commitment on our end but it will be enjoyable work for us," Lee said of himself and his staff.

The local chapters of hunter conservation groups, Humboldt County Pheasants Forever and the Two Rivers Timber Ghosts of the National Wild Turkey Federation were instrumental in financial support for the project.

"I have to credit all of the partners that contributed and were involved in the project. There are some amazing talented people who are very passionate about what they do. It was my first time doing something like this so I appreciate them answering my stupid questions and being patient with us in the process," Lee said.

The conservation director said there will probably be a public recognition of the project at some point but that has not been set at this time.

One thing is for certain.

"This is the crown jewel of what we have to offer for wildlife habitat in this area because of the size and diversity. The Rutland Marsh provides some pheasant hunting habitat and the same with the Pioneer Prairie Pothole area.

"Wright, Pocahontas and

Kossuth have been pretty aggressive in pursuing property for such purposes for some time and now we are doing that as well," Lee said.

"This will bring people from outside the area to Humboldt County and if they are here to hunt, fish or trap they will spend money in the local shops, hotels, restaurants and bars. A number I came across is that each acre of this property generates \$65 a year in local spending above what would normally be generated, so that far outweighs the tax dollars that are no longer on the rolls.

"It's a quality of life issue," Lee said, much like building bike and walking trails and adding amenities and better camping facility to parks. It's all part of the big picture.

## Zoning Permits Required in Humboldt County

If you live in the country and are thinking of building a new home, adding a deck, an additional bedroom, a shed/machine shed or other building project on your property, you are required to obtain a building permit from the Humboldt County Zoning Administrator. Building permits can be obtained from/returned to Ben Loots, Interim Zoning Administrator at the Humboldt County Engineer's Office located at the Secondary Roads office or you can download a copy from the Humboldt County website at [www.humboldtcountyia.org](http://www.humboldtcountyia.org). If you have questions please contact Ben Loots, Interim Zoning Administrator at 515-332-2366.

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