

Friends of the St. Joe River Association, Inc.
Board Meeting Minutes
Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, Michigan
Thursday, September 23, 2010

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Directors – Bruce Barton, Eric Kerney, Jim Coury, Geoff Cripe, Rachel Smith, Rudy Kappe, Danielle Meersman, Matt Meersman, Ron Niezgodski, Melanie Stoughton, Dona Hunter
- Outreach Coordinator – Leah Cooper
- Watershed Council Members – Jeff Reece, Indiana Michigan Power; Marcy Colclough, SWMPC
- Visitors – Roxanne Barton; Brian Musser, Steuben Co. SWCD; Alex Bozymowski, Cass Co. NRCS; Adam Shedd, Cass Co. NRCS

Minutes of the August Board Meeting – One correction was made concerning the Branch County Conservation District water monitoring. The last sentence should have said “Sort and identify “macroinvertebrates” collected not water collected – October 6th (5:00 p.m.)”. A motion was made by Matt Meersman to approve the minutes as corrected; seconded by Rudy Kappe; motion carried.

Treasurer’s Report – Danielle Meersman, Treasurer, reported that there had been \$100 received from membership, with a profit year to date of \$500 and current assets of \$59,357. The Treasurer’s report was approved on a motion made by Rudy Kappe and seconded by Ron Niezgodski.

Outreach Coordinator Report – Leah Cooper reported that the newsletter had been completed, which everyone should have received. There were about 400 copies extra at no cost to FotSJR. She can now send those bulk mailing using the not-for-profit status of The Friends. Matt and Leah want to get some of the extra newsletters to all of the SWCDs in the watershed. She filled out an application for a \$500 grant to be used for outreach and education through Lunkers. She has not heard anything back from them yet.

The next newsletter will have an urban stormwater management focus, including the rain barrel program in Branch and Elkhart Counties. There will also be an article on the low impact development project in Dowagiac completed by the Pokagon Band showing some of the tribal influence in the watershed. Ron Niezgodski suggested the new stormwater CSO in South Bend, but Leah stated it had already been featured in the first issue of the newsletter. If there is room, there could be some articles tailored to address the various grant projects the FotSJR are involved with.

Leah and Matt attended a workshop in Indianapolis – Getting In Step. This is a watershed marketing program developed by EPA to aid in addressing environmental issues. Chris Bauer noted that she has information on this program also. Marcy mentioned a standardized survey developed for EPA by Purdue University and the University of Wisconsin, among others, for both ag and urban issues, to get information for watershed planning. She will send the link to Matt and Leah. It may be something to use for future planning in the watershed.

Partner Project Grant Match Tracking Sheet – Geoff Cripe and Matt Meersman have been working on developing a tracking sheet. The board needs to have a clear idea about what grant commitments have been made, including match requirements with the various partners in the watershed. Once they have tweaked the final format, it will be presented to the board. This will be an aid when preparing a budget in the future.

Wetland Partnership Project Launch – The contract was signed on August 30 with a start date of September 1, 2010. Matt is working on an announcement letter to go out to the partners, along with a packet of information about the project. They are working on the cooperative agreement with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment (MDNRE). MDNRE would like to begin the GIS work this fall. They would like to have the agreement signed and in place by October 1, 2010. The next step will be an agreement/contract between Leah Cooper and FotSJR for grant administration and outreach/education. There may also be a contract for the GIS prioritization portion of the project, along with agreements with the Land Conservancy, MSUE and SWMPC. According to the project timeline MDNRE will be working for five quarters to conduct their assessment of wetlands in the watershed. In the third quarter they will begin to develop criteria for wetland prioritization in the watershed.

The first meeting of the Wetland Partnership is scheduled for October 28, 2010 at 10:00 a.m. This is the same day as the regular board meeting for FotSJR and will be held at the library in Three Rivers. Both board members and partners are welcome to attend. Future meetings will be scheduled the same day as monthly board meetings. Leah is going to develop a page on the website about this project and for regular updates on progress being made.

Matt distributed a summary of the project including a work plan with timeline for completion. This will be sent to all of the partners along with a copy of their original support letter and an invitation to the October 28 meeting.

There was discussion about the contracts between Leah and FotSJR. The independent contractor status for Leah needs to be maintained so we need to be careful with wording when developing the contracts. There was discussion about whether two separate contracts should be developed, one for administration and one for outreach/education, or would just one contract be sufficient. Several of those present felt like one contract could be written to cover both responsibilities. Matt and Danielle, along with Leah, will work on those contracts and send drafts to the board for review by email.

Eric Kerney asked whether the wetland assessment would be completed using GIS or actually on the ground. They will be using GIS to look at every individual polygon in the watershed and ranking them according to what is found. This will provide a broad picture of the wetlands in the watershed and should be a good guideline for future work. This information will be used to supplement the NWI maps.

Commemorative Stone/Bench – Nothing more has been accomplished on getting pricing for the bench for Al and Margaret Smith. It will be on next month's board meeting agenda.

CR 17 Access Site Fees – Matt was contacted by a concerned citizen about the proposed access fees on CR 17 in Elkhart County. As part of the bridge reconstruction the access site was closed. Now that the project is completed and the access site upgraded the county commissioners are considering charging a fee to put in boats at the site. The fees would reportedly go to the Upper St. Joseph River Association for weed management on this portion of the river. Nuisance weeds have been a problem in this area. Matt was contacted by a paddler who was outraged about the fee and about the use of the fees. News broadcasts are saying that the weed removal should be an asset to the fish and fish habitat, but that is likely not the case. Jeff Reece stated that the land is technically owned by the county. I&M sold the land with a clause reverting the land back to I&M if the land was not used for recreation. Ron Niezgodski stated that the launch site was maintained by DNR for residents and non-residents of Indiana to get on the river. The committee members with the Upper St. Joseph River Association live on this stretch of the river and the impression is they want fisherman and boaters to pay for weed control on the river so they can swim and water ski. They have to get a permit each year for weed removal. Jeff Reece said the county owns the land and it is leased to DNR. Elkhart County could set the fee without a public hearing. A high fee makes it no longer a public access site, except for the rich. There are no fees on any other access site in the county. The fee should go to benefit all user groups on the river, not just one. Jeff Reece stated I&M would recommend a reasonable fee of less than \$25 – a user fee, not an access fee. There is a need to address Eurasian milfoil and purple loosestrife. The commissioners have the legal right to do this whether users like it or not. This is more of a moral or ethical issue. In Michigan some state owned access sites charge a fee to launch boats, but include free parking so you can put in a kayak or canoe without paying. Matt will write a letter addressing the concerns stated with the stance of not keeping people off the river.

Other Items from the Floor:

- Geoff Cripe reported the Land Conservancy has purchased a 124 acre property with 60 acres of wetlands in the Rocky River Watershed near Cranberry Lake. It was purchased with funds from a NAWCA grant and donations. This property will be a stop on the Three Rivers Fall Color Tour on October 17.
- Brian Musser with Steuben County SWCD invited the board to a Showcase Award Tour of the Pigeon Creek Watershed on October 7. They received the award as one of four districts recognized in 2010 in the State of Indiana.
- Jeff Reece reported they are beginning a 5' drawdown of the river at the Twin Branch Dam.

Next Meeting is scheduled for Thursday, October 28, 2010 at 1:00 p.m. at Three Rivers Public Library.

Adjournment – Matt Meersman made a motion to adjourn at 2:35p.m. Rudy Kappe seconded the motion; motion carried.