

Wetland Partnership Meeting Summary
Thursday, December 20, 2012
Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers, Michigan
Coordinated by Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotSJR)

Matt Meersman, President of the FotSJR, welcomed everyone to the December quarterly meeting – the 9th quarterly meeting for the Wetland Partnership Grant. He began the meeting with introductions of all those in attendance.

IN ATTENDANCE: Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Rob Zbiciak, MDEQ – Wetlands; Jim Hazelman, FWS – MIPLU; Scott Fetters, FWS – Warsaw, IN; Chris Bauer, MDEQ – WRD; Bob Jones, LaGrange County SWCD; Brian Gunderman, MDNR – Fisheries; Norm Cox, ACRES Land Trust; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians; Karen Mackowiak, St. Joseph River Basin Commission; Rachel Smith, Branch County CD; Eric Kerney, Huron Potawatomi Tribe; Matt Meersman, FotSJR; Michael Sertle, Ducks Unlimited; Kristin Schinske, SWMLC; Kathy Worst, Branch County CD.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT: Due to mostly returning members of the Partnership and attendees of past meetings being in attendance, Matt skipped over the normal project overview.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS & STATUS UPDATES: Matt announced that the Friends held another successful outreach event on November 7, at the Howe School in Howe, Indiana. This was the third official outreach event of the Wetland Partnership Grant, counting one in Branch County, Michigan, and one along Christiana Creek in Elkhart, Indiana. Matt explained that the wetland prioritization tool was used to develop a list of landowners that owned the most highly functioning wetlands for either protection or restoration in the local Fawn and Pigeon River watersheds. There was an approximate return of 7 to 10 percent of landowners that received letters in attendance at the event, with a total near 45 attendees including Friends and other Partnership members. Matt spoke at the event about the Partnership project and the important functions of wetlands. The local SWCDs gave a presentation on projects being completed in the area as well. Wood-Land-Lakes RC & D and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service were on hand to talk to landowners about potential wetland restoration/protection projects. Scott Fetters mentioned that he is already working with 3 landowners from that night on wetland projects. He has 2 landowners in LaGrange County and 1 in Steuben County, with the largest project near 100 acres.

Matt and Marcy had a recent meeting with Jeremy and Chad from Michigan DEQ to discuss the wetland prioritization tool and the final deliverable product. They were able to give them the final, merged parcel data. Matt and Marcy expressed that they felt it was a productive meeting, and that Michigan DEQ is excited about the prioritization methodology developed through the Wetland Partnership Project.

LANDOWNER OUTREACH EVENTS: Matt announced an upcoming event that is not associated with the Wetland Partnership Grant, but is similar in scope. He explained that through the Van Buren County CD 319 grant they are hosting 2 events on January

31, to discuss wetland functions in the Black and Paw Paw River watersheds. They will be held at Sarett Nature Center in Benton Harbor from 3 – 5 PM, and at Lake Michigan College in South Haven from 7-9 PM. Matt explained that the meeting locations were designed to be at the downstream end of the respective watersheds.

Matt stated that the group needed to begin thinking about the next outreach event for the Wetland Partnership Grant. There have been two events on the Indiana side and one on the Michigan side. He discussed that the group would like to target the next Indiana event on the Elkhart River watershed, but there are currently no clear choices for another event in Michigan. It was discussed that areas with ongoing projects should be considered. Matt said that he hoped the final Michigan DEQ data might provide information that could help the group decide on which watersheds to focus more of their effort in Michigan. Jim mentioned that there were several projects being completed near Berrien Springs, and Marcy followed that by stating Andrews University might be a good location for a meeting. Matt also discussed that there are areas in Cass and Van Buren Counties that have had large amounts of wetland loss, and this area might be good for targeted outreach. It was reiterated that the final data from the wetland prioritization model should be taken into account when deciding the next Michigan outreach locations.

MUNICIPAL OUTREACH STRATEGY: Matt said that he had hoped Julie Pioch, from Michigan State University Extension would be able to attend the meeting today, but was unavailable. He explained that a portion of the strategy is to work with her to include information about the wetland prioritization tool in the Citizen Planner program offered by MSUE. Marcy discussed that she has a few names of planners in Indiana to contact about the wetland prioritization tool, but would still like to get a good “model” community to showcase that may already include environmental provisions in their planning.

Matt and Marcy gave a presentation to the St. Joe Harbor Authority concerning the wetland prioritization tool. Matt explained that it was a perfect group to target. It was explained that they are concerned with sediment deposition in the harbor, and the tool could potentially indicate wetlands that would be useful for sediment retention in their watershed. Matt and Marcy are also giving a presentation to health departments in the Michiana area tomorrow to discuss pathogen retention potential in local wetlands. Matt also gave a presentation to the St. Joe River Home Owners Association.

Matt shared a few signs for the project he is working on in the Paw Paw watershed that will be installed near Benton Harbor walking paths and the golf course that recognize the restoration of wetlands and their function, among other benefits.

GIS PRIORITIZATION: Matt thanked Rachel, Melanie, and Brian for their work in merging the duplicate parcels in ArcGIS for use with the wetland prioritization tool. This work is now complete and was delivered to Michigan DEQ this past week. Matt talked with Michigan DEQ about the final deliverable and what it will be. Other GIS tools have been placed on a read-only CD and work as a standalone program, but Matt explained that the hopes for this project it would be an online tool. This would probably be

accomplished using ArcGIS Online, allowing for custom delineation of a watershed of interest. This would allow users to locate wetlands in their area of interest. Another function of the online tool would be the ability to query information about significant wetlands in the chosen area, as well as their functionality.

There was a lengthy discussion about what layers would be included in the online tool. Scott asked if county drains could be included, explaining that such a layer would be greatly beneficial in his restoration work. Matt explained that as Michigan DEQ works on the tool, they have been enhancing the current NHD stream layers in the process. He explained that tailoring the tool to specific uses, like Scott's, is something that can be considered as the final tool is rolled out.

NEXT STEPS: The next step is planning the final two Michigan outreach events, as well as the Elkhart River outreach event in Indiana. Matt explained that work still needs to be done with MSUE on the Citizen Planner portion of the outreach events, as well as outreach with Indiana planners.

NEXT MEETING: Scheduled for April 25, 2013, at 10:15 a.m. at Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers, Michigan.