

# RiverCurrents

The Voice of the St. Joseph River Watershed

WINTER 2012

A Quarterly Publication of the  
Friends of the St. Joe River Association, Inc.

## "It's A Swamp Thing!"

### How to Help the Public Care About Marshy, Mucky and Ducky Places

Join the Friends of the St. Joe River on March 26, 2012 for the 5th Annual Meeting of the St. Joseph River Watershed Council at the Sturges-Young Auditorium in Sturgis, Michigan. Wetlands are essential to the health of lakes and rivers. But apart from biologists and hunters, who can fall in love with a buggy, snake-infested, boot-sucking swamp? Well, plenty of people can – provided that you give them some lively and powerful reasons to do so. Tom Springer will share six practical ways to get the wetland love-fest started when he presents: "*It's a Swamp Thing: How to Help the Public Care About Marshy, Mucky and Ducky Places.*"

#### ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Tom Springer is the author of *Looking for Hickories: The Forgotten Wildness of the Rural Midwest*. He is a senior editor at the W. K. Kellogg Foundation and has written for popular magazines such as *Backpacker* and *Michigan Out-of-Doors*. His nature-themed commentaries have aired on several National Public Radio programs. Mr. Springer holds a master's degree in environmental journalism from Michigan State University. He lives in the St. Joseph River Watershed near Three Rivers, Michigan.

#### WHO SHOULD ATTEND

- Soil & Water Conservation Districts
- Lake Associations & Watershed Groups
- Drain Commissioners & County Surveyors
- Natural Resource Managers
- Local Government Staff & Elected Officials
- Urban Stormwater Managers
- Water Lovers of Any Kind!

There will also be a **Silent Auction** from 5:00 - 8:00 p.m. Winners will be announced at the conclusion of the meeting. Items for bid include two Kayaks, Local Beer & Wine Packages, Native Plants, Rain Barrels, Bird and Bat Houses, and more!

#### REGISTRATION & PAYMENT INFORMATION:

Register Online (preferred) or by Mail. Online credit card payments are processed free-of-charge through PayPal. If paying by check or money order, please make payable to FotSJR, P.O. Box 1794, South Bend, Indiana 46634.

For registration assistance, please contact Leah Cooper, FotSJR Outreach Coordinator, at [fotsjr.outreach@gmail.com](mailto:fotsjr.outreach@gmail.com) or (574) 299-3421.

#### About us

The Friends of the St. Joe River Association, Inc. (FotSJR) was established in April of 1994, and operates as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

#### Mission

To unite a diverse group of stakeholders throughout the watershed in a collaborative effort to protect, restore and foster stewardship of the St. Joseph River Watershed.

#### Become a Friend

Join a group of stewards restoring and protecting this natural resource. We offer a variety of tax-deductible membership levels for both Personal and Business contributors.

#### Meetings

Monthly meetings of the Board of Directors and Watershed Council are usually held on the fourth Thursday of the month at the Three Rivers (Michigan) Public Library at 1:00 p.m. EDT. These meetings are open to the public. For more information and to verify dates and times, visit [www.fotsjr.org](http://www.fotsjr.org).

#### 5<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL ST. JOSEPH RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL MEETING

DATE:	March 26, 2012
TIME:	5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. (EDT)
LOCATION:	Sturges-Young Auditorium 201 N. Nottawa Street Sturgis, Michigan
COST:	\$25.00 / person (Includes dinner and program materials. A cash bar will be available.)
REGISTER BY:	March 21, 2012

Registration & additional event details are available at:  
[www.fotsjr.org](http://www.fotsjr.org)

# Marsh Madness in the St.

**A**ll around the country people are consumed by the excitement of the NCAA basketball tournament, which starts during the month of March, and is often referred to as "March Madness". In the St. Joseph River Watershed there are people getting just as excited about Wetlands. The Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotsJR) and a diverse group of partners are trying to raise awareness about wetlands and the important functions they serve as part of the Wetland Partnership Project. The project includes a study that will allow wetlands to be ranked against each other, much like teams are seeded in the NCAA tournament.

## THE MATCHUPS

We may not know who will be facing each other in the final game of the basketball tournament, but when it comes to wetlands we know it is always WATER and LAND. Wetlands are the places where water and land meet. They are also known as swamps, bogs and marshes. Wetlands are not always wet year-round. In fact, some of the most important wetlands are only wet for part of the year. There are three key components that must be present for an area to be considered a wetland:

1. Hydric soils (soils that have developed under wet conditions).
2. Water present during at least part of the year.
3. Water-loving plants adapted to changes in water levels.

## THE GEOGRAPHY & DIVERSITY

The tournament selection process ensures that virtually every region of the country will be represented. Some teams come from big schools with long basketball traditions and others come from small colleges with just over a thousand students. Just like teams in the tournament, wetlands can look very different and you can find them in almost every corner of the watershed.

Most people are familiar with cattail or lily pad wetlands found in areas with standing water. But wetlands may also look like grassy meadows, brushy fields or mature forests. They can be found in lowland areas, farm fields, forests and along rivers, streams and lakes. Wetlands also vary in size. Some may only be a few hundred square feet and in the middle of a forest where water collects, or some can be several hundreds or thousands of acres along the banks of a river or lake.

## THE EXCITEMENT

The diversity found in the tournament sets the stage for unpredictable games and amazing finishes. The excitement surrounding the tournament is infectious, but other than biologists and hunters, who can get excited about marshy and buggy swamps? Well, everyone can if they have some good reasons! We all benefit from wetlands because they:

- Keep our water clean by trapping sediment and nutrients.
- Provide wildlife habitat (they are among the most biologically productive ecosystems in the world).
- Protect us from flooding by storing floodwater.
- Guard against erosion of streambanks and lakeshores.
- Make great outdoor classrooms.

## AWARENESS

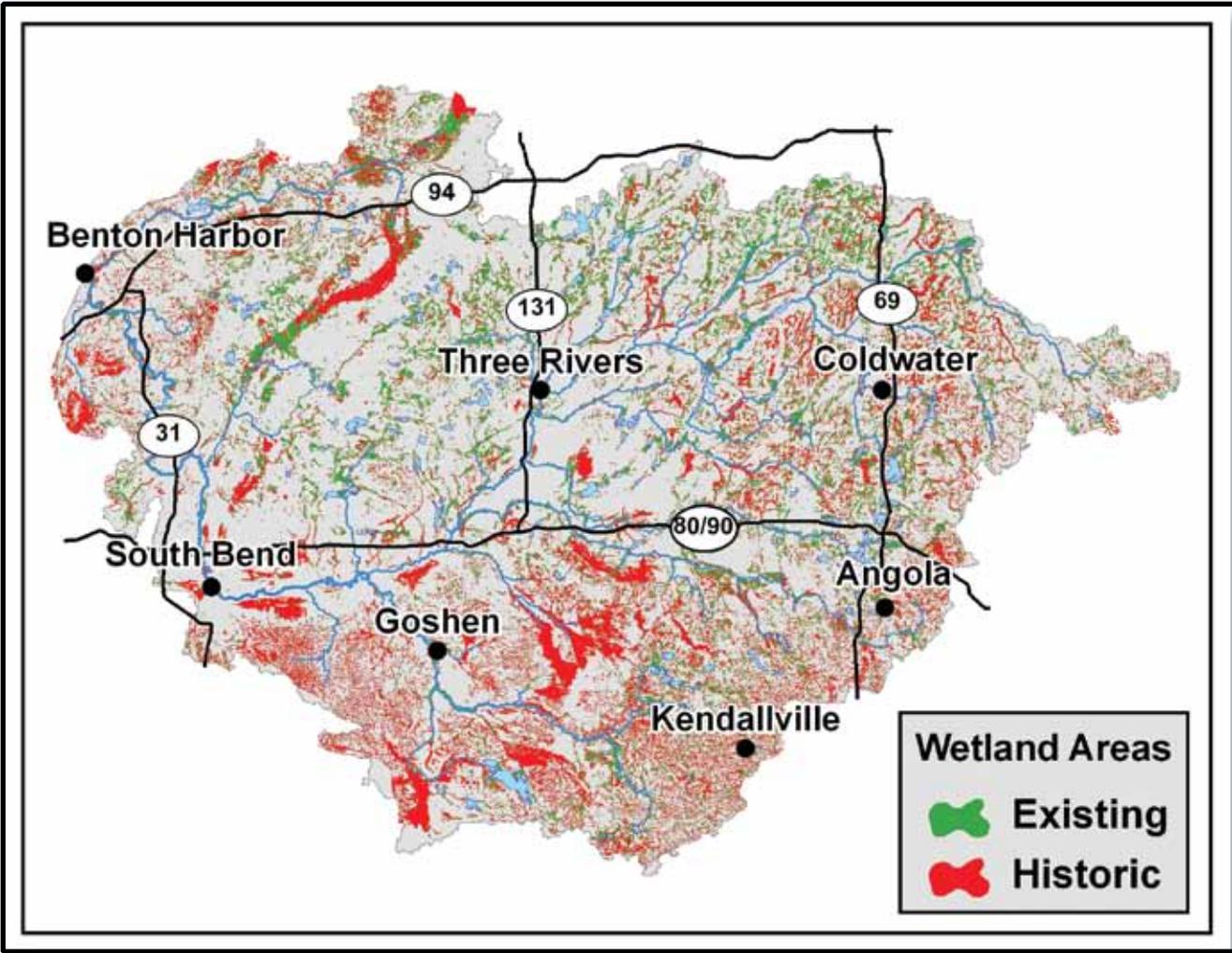
Everybody knows about the NCAA tournament, but wetland loss is a low-profile ecological catastrophe. Most people are not aware of the amount of wetland loss or the serious consequences of wetland loss, such as increased flooding and degraded water and habitat in rivers and lakes. Despite all the benefits provided by wetlands, the United States is losing about 80,000 acres of wetlands annually, equivalent to almost 1.5 basketball courts every minute. Over 50 percent of the wetlands in the St. Joseph River Watershed have been filled or drained in the last 200 years. *(See map on page 3)*

## THE STAKES ARE HIGH

It is devastating when your team loses in the NCAA Tournament. Likewise, when you lose your wetlands, the result is often increased flooding, loss of wildlife habitat and more pollution in local streams, rivers, inland lakes and Lake Michigan. After the first year of the Wetland Partnership Project, the FotSJR now has information on every lost and existing wetland in the watershed and what functions it did or does serve. For example, in the SJRW the Christiana Creek Watershed has lost only 16 percent of its wetland acreage, but this translates to a 25 percent loss of floodwater storage capacity. We can also identify which remaining wetlands in this watershed are crucial for storing floodwater and work with landowners and municipalities to protect these wetland areas.

# Joseph River Watershed

MARSH MADNESS FACT > The United States is losing about 80,000 acres of wetlands annually, equivalent to almost 1.5 basketball courts every minute.



## TEAM WORK IS NEEDED

The FotSJR has convened a bi-state Wetland Partnership to utilize this new information for targeting wetland restoration and protection efforts. The Partnership members include soil and water conservation districts in Indiana and Michigan, environmental agencies in both states, land trusts and many others. Over the next two years, Partnership members will be reaching out to priority landowners and municipalities to increase interest in protecting and restoring wetlands.

If you are interested in protecting or restoring wetlands on your property, contact your county's Soil and Water Conservation District for assistance. For more information on the Wetland Partnership Project visit <http://www.fotsjr.org/WetlandPartnership>.

## Creature Feature

### Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*)

The Wood Duck is among the most beautiful of all waterfowl, and they reside year-round within the St. Joseph River Watershed. Males are iridescent chestnut and green, with ornate patterns on nearly every feather; the elegant females have a distinctive profile and delicate white pattern around the eye. These birds live in wooded swamps, where they nest in holes in trees or in nest boxes put up around lakes. They are one of the few duck species equipped with strong claws that can grip bark and perch on branches, and they are comfortable flying through the woods. (Source: Cornell Lab of Ornithology)

Conservation Status: Least Concern



## FlowFacts

The way a river responds to rainfall and snowmelt is an important indicator of watershed health. A stream rising slowly after a storm generally has a healthier watershed than one rising quickly. The USGS continuously monitors streamflow (or discharge) in the St. Joseph River Basin at 12 separate gauging stations. Real-time stream flow data from each gauging station is available through the USGS web site below.

### FlowFacts from USGS gauging station at Niles, Michigan.

#### Period of Record October 1930 to present:

- Drainage Area: 3,666 square miles (78% of SJRW)
- Average Summer Flow: 2,741 cfs\* (June, July, August)
- 2010 Peak Flow: 8,290 cfs\* (May 22)
- Maximum Flow on Record: 20,200 cfs (April 5, 1950)

\*cfs = cubic feet per second

#### FlowFactoid

8,290 cfs would fill Notre Dame Stadium in about 42 minutes, but 20,200 cfs would fill Notre Dame Stadium in about 17 minutes!

Visit <http://waterwatch.usgs.gov> to find a gauging station nearest you and watch the flow of the Joe!

## FotSJR Announces *Al Smith Watershed Stewardship Award*

The Friends of the St. Joe River (FotSJR) Board of Directors established the *Al Smith Watershed Stewardship Award* this year to honor individuals who display a passion for the health of the watershed. The award is named in honor of FotSJR founder Al Smith who worked tirelessly to improve the St. Joseph River. Al passed away peacefully on April 5, 2011 at the age of 86.

The *Al Smith Watershed Stewardship Award* shall be awarded to a person who:

1. Shares their passion with others for the health of one or more rivers, streams and/or lakes of the St. Joseph River Watershed (HUC 04050001).
2. Has been active as an individual or as a key person in a business, organization or agency promoting stewardship in the watershed.
3. Is not required to be a current or past member of the Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotSJR).
4. Shall not be actively serving on the FotSJR Board of Directors.



This year, nominations were received and the Board members voted at the February 2012 meeting. Please join us at the Annual Meeting on March 26, 2012 to find out who won! The award winner will receive a lifetime membership to the FotSJR and a special traveling trophy that will be unveiled at the Annual Meeting.

More information on the award and the nomination process for next year can be found at <http://www.fotsjr.org/StewardshipAward>.



P.O. Box 1794  
South Bend, Indiana 46634  
[www.fotsjr.org](http://www.fotsjr.org)

## Support the Friends

The Friends of the St. Joe River are working with individuals and partner organizations to implement important restoration and protection projects throughout the watershed.

Pledge your support for our efforts by making a tax-deductible donation. Your support and generosity will help us improve and protect the quality of the water and other natural resources we depend on. Visit [www.fotsjr.org](http://www.fotsjr.org) for more information.