

**Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, August 23, 2018 – 1:00 P.M.**  
**Paw Paw Township Hall – Paw Paw, MI**  
**Hosted by: Van Buren County Conservation District**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

**Directors:** Bill Courliss, Carolyn Higgins, Eric Kerney, John Law, Ron Niezgodski, Grant Poole, Jeff Reece, Kim Sinclair, Dona Hunter

**Watershed Council Members:** Joe Parman, Tara Lee, Matt Meersman, Ron Johnson

**Visitors:** Josiah Hartman, Tom Estrem, Jason Thapp, Patty Hoch-Melluish, Rudy & Karin Kappe, Roey Marcon, Kalli Sternaman, Eleanor Serocki

**CALL TO ORDER:**

President Jeff Reece called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. Jeff welcomed everyone to the meeting and asked for introductions. He also expressed his sincere thanks to Ron Niezgodski for standing in as president in Jeff's absence at the June meeting.

Kim Sinclair welcomed everyone attending to Paw Paw on behalf of the Van Buren Co. Conservation District. Van Buren County is called the fruit basket of Michigan, due to all of the fruits grown in the area, including cherries, blueberries, grapes, etc. She also had prepared cups of blueberries for everyone to enjoy during the meeting. She urged everyone to pick up a cloth market bag made of 85% recycled cotton. Inside the bag were a pen, pad of paper, removable tattoo, the 2018 Local Food and Farm Guide, a flyer with agricultural highlights of Van Buren County and a coaster made from recycled tires. She mentioned that with the conservation district's recycling program they have collected over 4,000 tires this year.

**MINUTES** of the June 28, 2018 were reviewed. Being no changes Bill Courliss moved to accept the minutes as printed; Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion. **Motion carried.**

**TREASURER'S REPORT** was presented by Treasurer Kim Sinclair. The only change from June was an addition of \$.37 cents interest, bringing the Total Liabilities & Equity to \$67,647.32. Bill Courliss made a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report; Carolyn Higgins seconded the motion. **Motion carried.** Kim reported that she had filed the 990 certification with IRS for the year.

**INVASIVE SPECIES PRESENTATION – ELEANOR SEROCKI**

Eleanor Serocki with the Michigan Association of Conservation Districts gave an excellent program on invasive species focusing in Southwest Michigan. The research being conducted and eradication methods used are happening under a grant funded program. The following is a brief (and I hope accurate) summary of her presentation. She described 4 invasive species that are the biggest threat right now in Southwest Michigan. They are:

- European Frog Bit – a small lily pad that forms dense mats on the top of waterbodies. It kills off submerged plants by depleting the oxygen. It moves by fracturing and the over wintering buds can stick to sides of boats and transported from one waterbody to another.
- Flower Rush – grows densely in 10' of water. It affects the nesting birds and limits boating and swimming access.

- Phragmites – A tall reed reaching 15’ plus in height with blue green corn like leaves. It has large seeds heads which allows it to multiple rapidly and push out the native plants. It also limits nesting bird species. It also can be spread through ballast water. At one time it was planted by Boy Scouts.
- Japanese Knotweed – Grows to be 10-15’ tall. It is an ornamental plant that is dense and fast growing. Its roots can break through hardtop and concrete. It increases the potential for erosion and bank collapse and is very easily spread. Very specific chemicals are used to kill it.

How to minimize the threats of invasive species:

- Managing introductions is cheaper than managing the populations. Early detection and rapid response is the best deterrent.
- Best things to do - CLEAN your boats upon removal from water; DRAIN all water from ballast tanks, live wells, etc.; DRY for 5 days in the sun or dry with a towel; DUMP all left over bait in the trash, not in the water or on the land. It is actually illegal to have weeds on boats and water in bilges. Michigan is setting up more and more boat washing stations.
- Increase education about invasive species.
- Monitoring and Detection – download the app on your phone so that you can immediately report sightings through Midwest Invasive Species Info Network (MISIN). These sightings are posted on a map.
- Cross Boundary Cooperation is also key to controlling invasive species.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

**STRATEGIC PLANNING – NEWSLETTER UPDATE** – At the June meeting a newsletter committee was formed. Dona Hunter agreed to take the lead with Grant Poole and Eric Kerney as members. Dona contacted Carol Higgins after the meeting and asked her to join the committee and she agreed. The committee has not met since the June meeting but will schedule to meet before the next board meeting to begin outlining ideas for a newsletter. Dona has received some quotes for printing costs and has been in contact with Patty Hoch-Melluish and Lisa Phillips who both had expressed an interest in assisting. Jeff Reece expressed an interest in using social media to promote and share information about the organization. The committee will be looking at the possibility of creating a newsletter to send by regular mail and by electronic mail. It would also be good to have an updated newsletter to use as a hand out for all the counties in the watershed at various events throughout the year. A report will be given next month.

**2018 MEETING SCHEDULE & LOCATIONS** – There will be two more meetings in 2018. Next month’s meeting will be September 27, 2018 at Three Rivers, Michigan at the library. The October meeting will be on October 25, 2018 at the Community Center in Dowagiac, Michigan. Grant Poole will be organizing that meeting and have more information in September. Jeff asked if the meeting notices needed to be sent out more than a week before the meeting. Since there have been some changes in location, maybe send out just a notice of the meeting location and date a couple of weeks before with the meeting packet is sent out a week before. Another concern was if everyone was receiving the information about the meeting. Joe Parman had not received a notice and wouldn’t have known the meeting was in Paw Paw, if Matt Meersman hadn’t stopped by the office. It is possible that some of this could be due to security on computer systems and the message may have been kicked directly to spam. Jeff will look into it. Since there will no meetings in November and December, plans for the March 2019 Watershed Celebration should be a part of the September agenda. Then in January an attempt should be made to set up a meeting schedule for 2019 so that everyone would have it ahead of time in order to plan on attending.

**MIDDLEBURY RIVERFEST BOOTH** – Pat Wiltshire and Roey Marcon will be setting up and manning the booth at the Riverfest scheduled for this Saturday, August 25. Matt met Pat and gave him the display and hand-out information to use. Roey has a watershed model from the LaGrange County SWCD that she will be adding to the display.

**CAFO (green algae) INVESTIGATION – UPDATE FROM GRANT POOLE** – At the June meeting Matt share a packet of information he had received from a concerned citizen about a “toxic sludge” issue in the waters of the river which they feel is being caused by a Confined Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO) in the area. Grant talked with Jennifer Chang with DEQ, but has not visited the site. He plans to do that before the next board meeting. No water sampling is being done in that area to document water quality concerns. Grant has the packet. He will bring it to the next meeting and will share it with Carol by email, since she was not at the last meeting. The pictures in the packet were taken in 2017 and there have been no pictures taken in 2018 that he is aware of. Right now Grant is just trying to document the complaint. Concerns were raised by several members at the meeting about this organization being perceived as a so called “watch dog”. Most feel that the states should be encouraged to do more testing. Kim brought up the “Right to Farm Complaint Line”. Concerned individuals can call in and file a report on a “suspected” violation. A technician then is assigned to go out and meet with the farmer and work out a solution to the problem. Everyone feels that a letter needs to be sent to the person who sent the original packet from the Friends. Grant will take care of that once he has had a chance to visit the site and follow up with DEQ. Grant will report at the next meeting.

#### **NEW BUSINESS:**

**CITY OF SOUTH BEND CSO PLAN REVISION** – Jeff received a request for a letter of support for the South Bend CSO Plan Revision. The letter was initiated by Kieran Fahey and Daragh Deegan. Matt said that the St. Joseph River Basin Commission has also been asked for a letter of support. The original plan agreed to by the City of South Bend and EPA, if fully implemented, would cost billions of dollars and was cost prohibitive. Already millions of dollars have been spent to reduce sewer overflows. Since the plan was initiated a lot has been learned about green infrastructure and the benefits. South Bend is the most heavily monitored CSO system in the world and they are nowhere near the levels they are required to be in order to release the overflow. EPA and the Department of Justice have agreed to allow changes to the original plan. The new plan will be much better than the old plan and only cost about 1/3 of the original amount. The alternative plan will include green infrastructure and monitoring. John Law made a motion to submit the letter of support prepared by Daragh Deegan; Carol Higgins seconded. **Motion carried.**

**SCOPING MEETINGS FOR CONSTANTINE DAM FERC LICENSE APPLICATION** – Jeff Reece reported that there will be two scoping meetings held on August 28 and 29, 2018 at the Village Hall in Constantine, Michigan. The purpose of the meetings is to take public comments for the relicensing of the dam. Jeff asked Grant and Eric if they could possibly attend representing the native tribes in the area. Jeff is planning on attending and asking them to address the Indiana Bat and possibly invasive species, after hearing the presentation from Eleanor. Once all comments are compiled as a part of the environmental assessment, a plan will be put in place that will become a part of the licensing requirements. Everyone who has an interest in this project should plan on attending one of the meetings. Jeff encouraged everyone who attends to make sure they mention that they are members of the FotSJ, but not necessarily representing the views of the organization.

**LETTER OF SUPPORT** – Eric Kerney requested a letter of support for the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi Environmental Department proposal for USEPA 319 funds for a Non-Point Source Assessment Report and Management Plan including the Pine Creek and Lower Nottawa Creek Watersheds. Water improvement best management practices (BMP) will be located primarily on Tribal Lands, though any watershed program will involve multiple stakeholders living in the basin. The 30 Day Public comment Period for the plan begins on August 17 and commences on September 15. The plan document is located online for review. Bill Courliss made a motion to submit a letter of support for this project; Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion. **Motion carried.** Grant will assist in putting together a letter of support for board review before the next board meeting.

#### **OTHER ANNOUNCEMENTS:**

- **PROJECT ON ELKHART RIVER IN BENTON** - Josiah Hartman and Tom Estrem with Cardno Consulting Firm were at the meeting to see if there was any interest from the group to partner with or

support a project on Elkhart County Parks Department Land at Benton to improved and enhance the millrace to aid in fish passage. Now is the time to begin researching grants and start the conversation with organizations who might be interested in being the grantee on this project. They will also be talking to St. Joseph River Basin Commission about their support and/or interest. The board agreed there could be some interest there, once a proposal was developed. Daragh has already expressed an interest in such a project.

- **HEALTHY HOME FAIR** – Sponsored by Van Buren CD at Ely Park, Hartford on September 12, 3-7 p.m. Kim shared a flyer with everyone.
- **FARM TO TABLE PROGRAM** – Carol Higgins invited everyone to attend their program also on September 12. Contact her for more information.

**Next meeting will be Thursday, September 27, 2018 at the Three Rivers, Michigan Public Library beginning at 1:00 p.m.**

**Adjournment:** John Law moved to adjourn: Kim Sinclair seconded the motion. **Motion carried.**

Minutes recorded by Dona Hunter, Secretary