

Wetland Partnership Meeting Summary
Thursday, November 17, 2011
Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers, Michigan
Coordinated by Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotSJR)

Matt Meersman, President of FotSJR, welcomed everyone to the fifth quarterly meeting and asked for introductions.

IN ATTENDANCE: Maria Schaefer, St. Joseph Co., IN Department of Public Works; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band; Jim Coury, FotSJR Board of Directors; Brian Musser, Steuben Co. SWCD; Chris Bauer, MDEQ-WRD; Joe Schmees, IDEM; Nancy Brown, Elkhart Co. SWCD; Michael Sertle, Ducks Unlimited; Rachel Smith, Branch Co. Conservation District; Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Matt Meersman, President of FotSJR Board; Dona Hunter, LaGrange Co. SWCD and FotSJR Board Secretary.

Project Development & Updates: Matt passed around a map of the watershed showing the progress that has been made in coding the wetland polygons. MDEQ should have all of the polygons coded by the next quarterly meeting in February. They have not processed the coded polygons to determine functions yet. They will do that and assign the functional significance when they determine all of the functions that can be assessed, but if someone is working on a special project and needs the information for a specific area now, they may be able get it for them.

After the coding is completed and the functional significance is assigned, the next step will be prioritization of those wetlands. The prioritization will then be integrated into the final product. After that there will be a training done on how to access and use the information. This portion of the project should be completed in about six months.

Parcel Data Coverage: For most of the watershed it has been easier to acquire this data than at first suspected. There is still a problem getting LaGrange County data, but Martin Franke and Dona Hunter are continuing to work on getting it. Marcy has been in contact with the Berrien County. It is not common for Hillsdale County to share this information, but they will be making a stripped version available for this project. Calhoun County data should also be available soon.

Grant Administration: The fourth quarterly report was sent at the end of September, but no financial report requesting reimbursement was submitted. The next report is due the end of December and an invoice from MDEQ should be included.

The next steps will be to get contracts in place between FotSJR and the partners who will be receiving grant funds through the project. Marcy through SWMPC will be working on draft ordinances for municipalities using the wetland assessment

information that can be used when doing land use planning. Michigan State University Extension will be assisting with workshops to present the information and SWMLC will be working on outreach with individuals in the watershed.

So far very little grant money has been spent on the Wetland Functional Assessment. MDEQ has been utilizing other funds to aid this project, but Matt needs to know how much will be billed. In order to get this grant funded, several things were taken out or scaled back. It may be possible to use some of the funds earmarked for MDEQ for outreach with landowners.

Everyone needs to make sure they get their match contributions sent to Matt for the next quarterly report.

Outreach Strategy: Marcy passed out what she has started working on. She has Michigan information, but needs some assistance with information from Indiana. She has utilized other websites, etc. for this first draft. General wetland information in the first flyer can be added once the assessment is completed. The second hand-out is a very rough draft. It will cover incentives and resources available for landowners with the back having information for local governments. It may make sense to have two versions of this flyer – one for Indiana and one for Michigan – due to the differences between the two states – Townships in Michigan versus Counties in Indiana.

She talked about how to distribute brochures and flyers after they are developed. In an Iowa survey it was found that one of the main reasons landowners do not restore wetlands is because they do not know what is available. One on one contact with landowners works the best when sharing this kind of information. It will be important to develop a list of contacts in each county, including conservation districts, NRCS, USF&W, Ducks Unlimited and others who may know of individuals interested in wetland restoration.

Joe Schmees said he could share some Indiana information with Marcy. Ducks Unlimited, along with the State of Michigan, developed a “restoring wetlands” DVD that they will share with Marcy and Matt, along with a flyer that was developed.

Next Steps include completing wetland functional data, prioritization and developing contracts with partner organizations.

The next meeting will be held at 10:15 am on February 23, 2012 in the Three Rivers, Michigan Public Library.

Notes recorded by Dona Hunter, FotSJR Secretary.