

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 18, 2016—1:00 PM
Three Rivers Public Library—Three Rivers, MI

IN ATTENDANCE:

Directors: Melanie Stoughton, Bob Jones, Ron Niezgodski, Ray Leising, Matt Meersman, Danielle Meersman, John Law, Jeff Wenzel, Daragh Deegan

Watershed Council: Carolyn Grace, St. Joseph County CD; Bill Courliss, Union Lake Association

Visitors: Jeff Reece, FotSJR Member

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm, thanking everyone for rescheduling the meeting to a week earlier, and called for introductions.

Minutes of the January 2016 board meeting were reviewed to approve. A motion to approve the meeting minutes was made by Jeff Wenzel, seconded by Ron Niezgodski. Motion carried.

Treasurer's Report was presented by Danielle Meersman. Danielle noted that there has been \$650 of event income from annual meeting signup. Total net income was noted and detailed on the report provided, with the total assets at \$61,899.19 for the year. A motion to approve the treasurers' report was made by Bob Jones and seconded by Daragh Deegan. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Regional Conservation Partnership Project Update—Matt briefly summarized conversations that took place at the January board meeting. Matt noted that in regards to the original promise of technical assistance positions being placed within three designated Conservation Districts, NRCS in Michigan changed their mind regarding the funds that were promised by agency. Discussion regarding the lack of participation at a field office level in Michigan, and the level of enthusiasm about RCPP overall within Area 3 ensued. Matt noted that FotSJR is listed as a project partner on this grant, and that it would be perhaps in the best interest of the association to have a letter drafted to NRCS and MDARD requesting updates on the project to date, as well as to provide further comments regarding the lack of implementation of this program by both the State and Area 3 offices. Melanie Stoughton offered to draft a letter for review by the FotSJR board for the next meeting.

Annual Meeting Planning— Matt announced that the Annual Meeting is one month from today. Matt asked Daragh whether any donation items had been received yet. Daragh noted that he had received an item from Ray Leising. Matt noted that Eric Kerney sent a message regarding two auction items that he has for the silent auction. Matt announced that there has been a steady flow of registrations for the annual meeting. Matt thanked Grant Poole for his assistance on putting the flyer for this year's event together. Matt asked Danielle to send the flyer via snail mail to those members that do not use email. Matt announced that the meal will be the same as the previous year. Matt provided an update about speaking with keynote speaker Bob Barr. Daragh noted that Melanie Stoughton, Ray Leising, Jim Coury, Bruce Barton, and Ron Niezgodski all have terms ending this year, with Ray Leising being the only board

member that is not term limited. The nominating committee (Daragh Deegan and John Law), had spoken with Jeff Reece, Roxanne Barton, Bill Courliss, and Dona Hunter, and all have agreed to run for board seats. Matt discussed Zac Martin's board seat, and the possibility of Ray Leising being appointed for the last year of Zac's board term. Matt noted that there will be a slate of candidates to vote on for the annual meeting, and the board will appoint Ray Leising to serve Zac Martin's last year of his term during the annual meeting as well, per an agreement with Ray Leising during the February board meeting.

Matt noted that Daragh Deegan had inquired about possibly recognizing members of the group that will be stepping down after many years of service. Daragh noted that he specifically thought of Eldred, Ruddy, and Jim. Bob Jones will bring the same presentation station, and screen for the presentation as he had provided for last year's event.

NEW BUSINESS

Watershed Stewardship Award— Matt noted that voting for the award is completed. Matt will get the award from the St. Joseph Library back, and engraved for this year's recipient. Matt will coordinate with the nominator for the meeting. It was noted that a press release on the recipient of last year's award was not completed, or submitted, and that it was important to have that done ASAP for this year's recipient. Melanie Stoughton suggested writing an article highlighting both winners to make up for the mistake.

Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant—Matt announced that he is working with Sara Peel on a grant proposal, due the week of March 14th. Matt will meet with the drain officials from Michigan and Indiana to gather support for the project. Matt noted that four of eight commissioners/surveyors are already committed to coming to the annual meeting. Matt is working on relationships with the County Surveyors in the Indiana portion of the watershed, and will be speaking at the St. Joe River Basin Commission meeting about the grant proposal as well. Ron Niezgodski suggested that Matt ask Jeremy Reiman to get in touch with Indiana commissioners to increase support and foster stronger working relationships for this project. In regards to Michigan Drain Commissioners, Matt noted that he has had difficulty getting support and participation from the Berrien County Drain Commissioner. Discussion regarding drainage law ensued. Matt would like to do a survey to get an idea of how much time is being spent in each county working in the drain, preparing assessment roles and holding public meetings. A brief summary on the project was given, with Matt noting that the verification of best management practice implementation would be best suited to Conservation Districts. Part of the grant would include expanding the coverage of an online tool that estimates changes in sediment delivery from land cover and management changes. More information will be provided via email if necessary.

OTHER

- Melanie Stoughton announced that the MDNR awarded two projects to be completed within the watershed. The Van Buren CD and Kalamazoo CD were each included in the formation of Cooperative Invasive Species Management Areas (CISMA)s that will focus on outreach, education, and the beginning stages of invasive species removal over two years. Melanie

noted that the two projects together totaled over \$550,000.00, and that the projects are expected to begin in April.

- Melanie Stoughton also announced that there is a job opening at the Branch CD for a Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative (CTAI) Technician. This position is housed out of the Branch CD office, and covers Branch, St. Joseph, and Kalamazoo Counties. Applications are due March 1, 2016.
- Matt will be speaking at the Presbyterian Church in Elkhart near Island Park on various environmental issues within the St. Joseph River Watershed on Sunday, February 28th at 5:00 pm. John Law and Jeff Reece requested information be sent to them regarding the event.
- John Law announced that Marcy spoke at the St. Joe River Valley Fly Fishers meeting regarding the Pucker Street dam removal project last night, and did an excellent job explaining a very controversial issue.

A motion to adjourn the meeting at 2:20 pm was made by Jeff Wenzel, and seconded by Daragh Deegan. Motion carried.

NEXT MEETING

The next business meeting is scheduled for Friday, March 18, 2016 at **2:00 p.m. in the lower level of the Sturges-Young Auditorium in Sturgis, MI.**