

RiverCurrents

WINTER /SPRING 2020

A Publication of the
Friends of the St. Joe River Association, Inc.

Rain in the forecast?

What a changing climate means for our watershed

Join the Friends of the St. Joe River for dinner and inspiration at the 13th Annual St. Joseph River Watershed Council Celebration in Sturgis, Michigan. Matt Meersman will lead us in celebrating our watershed and our efforts to keep it healthy. Our keynote speaker will share the latest science on climate in our basin and we'll talk about what we can do to build resilience as we face the future.

13th ANNUAL ST. JOSEPH RIVER WATERSHED COUNCIL MEETING

DATE: March 20th, 2020
TIME: 5:00 to 9:00 pm (EDT)

LOCATION: Sturges-Young Center
201 N. Nottawa Street
Sturgis, Michigan

COST: \$25.00 / person
includes dinner and program
cash bar available

REGISTER BY: March 16th, 2020

AGENDA:

5:00 - 6:00 pm Registration/Social Time
Cash Bar/Bidding Begins

6:00 - 6:15 pm Welcome/Opening Remarks

6:15 - 6:30 pm Award Presentation

6:30 - 7:30 pm Dinner (Bidding Continues)

7:45 - 8:45 pm Presentation by:
Ms. Melissa Widhalm

8:45 - 9:00 pm Questions & Final Comments
Auction Check-Out

Registration & Additional event details at:
www.FotSJR.org
fotsjr.outreach@gmail.com

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Should we expect current weather patterns to continue? What do models predict for our area? Preparing for future rainfall events is critical as we think about water management locally. If you want to know what the experts say about our climate in the future and how it could impact our lakes, streams and rivers, you should come to this event.

This year's keynote speaker will be Ms. Melissa Widhalm, from the Purdue University Climate Change Research Center. Melissa serves as the program coordinator for the Indiana Climate Change Impacts Assessment, a statewide effort to help citizens better understand climate change. Ms Widhalm will help us understand regional climate predictions and think about their impact on our water resources and infrastructure in the St. Joseph River Watershed.

SILENT AUCTION

There will be a silent auction from 5:00 - 7:45 pm. Winners will be announced at the conclusion of the meeting. Previous auctions have featured canoes & kayaks, local beer & wine packages, native plants, hand painted rain barrels, and locally made maple syrup!

REGISTRATION & PAYMENT

Register Online, or by mail. Online payments processed through PayPal. If paying check or money order, make payable to: FotSJR, P.O. Box 1794, South Bend, Indiana, 46634

About us

The Friends of the St. Joseph River Association, Inc. was established in 1994, and operates as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization

Mission

To unite a diverse group of stakeholder throughout the watershed in a collaborative effort to protect, restore and foster stewardship of the St. Joseph River Watershed

Become a Friend

Join a group of stewards restoring and protecting this natural resource. We offer a variety of tax-deductible membership levels for both Personal and Business contributors.

Meetings

Monthly meetings of the Board of Directors and Watershed Council are usually held on the fourth Thursday of the month at the Three Rivers Public Library, Michigan, at 1:00 pm EDT. These meetings are open to the public. For more information and to verify dates and times, visit:

www.fotsjr.org

or on Facebook at:

www.facebook.com/FotSJR/



Top Left: Over 250 students from Union City Elementary get a hands-on exploration of landscapes and watersheds with the Augmented Reality Sandbox. Article Link: <https://www.thedailyreporter.com/news/20191002/augmented-reality-sandbox-offers-hands-on-learning>

Progress Towards Removal of High Priority Dams

by Daragh Deegan

In 2011, the Friends partnering with several other organizations, released an inventory report of fish migration barriers in the St. Joseph River Watershed. As part of the inventory report, dams within the watershed were prioritized for removal based on several criteria including their ecological impact. Although it's taken a while, two high priority dams are currently being removed.

The Pucker Street Dam, located in Niles, is currently being removed by the City of Niles along with several other partners. Removal of the Pucker Street Dam will restore fish passage for 159 miles of mainstem and tributary habitat in the Dowagiac River.

The Elkhart River Dam, located approximately ½ mile upstream of the Elkhart River confluence with the St. Joe, is also currently being removed. This project will benefit approximately 15 species of fish in addition to opening up approximately 40 miles of stream habitat for fish migration.

A third high priority dam, the Parkville Dam in St. Joseph County (MI), is also currently being planned for removal. The St. Joseph County Conservation District, along with other partners are working towards its removal. Stay tuned with the Friends for more updates and information on these important river projects.



2020 PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I hope everyone enjoyed their holidays during our November and December break from Monthly meetings. I also wish that 2020 will prove to be as fruitful, engaging, and informative as was 2019. The FotSJR was able to accomplish a number of things this past year that proved beneficial, in my estimation, with help from so many members and stakeholders.

When the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) announced its efforts to send several interested persons to the **2019 Watershed Leadership Academy** (at Purdue University in West Lafayette, IN), the FotSJR stepped up and supported two additional sponsorships from the St. Joseph River Watershed to participate in a wonderful learning experience at this academy. The FotSJR Board agreed in 2019 to support two more individuals to attend the upcoming 2020 Watershed Leadership Academy at Purdue. The experience and knowledge these folks bring back to our watershed and to their organizations after attending the leadership academy is immeasurable!

Through the wonderfully creative efforts of member **Jordan Beehler** (and some funding from FotSJR), an **Augmented Reality Sandbox** was made available for public use through **Branch County CD**. She had built a similar AR Sandbox while she was with Elkhart County SWCD in Indiana and it was widely popular there. This AR Sandbox, via a laptop and sensors, allows one to see how water movement is accomplished through and across a watershed. It is a great hands-on tool for kids to explore how water flows across the St. Joe Watershed! **Over 800 students at 8 schools** and organizations have had a chance to interact with the AR Sandbox. Kudos to Jordan!

In our continuing efforts to travel around the watershed for our monthly Board meetings, we had several meetings in Indiana (2 in South Bend, 1 in LaGrange, and 1 in Angola). I am hopeful that the Board will make it to the **Benton Harbor/St. Joseph area, back to Angola, Dowagiac, or Paw Paw** again, and perhaps a new location for 2020. While most of our meetings will be in Three Rivers, other meeting locations around the watershed allow us to get engaged with members and stakeholders that cannot make the jaunt up/over to Three Rivers. Consequently, when we do make the effort to see a different part of the watershed, the FotSJR Board always comes away knowing a little more than we all did before we visited.

Through the efforts of Board member Grant Poole, Pokagon Tribe staff, the FotSJR now can be found on Facebook. Take a look to see what's happening around the watershed, "like" us, and follow us on social media via: <https://www.facebook.com/FotSJR/>

Please try to attend one of our Monthly Board meetings, but if you cannot make one of those, then please attend our **Annual Watershed Celebration Event in Sturgis on March 20th** this year. The FotSJR has lined up a wonderful speaker (Ms. Melissa Widhalm with the Purdue Climate Change Research Center); Matt Meersman will return again as our host for the event, and we promise there will be an evening of good food and drink, and great people to network with.

On behalf of the FotSJR Board and its officers I sincerely hope to see you there!
---Jeffery Reece, President

Al Smith Watershed Stewardship Award 2019 Winner Kevin Haight



Kevin Haight is passionate about protecting the Paw Paw River and raising awareness around issues involving the river. Kevin has served as President of the Two Rivers Coalition (TRC) for several years and has been instrumental in developing and promoting the Paw Paw River Water Trail (PPRWT).

His belief is that getting people out on the river will make them better stewards of the resource and more willing to fight for protection of it. Kevin has also been critical in developing and maintaining a presence on social media for sharing information about TRC and the PPRWT.

Kevin's passion for the river has been evident in the many public presentations he has provided over the years. One of his earliest efforts to bring attention to the river was his "Paw Paw River Odyssey" where he paddled all 66 miles of the Paw Paw River and blogged about his experiences. Kevin's leadership of the TRC and his efforts to bring attention to the Paw Paw River are exceptional.

Kevin affectionately refers to the St. Joseph River as the "Big Branch of the Paw Paw." His passion for the Paw Paw River, which he shares with many people every year, is unending.

Are Your Community's Trees River Friendly?

The St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) is currently working with six communities in the watershed on a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative funded project to:

1. Assess the community's Urban Tree Canopy (UTC)
2. Identify ways to improve their UTC that maximize stormwater infiltration
3. Secure tree stock (1-2" caliper) and volunteers for planting ~50 trees

The following communities were selected based on criteria including size, need, capacity of Department of Public Works, demonstrated interest in trees and a strong volunteer contingent:

- Angola, IN
- Buchanan, MI
- Coldwater, MI
- Middlebury, IN
- Sturgis, MI
- Syracuse, IN

If your community is interested in assessing its UTC to maximize stormwater infiltration contact the SJRBC to learn more.

Thanks!
Matt Meersman | Director

St. Joseph River Basin Commission
227 W. Jefferson Blvd. | Rm. 1120 |
South Bend, IN 46601
t: 574.287.1829 xt.800 |
www.sjrbc.com

CREATURE FEATURE

Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*)

Often times when considering wildlife in the St. Joseph River Watershed, the great blue heron is a prominent symbol that comes to mind. This large bird is often observed perched on a log stalking fish, or wading in the shallows of our local waterways. Their elusive cousin, the green heron, is not as well-known due to their small size and their shy demeanor. This beautiful little bird can be seen along the shores of the St. Joe and other water bodies, but they spook easily, sometimes only offering a quick glimpse as they fly away. The green heron is a compact, stocky version of the blue heron with a velvet-green back and chestnut body. They primarily eat small fish, but are willing to eat many other small animals. They are known to sometimes use a lure, such as a feather, to attract fish. Although green herons are consid-



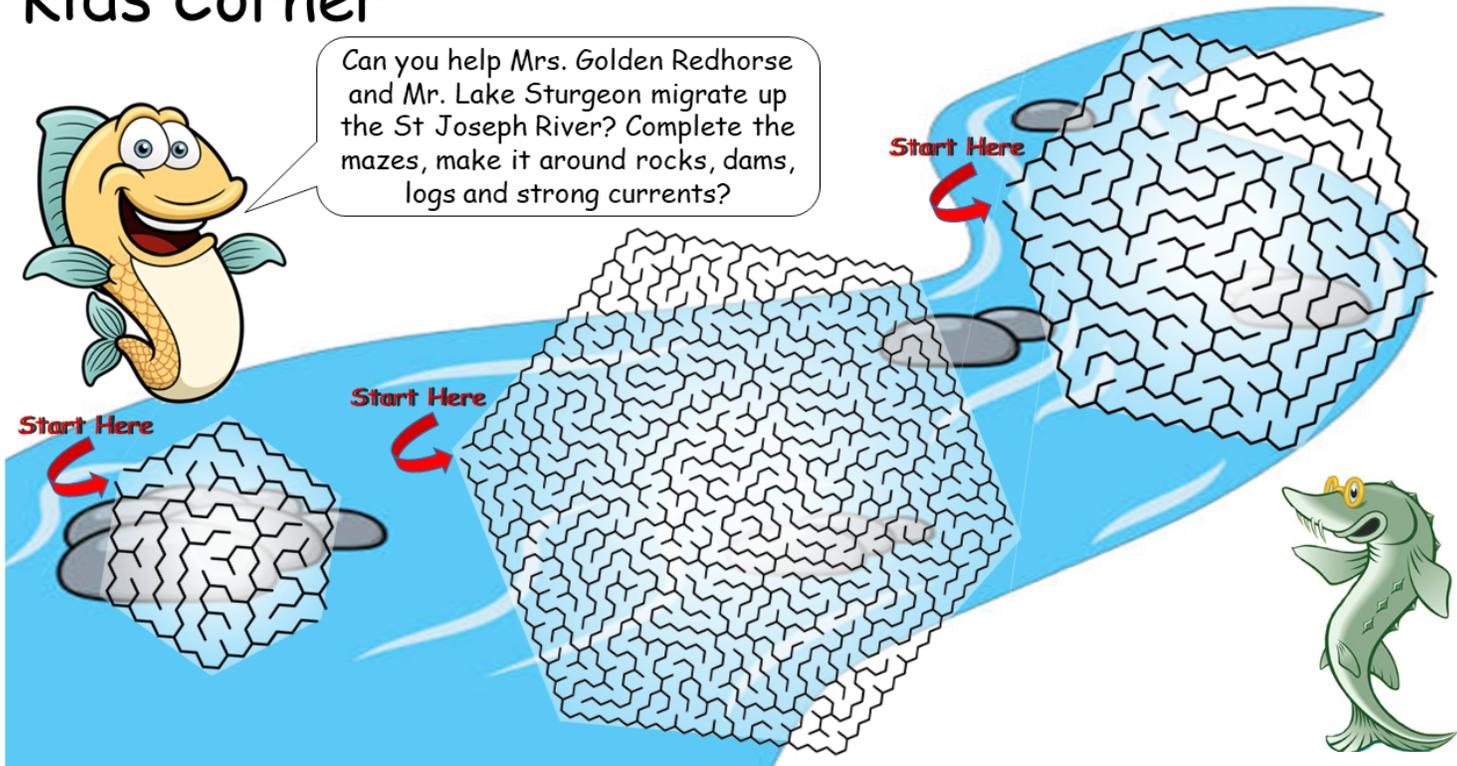
Conservation Status: Apparently Stable

ered common across their range, their populations have declined mainly due to wetland habitat loss. - Daragh Deegan

Kids Corner



Can you help Mrs. Golden Redhorse and Mr. Lake Sturgeon migrate up the St Joseph River? Complete the mazes, make it around rocks, dams, logs and strong currents?



P.O. Box 1794
South Bend, IN 46634
www.FotSJR.org

Support the Friends

The Friends of the St. Joseph River are working with individuals and partner organizations to implement important restoration and protection projects throughout the watershed.

Pledge your support for our efforts by making a tax-deductible donation. Your support and generosity will help us improve and protect the quality of the water and other natural resources we depend on.