

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 24, 2018 – 1:00 PM
Three Rivers Community Center – Three Rivers, MI

IN ATTENDANCE:

Directors: Carol Higgins, Dona Hunter, Danielle Meersman, Ron Niezgodski, Jeff Reece, Kim Sinclair, Jeff Wenzel

Watershed Council: Ron Johnson, Fabius Township; Tara Lee, Steuben County SWCD; Matt Meersman, SJRBC

Visitors: Bob Jones, Rebecca Shank, Melanie Stoughton, Kyle Boone, Pokagon Band; Bruce Howe, SWMLC

CALL TO ORDER:

President Jeff Reece called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m., welcomed everyone and asked for introductions.

MINUTES of the April 26, 2018 meeting were reviewed. Ron Niesgodski moved to accept the minutes as printed; Kim Sinclair seconded the motion. **Motion carried.**

TREASURER'S REPORT – Treasurer Kim Sinclair presented the financial report. Total Liabilities & Equity of \$67,646.76 was reported on the balance sheet. The Profit & Loss YTD Comparison showed a net income for the month of \$77.63 with YTD of \$297.53. Danielle Meersman made a motion to accept the presented Treasurer's Report; seconded by Jeff Reece; **Motion carried.**

OLD BUSINESS:

Strategic Planning Discussion

Bob Jones suggested focusing on a few items that were discussed at the last meeting. Those items included 1) Maintaining/updating website; 2) Newsletter; and 3) Outreach. Bob felt like working on these three areas might help get people more involved.

Outreach – the first step may be what is already being planned – holding monthly meetings at different locations in the watershed and inviting guests to attend. This might generate more information as to what is happening in the watershed and could increase membership. Matt pointed out that the original Friends organization was a group of retired folks meeting at the local coffee shops and going up and down the river doing primarily river cleanups. With the development of the watershed management plan (WMP) the makeup of the board changed. More resource professionals became involved to aid in supplying information for the resource concerns in the watershed and where the focus should be in the WMP. That has enabled the group to grow into a diverse group of individuals with the main focus on

the river. We need to continue to talk to other people in the watershed about work that is being done on the river and find new ways to share what is being accomplished. We need to develop a plan to recruit members, which is critical for the Friends to grow and maintain past momentum.

Website Management – Matt and Danielle have been responsible for all of the updates being made to the website. Under the grant Leah took on that responsibility and did a great job. Now there is no paid staff to take care of it and it fell to Matt and Danielle. A page on the website with contacts for watershed council members with their names and contact information would be beneficial. This needs to be updated. Kim suggested setting a goal of September to have that update completed. Hopefully someone(s) on the board of directors who has a good background in website management would be willing to step up and be responsible for updates. Bob also suggested giving administrator privileges to selected individuals on Wild Apricot to aid in keeping track of membership and contacts.

Newsletter – There were many good ideas shared concerning reinstating a Friends newsletter. Contacting members of the watershed council for news articles concerning what is happening in their portion of the watershed would be a start to accumulate information to share. The newsletter could be used for marketing and board member recruitment. Becky said the newsletter could be used to introduce the Friends and bring more people on the watershed council. It was suggested to try and get one newsletter each year as a start. Ron Johnson felt like maybe we should target trying to complete two. There is a large data base available and it would be easy to share a digital copy with this group. The size of the watershed makes it almost cost prohibitive to do a mass mailing. There is some money budgeted for marketing/promotion which could be used for development of a newsletter. Carol Higgins suggested working with the individual who develops the publications for the SWMLC to see if they would be willing to assist and how much it might cost. Tara Lee with Steuben Co. SWCD would be willing to help with putting it together once she is back from medical leave in September. Patty with Kieser & Associates has expressed an interest in helping with a newsletter, along with Lisa Harris. Carol also suggested having newsletters available just to hand out at various events to help in promotion of the Friends and recruiting new members. Dona Hunter committed to pursuing costs of newsletter development and printing by the next meeting. She will try and get costs for a newsletter, along with a promotional brochure. Kim and Matt will both share contacts they have for possible quotes.

2018 Meeting Schedule/Locations

The discussion continued from the last meeting on dates and locations for monthly meetings for the remainder of 2018. It had been suggested at the April meeting to rotate the meeting throughout the watershed. This would allow directors and watershed council members the opportunity to visit different parts of the watershed and to possibly learn more about what was happening in the watershed.

The following is a list of meetings for the remainder of 2018:

- June 28, 2018 – Par Gil Natural Resources Learning Center, LaGrange, hosted by LaGrange County SWCD. Lunch will be provided with the opportunity to paddle from the Trading Post in

Mongo or just walk the trails at Par Gil. Jeff Reece will not be able to make the June meeting due to having to have knee surgery and Jeff didn't think that Daragh was going to be able to attend either. Jeff asked Ron Niezgodski if he could chair the meeting and Ron agreed;.

- July – No meeting scheduled
- August 23, 2018 – Kim Sinclair will host the meeting in Paw Paw, Michigan with a presentation on invasive species. More information to follow.
- September 27, 2018 – Three Rivers, Michigan Library (Unless another location is determined)
- October 25, 2018 – Three Rivers, Michigan Library (Unless another location is determined)
- November & December – No meeting scheduled

NEW BUSINESS:

SWMLC Jones Area Conservation Plan

Bruce Howe with the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy presented a summary on the Jones Area Conservation Plan which was started in 2014 under the direction of Geoff Cripe. Bruce distributed a copy of the plan to those present. The Project Purpose is listed as follows:

“With the natural and undeveloped landscape surrounding it, Jones, Michigan provides an opportune setting for focused conservation efforts. Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) developed the Jones Area Conservation Plan, which provides a locally-informed vision for present and future conservation in the region based around identified conservation corridors, and conservation values – including water quality, wildlife habitat, and recreational assets. Through the expansion of conserved land, site-specific restoration, and protection of natural resources, SWMLC and its partners seek to facilitate the creation of an exceptional greenspace that will sustain and enrich the region’s quality of life for generations.”

A diverse committee was formed to identify the conservation value of the area using GIS analysis and the committee's knowledge of the area. The plan was finished in 2015, but nothing moved forward. In late 2017 the plan was reviewed and a new Executive Summary was written. It focused on creating and preserving a world class greenspace. They are now sharing the concept and vision while trying to locate landowners interested in participating in the protection of these wildlife corridors.

Ron Niezgodski made a motion that a letter of endorsement be sent to the SWMLC from the FotSJR in support of the Jones Area Conservation Plan. Carol Higgins seconded the motion; **Motion carried.**

Other Business:

Carol Higgins reported that funding will be disappearing for the Michigan Land & Stream Monitoring Program. There are a number of lakes in the watershed that use this service. She asked that anyone

having connections with Michigan legislators, please make contact with them encouraging this funding be continued.

Kim reported that funding under a grant to address Japanese knotweed and other invasive species (phragmites) is being reduced dramatically for the second tier of funding compared to the first tier. This is also an important grant for counties battling these invasive species.

Next meeting will be on Thursday, June 28, 2018, at 1:00 p.m. – Par Gil Natural Resources Learning Center, LaGrange, Indiana.

Adjournment: Danielle Meersman moved to adjourn; Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion. **Motion carried.**

Minutes recorded by Dona Hunter, Secretary