

**Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, February 27th – 1:00pm**  
**Three Rivers Public Library—Three Rivers, MI**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

- **Directors:** Matt Meersman, Danielle Meersman, Ron Niezgodski, Ray Leising, Eldred Adams, Daragh Deegan, Melanie Stoughton, Rachel Smith
- **Watershed Council:** Bob Jones, LaGrange SWCD; Jeff Reece, IMP; Zac Martin, Steuben County SWCD; Jen Miller, St. Joseph County CD (MI); Dave Foerster, Two Rivers Coalition; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner
- **Visitors:** Mike Miller, Blue Heron Ministries; Patty Hoch-Melluish, Kieser & Associates; John Senecal, Trading Post Canoe/Fluid Fun; Kathleen Petitjean, Greening the Bend

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:07 pm, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions.

**Minutes** of the January 2014 board meeting were approved as submitted with a motion by Eldred Adams and seconded by Ron Niezgodski. Motion carried.

**Treasurers Report** was presented by Danielle Meersman. A motion to accept the treasurer's report was made by Eldred Adams and seconded by Daragh Deegan. Motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Wetland Partnership Project**—Matt updated the group on outreach events that had occurred since the last monthly board meeting. To date, Matt and Marcy have met with planning commissions in St. Joseph, Elkhart, and LaGrange Counties in Indiana to discuss wetland restoration and wetland protection as planning and zoning options. Matt noted that Elkhart County is considering an ordinance where building will not be allowed on hydric soils in their regulations. The next landowner outreach event is currently being planned by Geoff Cripe and Eric Kerney, and will be held in April at the Pine Creek Reservation in the Athens area, focusing on the Nottawa Creek, and Pine Creek. Lastly, Matt updated the group on the progress on the data viewing side of the wetland project, noting that he has met with the Michiana Area Council of Government, who has worked in the past with the St. Joe River Basin Commission. An online GIS system will be launched and they may be able to display data for a larger region than their service area. Matt also met with the Michigan Dept. of Environmental Quality regarding their online GIS system, and will be meeting in March with the programming aspect of the project. This would help to generate some reports that provide specific information on various wetlands, different wetland functions, and a report in trends within the county or subwatershed based on the value queried. The question of the project timeline arose from the group, and Matt reported that it is required through the grant that all funds be expended by October 2014.

**Clean Water Campaign**—Matt Meersman noted that there are no new developments on the campaign since the last board meeting. John Senecal of The Trading Post Canoe and Fluid Fun in Mongo, Indiana was invited to attend the meeting to speak on the value of the Clean Water Campaign, and offered his insight into the developments of the project to date. John noted that he believes the best angle to take is to request a little from a large number of people, verses a lot of money from few. Aside from John Senecal, the only other private business owner approached to date has been by Geoff Cripe, and was

the restaurant Boundary Waters. Matt briefly noted that Bill Courliss is continuing to work with the Union City Public Works Department on a plan to include the campaign in the municipality's billing.

**Director/Officer Elections**—Matt summarized the nomination and election process for board members, noting that this year may be an officer election year. At least the position of Vice President will need to be filled due to Maria Mast moving out of state and resigning from the board. The position is temporarily being filled by Daragh Deegan. Matt stated that if any board member is willing to take on the role of Vice President, they would be responsible for assisting with website maintenance, and running board meetings in Matt's absence. To date, Matt reported that there are three board members that were up for re-election this year that do not wish to run again. The three board members that will not be running in 2014 are Geoff Cripe, Brian Musser, and Maria Mast. As of the last meeting, Rachel Smith had not had the opportunity to contact Eldred Adams regarding his interest in staying on the board. Matt asked Eldred at this time, and Eldred stated that he would like to continue to serve on the FotSJR board. Matt reiterated the discussion from the January board meeting regarding the potential candidates for new board members. Two of the three possible candidates were present at this meeting (Bob Jones of LaGrange SWCD, Zac Martin of the Steuben SWCD), and confirmed their interest in running for board member positions. The third candidate, John Law, who works in the same office as Maria Mast formerly did, although within the county surveyor department, was unable to attend the February board meeting, but through email correspondence with Matt Meersman, confirmed his interest in serving on the board. Rachel Smith, representative of the Nominating Committee, announced the slate of candidates.

**2014 Watershed Stewardship Award**--Matt reported that there were two nominations submitted for the award this year, with both nominations for the same person. A motion to accept the nomination of this individual as the recipient of the 2014 Al Smith Watershed Stewardship Award was made by Daragh Deegan and seconded by Ron Niezgodski. Motion carried. The winners name will be announced at the Annual Meeting in March.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Annual Meeting Planning**—Matt listed the tasks that are still in need of volunteers to complete for the annual meeting on March 14<sup>th</sup>, and noted that a significant donation was made by Indiana Michigan Power to help sponsor the event. Daragh Deegan offered to assist in gathering Silent Auction Items and organizing the paperwork that will be completed for both donators and auction item winners. Daragh also agreed to be responsible for reaching out to previous exhibitors to request their participation at the meeting, and informational inserts for the program folders. Daragh will also send an email invitation out to all Watershed Council members. Rachel Smith reported that there is a newsletter that is ready to be published and sent out that can serve as another means of outreach for the annual meeting. A question from the group arose regarding the cost of the newsletter. Rachel Smith noted that the cost would be comparable to previous years. A motion to approve Rachel Smith to spend up to \$500 on printing and mailing of the latest newsletter was made by Ray Leising, and seconded by Ron Niezgodski. Motion carried. Melanie Stoughton agreed to be responsible for purchasing folders and labels for the program packets handed out at registration. Matt announced that the Annual Meeting Planning Database has been updated and can be viewed in Google Documents for anyone seeking to assist on a specific task for the event.

**Calhoun CD Grant Support**—Matt reported that the Calhoun Conservation District is seeking support from the FotSJR for a pre-proposal submitted to the Great Lakes Protection Fund. The project the district is proposing would further implement conservation practices identified in the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program by offering incentive money to help complete necessary risk reductions identified in the assessment tools. A motion to approve a letter of support for the project was made by Daragh Deegan, and seconded by Ron Niezgodski. Motion carried.

**Other Items**

- Matt noted that he had received an email from Karen Mackowiak of the St. Joe River Basin Commission regarding issues involving a proposed wastewater treatment plant in the Edwardsburg area/Ontwa Township. Discussion ensued regarding the implications of such a proposal.
- Jeff Reese, of Indiana Michigan Power announced that from February 15, 2014 to July 31, 2014 the St. Joseph River Public Access above the dam in the Buchanan would be closed for canoe and kayak use. There will be extensive work at the substation, and the area above the dam will be closed.

**Next Meeting** will be held on Friday, March 14th at 2:00pm at Sturges-Young Auditorium in Sturgis, Michigan. The meeting will precede the Watershed Council Annual Meeting from 5-9pm.

Meeting adjourned at 2:52 pm.