

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, 11/17/11 – 1:00 p.m.
Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, Michigan

IN ATTENDANCE:

- **Directors:** Eldred Adams, Bruce Barton, Geoff Cripe, Daragh Deegan, Danielle Meersman, Matt Meersman, Brian Musser, Maria Schaefer, Ron Niezgodski, Melanie Stoughton, Dona Hunter
- **Watershed Council:** Chris Bauer, MDEQ Water Bureau; Joe Schmees, IDEM; Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Jeff Reece, Indiana Michigan Power; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner
- **Visitors:** Rachel Smith, Branch Co. Conservation District; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and asked for introductions.

Minutes of the October board meeting were approved on a motion made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Melanie Stoughton.

Treasurer's Report for November was presented by Danielle Meersman, Treasurer. There was not much activity this month. Assets remain around \$50,000. The report was approved on a motion made by Eldred Adams and seconded by Ron Niezgodski.

Wetland Partnership Project – There was a steering committee meeting held this morning. Most of the counties in the watershed have cooperated in providing the GIS parcel data. Still need to get data from Calhoun and Hillsdale in Michigan and LaGrange in Indiana, but feel like it will be available eventually. The outreach strategy for the grant was discussed at length during the morning meeting. The next step is to develop contracts with the partners who will be providing assistance with the grant once the wetland assessment is complete. Matt will be working on that over the next couple of months.

Outreach Coordinator Contract – Leah Cooper is working under two separate contracts – the Wetland Partnership Grant for three years and a one year contract for FotSJR outreach. That one year contract expired in October. Leah is not too concerned about it, but we need to get a new one put together. Matt has talked with her extensively about the current contract, tasks, and amounts assigned to those tasks. Currently the contract is for paying her “not to exceed \$15,000”. Matt recommended that the new contract should restructure the service details and list task items with different amounts. Some changes need to be made with the task items, allowing us to budget better. Some of the task items were probably budgeted too high and can be reduced. Matt recommended getting the contract amount “not to exceed” down to about \$7,500. Concerns were raised about lowering the cap too much, but also concerns were voiced about using all of the money that has accumulated over the years. There are not enough funds coming in to keep the organization sustainable. Board members may be able to step up and volunteer to complete some of the tasks. An addendum can be added to Leah’s contract very easily, if other duties arise.

This generated a lengthy discussion about how to raise funds to maintain the organization. Chris Bauer suggested the need to step back and look at the big picture and discuss how we are going to raise funds. Leah can concentrate on some very basic tasks, like the website, newsletter, publication flyers, etc. and have the board develop a fund raising strategy. Grants can't be used to sustain this organization. This year might be the year to support an aggressive fund raiser at the annual meeting. Jeff Wenzel suggested contacting the people who actually live on the river and ask for \$100 donation from each. During the outreach phase of the Wetland Partnership grant will be an excellent time to promote FotSJR. Also might want to look at promoting the organization at other wildlife events, like Ducks Unlimited and Pheasants Forever. We need to identify various groups and individuals along the river and in the watershed where we might be able to pull financial support.

Ron suggested that Matt work with Leah on a new contract including changing the service tasks and amount paid for each. Once Matt and Leah have come to an agreement, Matt will email the contract to all board members for their review and approval so it can be completed before the next board meeting.

Board of Directors – Right now five directors' terms expire every year. This year 4 of those 5 are officers. Matt Meersman, Danielle Meersman, Dona Hunter, Rudy Kappe, and Eric Kerney are up for re-election. We need to try and fix this at the March meeting, when new directors and officers are elected. Officers change every two years, so something needs to be changed to make sure all officers would not be going off the board at the same time. Melanie Stoughton said she would be willing to serve as secretary for this coming year.

The nominating committee is Geoff Cripe, Daragh Deegan, and Ron Niezgodski.

Annual Meeting Planning – A date, theme, speaker, and location need to be determined for the annual meeting soon. Brian Musser, Matt Meersman, Marcy Colclough, and Rachel Smith agreed to help plan the meeting. Sturgis is a great location for the workshop. Eldred Adams will talk with Sturges-Young Auditorium to find out available dates. Monday, March 12 or Thursday, March 22 were suggested as long as they did not coincide with March Madness. Things to consider for this annual meeting are:

- Report on watershed projects that might be replicable in other parts of the watershed.
- Allow 5 minutes to share reports on accomplishments in the watershed, or have information in hand-outs or on a display.
- Tom Springer would make a good speaker. He works for the Kellogg Foundation, have written a book, is a great speaker and very entertaining.
- Use this meeting as a fund raiser, invite more people and maybe consider having alcohol available.

December Meeting – Matt and Danielle will be out of town on the regular scheduled meeting date. On a motion made by Dona Hunter and seconded by Melanie Stoughton, the December meeting will be canceled. The next meeting will be held on January 26. Both the nominating committee and the annual meeting committee will need to be working on plans between now and then.

Other Items:

- Matt reported that the fall newsletter has been distributed.
- The final report for the Fish Migration Grant will be on the website soon.
- Eldred knows of a fund raiser who would work with us for no charge and may be able to help us come up with some funding raising ideas. He will be in contact with him.
- Christiana Creek Coalition will have it's not for profit status and 501 c 3 soon.
- Look for information on the website about – Farming for Future – 11/30; Wetland Restoration Workshop in New Troy on 12/8/11; and Two Rivers Coalition annual meeting on 12/14/11.
- Jeff reported that there are interpretive signs for the Mottville projects, along with directional signs off of US 12.

Matt reminded everyone that he would be working on Leah's contract, contracts for the wetland partnership project, and plans for the annual meeting. Date, location, and speakers will need to be determined before meeting again in January. Also the nominating committee will be in contact with board members whose terms are expiring to see if they are interested in running again.

Meeting adjourned on a motion made by Marie Schaefer and seconded by Ron Niezgodski.

Minutes recorded by Dona Hunter, Secretary.