

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, December 20, 2012 – 1:00pm
Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, MI

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Directors: Matt Meersman, Rachel Smith, Eric Kerney, Daragh Deegan, Bruce Barton, Eldred Adams, Danielle Meersman
- Watershed Council: Chris Bauer, MDEQ; Bill Courliss, Union Lake Com. Assoc.; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph County DC; Karen Mackowiak, St. Joseph River Basin Commission; Jeff Reece, IMP; Lucas Gabbard, Hillsdale CD; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians; Joe Schmees, IDEM; Jen Miller, St. Joseph County CD; Kathy Worst, Branch County CD; Marcy Colclough, SWMPC
- Visitors: Roxanne Barton

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:00pm, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions.

Minutes of the November board meeting were approved as submitted with a motion by Eldred Adams and second by Rachel Smith.

Treasurers Report was presented by Treasurer Danielle Meersman detailing financial transactions from October 26 through December 20, 2012.

Old Business

Wetland Partnership Project –Rachel Smith summarized the Wetland Partnership Project for the group. Matt stated that a well-attended quarterly Wetland Partnership meeting was held earlier in the morning. He mentioned that data incorporation for this project is almost complete. He also mentioned that he and Marcy Colclough gave a presentation to the Harbor Authority and that he was pleased with the November outreach event that was held in Howe, IN. Matt said that he and Rachel Smith are working together to incorporate the Wetlands project into the Prairie River project that Rachel is working on.

Membership Development and Fundraising – Matt stated that he, Geoff Cripe, and Marcy Colclough, working with Jeff Reece, held a meeting with AEP marketing executives to propose the possibility of a fundraising partnership. Their proposal to AEP outlined the Water Quality Campaign – Point of Sale concept in which a donation option would be presented to AEP customers during the payment of their bills. Funds collected from this program would not directly benefit the FotSJR, but would be used to develop a granting fund that the Friends would oversee. Matt stated that AEP executives did not think that the idea would be feasible because in many cases AEP does not work directly with the end users of the electricity, but with municipalities that purchase the power from AEP and distribute it to customers in their community. However, Matt mentioned that the meeting was still a great success as several potential avenues for partnership were discussed: 1) AEP marketing folks are working on an advertisement campaign, which could also be used to benefit the Friends; 2) AEP is interested

in the Wetland Partnership project and could help with the promotion of the outreach events; 3) In the near future, AEP will be celebrating the birthday of the Elkhart Hydro Dam and is planning on holding an event to celebrate and promote the river. The friends could play a role in this event. 4) AEP, under their FERC licensing will soon become involved in the permitting process for private river projects including seawall construction. The Friends could assist AEP with outreach on this matter by promoting river friendly projects. A short discussion followed, where Marcy Colclough said she believed that the Friends is now in a position that it could act as a granting entity. Daragh Deegan stated that it might be beneficial to contact large wastewater utilities regarding the Point of Sale concept, but he wasn't sure if such a relationship could be established between a government entity and a private group. Matt mentioned that to ease some of this potential concern among municipalities and organizations, it might be possible to create an outside granting fund, so that funds are not directly given to the FotSJR. Eric Kerney suggested working with organizations to put promotional links to the FotSJR on their websites. Matt liked the idea and stated that it was also discussed with AEP.

Annual Meeting Planning – Matt mentioned that several directors' terms are expiring this year and that Geoff Cripe is heading up an election committee. Matt encouraged ideas from the group for new board members. Matt said that the theme of the Annual Meeting could revolve around the tribes in our watershed. He has had conversations with Eric Kerney and Grant Poole about the potential of getting someone from their respective tribes to speak. Grant stated that he has discussed the idea with someone from his tribe and she is interested. Eric mentioned that he is also working on enlisting another potential person from his tribe, and that he is very excited about the idea. Matt said that he is also interested in incorporating a short film into the annual meeting. A colleague of Matt's from the Van Buren CD is experienced with film and has done some film work for them, so he may be willing to help put a short film together.

The best date for the meeting appears to be Monday March 18th. Matt suggested modeling the times for this year's meeting, including the business meeting, off those from last year. Matt also mentioned that the serving of alcohol at last year's meeting did not detract from the event and suggested doing it again. Some discussion followed regarding promotion of the event through local media outlets. Several good media sources were provided by those in attendance. The Annual Meeting committee will work on putting together and distributing a press release as soon as the program details are finalized. Matt also showed the group a newsletter that Rachel Smith developed for the Prairie River Project that clearly illustrates Rachel's newsletter development skills. Rachel along with the other members of the newsletter committee might be able to develop a newsletter in time to promote the annual meeting.

New Business

St. JoeRiver.net Website Renewal – Matt stated that over the past few months Danielle Meersman has been working on renewing contracts with the hosts of both websites that are maintained by the Friends. Danielle said that she discovered that the host of the St. JoeRiver.net website, Net Nation, was pretty expensive compared to other companies and decided to switch hosting services to Go Daddy. Danielle said there will be significant savings with this move and also stated that the customer service with Go Daddy was very good.

Event Display – Matt stated that the event display is becoming deteriorated and is in need of a little touching up. Rachel Smith said that she would be willing to work on improving it. Matt also said that it would be nice if the event display could be brought to every board meeting, so that if anyone needed it for an event, it could be transferred at that time. Eldred Adams agreed to be the official keeper of the event display and to bring it with him to every meeting.

Other Items

Matt mentioned that the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi Indians is doing a study to investigate the possibility of reestablishing meanders back into five miles of the Dowagiac River. Matt, along with Marcy Coclough, described the significance of project.

Jen Miller with the St. Joseph County CD said that she is applying to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for a grant that would focus on stormwater outreach. Part of her project would include an update to the Heritage Trail Guide. She requested a letter of support from the Friends along with in-kind match towards the grant. Matt Meersman's time and expertise would serve as the in-kind match. A motion approving Jen's request was made by Rachel Smith and seconded by Eldred Adams.

Chris Bauer with MDEQ announced that Michigan's Volunteer River, Stream and Creek Cleanup Program has grants available for groups interested in carrying out cleanup projects. Chris mentioned that the grants could be used for purchasing tools and equipment to assist with river cleanups. The deadline to apply is January 22, 2013.

Kathy Worst with the Branch County CD announced that they are currently wrapping up their MiCorps grant that is focused on the Coldwater River Watershed. She mentioned that they ran into some complications with sampling last year and have added an additional quarter of sampling to their project. She also mentioned that her board has a desire to continue the project and will be looking for grant funds to do so.

Kathy Worst announced that the Branch County CD Annual Meeting will be held on March 9th and will celebrate their 65th Anniversary. She said that she has an excellent program lined up including talks on the Prairie River and the EHD virus that has impacted the deer population.

Jeff Reece with AEP indicated that AEP has initiated their draw down of the reservoir above the dam in Elkhart to prevent potential flooding caused by winter ice jams. The draw down started on December 17th and will be completed once the river is 2 feet below normal levels.

Next Meeting

Thursday January 24, 2013 at 1:00pm at the Three Rivers Public Library

Meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm