

Wetland Partnership Meeting Summary
Thursday, August 25, 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 and asked for introductions.

IN ATTENDANCE: Eric Kurtz, Elkhart Co. SWCD; Angie Brown, IDEM; Joe Schmees, IDEM; Eric Kerney, Huron Band of Potawatomi; Brian Musser, Steuben Co. SWCD; Brian Gunderman, MDNR – Fisheries; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band; Karen Mackowiak, St. Joseph River Basin Commission; Rachel Smith, Branch Conservation District; Melanie Stoughton, Calhoun CD/FotSJR Board; Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Jim Coury, FotSJR Board; Matt Meersman, President of FotSJR Board; Dona Hunter, LaGrange Co. SWCD & FotSJR Board.

OVERVIEW OF WETLAND PROJECT - Matt gave a very brief overview of the project reminding everyone of the purpose of the grant.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND STATUS UPDATES - All of the preliminary coding of existing and historic wetland polygons should be completed in the next quarter. The spring of 2012 is the target date for the full functional assessment to be completed.

Matt gave presentations on the Wetland Partnership project to Waverly Township and to the Lions Club in Buchanan.

PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA - Matt is working on a project in the Black River Watershed that is very similar to the Wetland Partnership project. Most of the prioritization criteria he is using there will be applicable for this project. They grouped the criteria based on functional water quality and practicality and have added a third category – pollutant reduction potential. Using these three categories or any of the individual criteria, every current and historical wetland can be ranked. The goal is to identify the highest functioning wetlands for restoration and protection. The prioritization incorporated some criteria and methodology from earlier Michigan and Minnesota models. Matt and Marcy refined what was out there and made it better as they worked through the process. An updated copy of the Wetland Restoration Prioritization Model was submitted for everyone to review. The handout provided maps based on the Black River project showing information that can be acquired when the assessments are completed. The maps showed wetlands prioritized by functional water quality, pollutant reduction potential, practicality, and all three combined.

It is going to be very important to have parcel data from the counties to make the practicality ranking possible. Units of government need to be told that FotSJR use of the parcel data will allow all of the data developed under the grant to be shared with them, both historical and current. FotSJR has a draft agreement that can be signed with each county outlining the data that is needed, how the use is restricted and what will be shared with them in return. It will assure the counties that the parcel data will not be used for anything other than this grant. Right now GIS data has been received from Van Buren and Steuben Counties. Eric Kurtz will work to get the Elkhart County data and Dona Hunter will work with LaGrange County surveyor, Rex Pranger to get the information.

GRANT ADMINISTRATION - The third quarterly report was submitted in June, along with an invoice. A very small invoice was received from DEQ for the work they have been doing. It is important for everyone to submit their local match tracking sheets for in-kind. These need to

be submitted with the grant. There is a link on the website to these forms. Make sure everything is submitted, including mileage.

OUTREACH STRATEGY – Marcy reported that once the data collection has been completed the outreach program needs to gear up. In the grant the outreach program was to target two specific audiences – landowners and municipalities. For the landowners a flyer needs to be developed listing the wetland functions and then a mailing needs to be completed. For municipalities there are several things that should be developed, including model language for development of master plans, draft zoning and wetland ordinances, and custom maps for the high priority municipalities or those who are updating their master plans. Toward the end of this three year project a workshop for the municipalities needs to be hosted. At the end of the grant a wetland watershed tour should be held. Marcy would like to have two committees to begin working on these products. She asked for volunteers to help develop these materials. Suggestions for the committees include Brad Neuman with MSU Extension.

Marcy asked for any materials that are already out there focused on wetland protection or restoration with respect to local governments. It would be nice to be able to use them as a guide instead of developing all new materials. For the landowner portion of outreach the conservation districts could help host meetings focusing on protection and restoration of wetlands in specific areas. It will be important to bring EPA, USDA-NRCS, ACOE, Fish and Wildlife Service, etc. together and share with them what has been compiled from the grant.

NEXT STEPS – Matt will be presenting at the MI Wetland Association Annual Meeting in Traverse City on the Black River project. Matt is continuing to work on the prioritization strategy/criteria. Marcy will continue to work on the outreach strategy. Marcy again asked for volunteers to serve on the committees to begin developing the outreach materials.

NEXT MEETING – The next Wetland Partnership Meeting will be held on Thursday, November 17, 2011 at 10:15 a.m. at the library in Three Rivers.

Notes recorded by Dona Hunter, FotSJR Secretary.