

Wetland Partnership Meeting Summary
Thursday, May 24, 2012
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 May quarterly meeting and asked for introductions.

IN ATTENDANCE: Joe Schmees, IDEM Watershed Planning Branch; Chris Bauer, MDNRE Water Resources Division; Martin Franke, LaGrange Co. SWCD; Rachel Smith, Branch Co. CD & FotSJR; Melanie Stoughton, Cass Co. CD & FotSJR; Marcy Colclough, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission; Matt Meersman, Van Buren CD & FotSJR; Eric Kurtz, Elkhart Co. SWCD; Maria Engle, FotSJR and St. Joseph Co. Indiana Department of Public Works; Jim Coury, FotSJR; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians; Karen Mackowiak, St. Joseph River Basin Commission; Geoff Cripe, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy & FotSJR; Dona Hunter, LaGrange Co. SWCD.

STATUS UPDATE: Matt reported that he had conducted training for the merging of parcel data. Melanie has completed St. Joseph County, Michigan; Rachel Smith has half of Branch County completed; Eric Kerney is about 1/3 of the way finished with Calhoun County; Brian Musser has completed Steuben County; and Matt has almost completed Van Buren County. Brian will be working on LaGrange and Matt on St. Joseph County, Indiana. This merging of data should be completed by the next meeting at the end of the summer.

DATA AVAILABILITY: Landscape level functional data is completed for the entire watershed. Matt can provide it to anyone if you need it. Once the merge has been completed, prioritization can be added for the entire watershed. It can be completed earlier for a piece of the watershed, if needed. Matt has provided the information to Grant Poole. They will be working on a report to explain the data and how to use it. Two or three different templates will be developed to aid in the use of the assessment data once it is completed – individual template, county government template, and agency template. In its current form, it is limited as to what you can do with it, unless you are very GIS savvy. Meta Data files do not exist for any of the wetland function assessment data. Matt needs to talk to DEQ about providing that.

GRANT ADMINISTRATION: A contract needs to be entered into with Michigan State University Extension to aid with outreach to public officials. The quarterly report has been submitted to EPA. An invoice has been received from DEQ, which will be covered at the board meeting this afternoon. Marcy has been helping with those reports. The next quarterly report is due by the end of June.

OUTREACH STRATEGY: SWMLC has been contracted to assist with planning events to promote the project starting this summer. Combining with other organizations already planning on hosting workshops this summer will aid in spreading the word about the wetland assessment grant and how it can be used. In the beginning

workshop presentations should focus on protecting existing wetlands and then move into restoration possibilities. Possible locations for workshops include: In Cass County partnering with Meanders; Christiana Creek hold in South Bend or Elkhart County in conjunction with ERRR/MACOG and Gene Lightner; Pigeon Creek/Pigeon River with LaGrange and Steuben Counties.

One of the problems is there is no entity set up to hold small easements. There has been some discussion about the possibility of conservation districts serving as this entity. Landowners may want to protect these existing wetlands and to restore historic wetlands, but what is the incentive to conservation districts for holding the easements?

It was suggested trying to hold workshops this summer in Elkhart County focusing on Christiana Creek and one in May focusing on the Pigeon with Steuben County. Next year sometime it was suggested holding a workshop in the Ligonier area in conjunction with ERRR and Gene Lightner.

Other suggestions: 1) Develop a data base to track what is being done in the watershed toward both restoration and protection of wetlands; 2) Hold a celebration of the grant completion – maybe next year – with a tour of a couple of good projects, inviting county officials.

There is a meeting scheduled in Ft. Wayne on May 30 at the NRCS office at 10:00 a.m. with Rick Ward and NE Indiana Pothole Cooperative.

NEXT MEETING is scheduled for August 23 at the Three Rivers Public Library.