

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, June 27, 2019 – 1:00 p.m.
Par Gil Natural Resources Learning Center – LaGrange, Indiana

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Directors: Carolyn Grace, Carol Higgins, Eric Kerney, John Law, Ron Niezgodski, Jeff Reece, Dona Hunter
- Watershed Council Members: Ron Johnson: Tara Lee, Steuben Co. SWCD; Janel Meyer, Steuben Co. SWCD; Jim Hess, Elkhart Co. SWCD; Matt Meersman, St. Joseph River Basin Commission Director; Roey Marcon, LaGrange Co. SWCD
- Visitors: Jamie Miller, Indiana DNR; Jordan Beehler, Branch Co. CD; Pete Kelly; Patrick Wiltshire

CALL TO ORDER – Jeff Reece called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and asked for introductions of those present.

MINUTES of the May 23, 2019 meeting were presented for approval. [Pat Wiltshire asked if the board had discussed setting up a display at Riverfest in Middlebury in August. This item was discussed in the minutes from the last meeting.] **Ron Niezgodski made a motion to approve the minutes; motion seconded by Carolyn Grace; motion carried.**

TREASURER’S REPORT – In Treasurer Kim Sinclair absence, Jeff Reece reviewed the financial report she had submitted. The only income came from membership dues and Amazon Smile. Kim and Danielle Meersman are checking on the use of PayPal through Wild Apricot InfiniPay. **The treasurer’s report was approved on a motion made by Carol Higgins and seconded by Ron Niezgodski.**

OLD BUSINESS

- **STRATEGIC PLANNING** – Facebook and the newsletter had been discussed at the last board meeting and there was nothing new to report. Carol Higgins brought up the subject of the best way to distribute news releases. Kim Sinclair had just completed a workup on the watershed stewardship award winner and had asked Carol if she was interested in distributing it to the counties in the watershed. Carol wondered if it would be better to have it sent from an email address that would be more readily recognized than hers by the news media that was receiving it. One thing was agreed on by all is that any news release being sent should go out using FotSJR letterhead. Matt Meersman agreed for this news release that he will directly contact Kim and have her put it on the FotSJR letterhead. He will also forward the FotSJR letterhead to Carol, along with a list he has of media contacts throughout the watershed. Then Carol could forward it on using that list.
- **STRATEGIC PLANNING** – The next thing discussed was a policy to handle funding requests. Matt Meersman said that in the past a grant program has been discussed, but the board is not ready to take that step yet. Matt proposed that a voluntary committee be formed to work on a set of guidelines for requests to fund special projects in the watershed and then bring the proposal back for board approval. He suggested John Law, Daragh Deegan, Jeff Reece, Kim Sinclair and himself as members of the committee. **Eric Kerney made a motion to create the committee to put together guidelines for funding requests; Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion; motion carried.**

- **Watershed Stewardship Winners** – Jeff Reece reported that the website has been updated with the Watershed Stewardship information. Matt thought it looked great and he complimented Jeff for getting it completed.
- **2019 Meeting Schedule:**
 - July – no meeting – Jeff Reece encouraged everyone to support Matt in his upcoming kayak race.
 - August 22, 2019 @ Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers, Michigan – 1:00 p.m.
 - September 26, 2019 – Hosted by Daragh Deegan in Goshen ???
 - October 24, 2019 – Macog in South Bend, hosted by St. Joseph River Basin Commission
 - November and December – no meetings
- **Booth at Riverfest in Middlebury on August 24** – Pat Wiltshire will be working with Roey Marcon and LaGrange County SWCD to set up information and display. Dona has newsletters and the portion of the display that they want to use. The board appreciates Pat and Roey for setting up a display.

NEW BUSINESS

- **I&M/AEP Sponsorship** - I&M/AEP had been in contact with Jeff Reece about sponsorship support for 2019 for FotSJR. No funding had been donated for events in 2018, due to organizational changes. In the past they have donated from \$1,000 - \$4,000. Jeff will send a letter outlining the events/projects that funding could be used for in 2019. He will include watershed council celebration in March, newsletter funding, and Leadership Academy Scholarship.
- **Branch County CD Funding Request** – Jordan Beehler, while working for the Elkhart Co. SWCD, had built an automated reality sandbox to show water movement across a watershed. It is connected to a computer and you can automatically see the water flow. 80,000 people saw the display in Elkhart County last year. Over the last 3 years it has been viewed by 163,000 people. It was displayed at the Indiana State Fair. The 30" x 40" stand that is table height and has a rolling cart that can be set up at almost any event. Since she is now working with Branch Co. CD she wants to build another one. It would be available for use throughout the St. Joseph River Watershed, but primarily supported by Branch, St. Joseph and Kalamazoo Counties in Michigan. The cost for a commercially built unit is \$7,000 - \$10,000. The one they built in Elkhart County was about \$2,500 for the hardware, computer, projector, camera, and the box. It would be available for use in all counties in the watershed. Jordan went on to explain that conservation districts in Michigan have no base funding from the state, like Indiana SWCDs have. The Michigan CDs would provide maintenance, upkeep and materials, once the sandbox is built. Her proposal is to build one unit and house it in the Branch County CD for use throughout the watershed. The Elkhart Co. unit is housed in libraries when it is not in the schools. It is an excellent tool for teaching about watersheds. There will be a fee schedule set up for use outside the watershed. When Elkhart Co. took it to the state fair they charged a fee. Jordan anticipates it will take about 3 months for completion. **John Law made a motion to fund the \$2,500 for the automated reality sandbox; Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion. The motion was amended to include acknowledging the FotSJR on the box, and to support the project as described in the original letter Jordan submitted. Motion carried with the added suggestions. Carol Higgins abstained from the voting because of her involvement with Van Buren County CD.**

OTHER/ANNOUNCEMENTS:

- Matt Meersman asked for the board's continued support of the St. Joe River Races in South Bend in Veterans Park scheduled for September 28. In the past the registration has been handled through the FotSJR website and FotSJR paid the insurance. All the money spent comes back to FotSJR. **John Law made a motion to provide support to the St. Joe River Races; Carol Higgins seconded the motion; motion carried.**
- Carolyn Grace thanked the FotSJR for supporting her attendance at the Watershed Leadership Academy sponsored by Purdue University. It took a lot of time for all the preparation, but she felt it was well worth the time and the money. She and her partner developed 30 lesson plans which will be used in the South Bend schools.

Lake George Conservancy District Development Presentation – Jamie Miller, Water Resource Planner, Indiana DNR Project Development Division:

Jamie Miller is a water resource planner with the Department of Natural Resources. Her primary responsibilities are working with lake outlet structures, dam safety grants and conservancy districts. Her presentation focused on Indiana/Michigan Conservancy Districts and specifically Lake George. In Indiana there have been 135 conservancy districts formed since 1957 with 85 still active. Lake George is the newest proposed conservancy district and is the only one that involves two states – Indiana and Michigan. Jamie gave an interesting and informative presentation outlining legal requirements in both Indiana and Michigan in order to form a conservancy district. Lake George is a 538 acre lake located in Steuben County in Indiana and in Branch County in Michigan. There are more acres of the lake in Indiana than in Michigan. The Lake George Conservancy District is being formed to deal with flood prevention and dam repair, along with aquatic weed control. A petition in Indiana was circulated to landowners on Lake George in 2017 and submitted to the Natural Resources Commission in 2018. Approval of the conservancy district was granted for Indiana on August 24, 2018. Now a plan needs to be prepared and submitted for review in July. Michigan began the process at the same time with 70% of landowners in the Michigan side of the lake agreeing to form a conservancy district. Before they can move forward a legal lake level for that portion of Lake George needs to be established. That legal level was established in Indiana in the early 1930s. That decision in Michigan is now in the attorneys' hands with a decision expected in the near future.

Jamie said that the important thing to take away from this is that it took dedicated people in Indiana and Michigan on Lake George moving forward to form the conservancy district. The conservancy district will provide an avenue for Lake George residents to repair the dam in order to prevent the possibility of future flooding in the area.

Everyone in attendance appreciated the information which Jamie had to share. Not many realized the legal responsibilities that are placed on the committee to make this come about.

NEXT MEETING – August 22, 2019 at Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers, Michigan

Adjournment – The meeting was adjourned on a motion made by John Law and seconded by Ron Niezgodski.

Minutes recorded by Dona Hunter, Secretary.