

**NOTES FROM THE 5TH ANNUAL ST. JOSEPH RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL MEETING
“IT’S A SWAMP THING!”**

Monday, March 26, 2012 – Sturges-Young Auditorium, Sturgis, Michigan

The 5th Annual St. Joseph River Watershed Council Meeting was a huge success with over 95 people in attendance – the most ever to attend the yearly celebration of successes in the St. Joseph River Watershed.

Participants received a packet containing information on membership to the Friends, current newsletter, a list of current board members and an evaluation form. Also included in the packet were summary sheets highlighting ongoing activities in the watershed, including information on the Wetland Partnership Grant Project, along with information from Steuben Co. SWCD – Pigeon Creek Watershed Management Project; Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy – wetland protection/restoration, along with outreach and conservation projects in the Rocky River WMP area; Fabius Township, St. Joseph County, Michigan – helped to create and enforce the Wetlands Protection Ordinance, along with an ongoing education program throughout the township; St. Joseph River Basin Commission – serving portions of seven counties in the St. Joseph River Watershed in Indiana; Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi Environmental Department – conducting water monitoring throughout the tribal properties in Calhoun County, along with restoration efforts; Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy with Ducks Unlimited and their northeast pothole program working with 170 landowners throughout northeast Indiana; LaGrange County SWCD – ongoing watershed projects in Little Elkhart River, Pigeon River, and Fawn River Watersheds.

The meeting began with registration and social time at 5:00 p.m. allowing participants the opportunity to view displays set up by various organizations throughout the watershed highlighting new and ongoing activities. This also allowed those early arrivals to begin bidding on silent auction items.

At 6:00 p.m. Matt Meersman, President, welcomed everyone to the annual meeting, introducing members of the board to the audience. Matt then gave a report on some of the activities going on in the watershed. He focused on Elkhart River Restoration Association and Three Rivers Coalition and their activities. He also gave an update on progress being made with the EPA Wetland Partnership Project.

The next important item on the program was the presentation of the 1st Watershed Stewardship Award. Matt recognized the two individuals who had been nominated – two very worthy candidates. The nominees were Bob Owens and Gene Lightner. This year’s winner was Bob Owens.

After a delicious dinner prepared by the staff at the Sturges-Young Auditorium, Matt announced the high bidders on the silent auction items. He then introduced the evening’s speaker. Tom Springer, Senior Editor, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, presented his program, “It’s a Swamp Thing: How to Help the Public Care about Marshy, Mucky & Ducky Places.” Tom shared his belief that you can make everyone fall in love with a buggy, snake-infested, boot-sucking swamp just by sharing with them the very practical important reasons to protect those wetland areas. Tom is the author of “Looking for Hickories: The Forgotten Wildness of the Rural Midwest”, which he had on hand to autograph for those interested in purchasing this interesting book.