

**Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, April 23, 2015—1:00 PM**  
**Three Rivers Public Library—Three Rivers, MI**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

- **Directors:** Matt Meersman, Melanie Stoughton, Bob Jones, Ron Niezgodski, Danielle Meersman, Ray Leising, John Law
  - **Watershed Council:** Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph Co. Drain Commissioner; Jeremy Reiman, MACOG/SJRBC; Carolyn Grace, St. Joe (MI) Conservation District; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band; Bill Courliss, Union Lake Association; Dennis Bradley, Fabius Township
- Visitors:** John Bagley, Michigan Nature Association; Jim Jackson, Elkhart County SWCD

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions.

**Minutes** of the March 20, 2015 board meeting were not available for review, and were tabled until the May board meeting.

**Treasurer's Report** was presented by Danielle Meersman. Danielle summarized a profit and loss report focused on the annual meeting, noting an increase in profits from the previous year. Danielle reported that current net assets are \$60,375. A motion made to accept the treasurer's report as presented was made by Ron Neizgodski, and seconded by John Law. Motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Annual Meeting Wrap-up:** Matt summarized the agenda and highlights of the evening. Matt reported that the silent auction this year was a great success. Matt updated the meeting attendees on the Watershed Stewardship Award, noting that Marcy Colclough was the recipient of this year's award. Matt would like a press release written recognizing Marcy as this year's Watershed Stewardship Award winner, and asked if anyone would be willing to help. Matt noted that the article could be written using last year's press release, nomination information, and the speech given by Jim Coury at the annual meeting. Melanie Stoughton offered to help Matt out with completing an article regarding the stewardship award, and will get the information from him at a later date. Ron Neizgodski stated that he really enjoyed Jim Patchett's keynote presentation, and wished that there could be more time dedicated to his topic. Discussion regarding planning of the 2016 annual meeting ensued. Dennis Bradley, of the Fabius Township Citizen's Coalition noted that perhaps anthropologic history as a topic this year could be of interest for the keynote speaker. Melanie Stoughton suggested Michigan author Jerry Dennis as a potential speaker on both historical and environmental aspects of the

Great Lakes Basin as a whole. Matt Meersman requested meeting attendees to start thinking about individuals that are dynamic speakers on various watershed topics. Bill Courliss from the Union Lake Association recommended that the board select the date as soon as possible. Potential dates of Friday, March 4<sup>th</sup> and Friday, March 11<sup>th</sup> were discussed, with Friday, March 11, 2016 set as the tentative date.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Project Update**—Matt summarized the scope of the partnership project, noting that the funds will come through the Natural Resource Conservation Service to landowners in the form of cost share. Marcy Colclough provided more information regarding the project progress, including a meeting with NRCS (MI&IN) to develop a project contract. At the present time, the contract for the project is sitting in Washington D.C. Marcy noted that during the contract negotiation meeting, NRCS discovered they had forgotten to set aside funds to carry out the technical assistance needed for the project. They decided that 20% of the total funds awarded would be earmarked for technical assistance. Marcy summarized the different strategies between Michigan NRCS and Indiana NRCS regarding the execution of technical assistance in both states, noting that Michigan NRCS is currently discussing a plan similar to the Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative technicians (CTAIs) that are employed by Conservation Districts. Indiana NRCS appears to want to wait and see if their current staff could handle the workload, and may move positions around to accommodate for extra work. Marcy reported that she had received an email from Jack Knorek from the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development informing her of a “public signing” of the RCPP documents scheduled in East Lansing on May 1<sup>st</sup>. Marcy will send out an email to the board members if the event is open to everyone. A meeting for MI NRCS and CDs is scheduled for May 4<sup>th</sup> from 9-12 at the St. Joseph County ISD to discuss the plan for this partnership project. Matt noted that FotSJR partner contributions (in-kind match) include help prioritizing and developing rankings for landowners interested in the program.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Letters of Support—**

**1. City of Elkhart**—Matt Meersman presenting for Daragh Deegan: The Elkhart dam is up for re-licensing through the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The City of Elkhart would like Indiana Michigan Power (IMP) to consider improving the canoe access and installing a small parking lot, in their re-licensing plans for the dam. In Matt’s request from Daragh, he asked for a letter from FotSJR supporting the City’s request for access improvement. Ron Neizgodski asked how soon the letter was needed, noting the importance of avoiding a conflict with a long time partner in IMP, as the company has supported the annual meeting and donated funds towards the association for many years. Matt assured the board that he would reach out to IMP to make sure they understood our position if a support letter was provided. John Law stated there are requirements regarding access being provided, and noted that

currently that requirement is met at minimal level. Dennis Bradley asked about the cost of the entire project. Matt Meersman replied that the City of Elkhart would cover the cost of engineering, with the hope that IMP would cover the cost of improvements. A motion to support the project was made by John Law, seconded by Ray Liesing. Motion carried.

**2. Kalamazoo CD/St Joe CD**—Melanie Stoughton announced that the Kalamazoo Conservation District will be submitting a grant proposal to the Great Lakes Commission on a project with the Delta Institute. The project is modeled after a Reverse BMP Auction carried out by the Van Buren Conservation District. If funded, the project would focus on three subwatersheds of the Portage River Watershed; (the Indian Lake subwatershed, Bear Creek-Butternut Creek subwatershed, and the Goose Lake Drain-Portage River subwatershed). Approximately \$145,000 will be designated solely for direct payments to landowners installing best management practices. Melanie stated that a support letter was not needed at this time.

**3. Van Buren CD**—Matt Meersman announced that the VBCD is also submitting an application through the Great Lakes Commission for a project within three tributaries of the Paw Paw River Watershed. The scope of the project includes providing cost share for conservation practices decreasing phosphorus runoff, with a focus on controlled tile drainage. A demonstration site showing how the practice is implemented in field would be installed with grant funds. Matt explained how controlled tile drainage uses a water control structure at the end of the tile line to set to the elevation of the saturation point of the field, and by stacking boards to store the water, a producer can manipulate the saturation of the soil based on the needs of the crop, and the timing of planting or harvest. The practice is currently being used throughout southeastern Michigan and the VBCD hopes to increase BMPs like this in SW Michigan through their project. Dennis Bradley asked whether the controlled tile drainage could lead to a decrease in the need for irrigation. Matt suggested that it could. Danielle questioned whether FotSJR was able to offer multiple letters of support for different projects that are requesting funding from the same source. Matt Meersman noted that the FotSJR has historically supported many projects within the watershed that often compete with one another in terms of the funding source, and that from a watershed association standpoint, supporting many projects benefits the group as a whole. A motion to draft a letter of support with outreach of in-kind support valued at \$500 was made by Ron Neizgodski , and seconded by Jeff Wenzel. Motion carried. Melanie noted that while a letter of support including in-kind match was not needed with the grant application she mentioned earlier, a letter of support from FotSJR similar to that given for the VBCD project would be appreciated by the Kalamazoo CD. A motion to draft a letter of support for the Kalamazoo CD project including \$500 in-kind match for outreach assistance was made by Bob Jones, and seconded by John Law. Motion carried.

**Cobus Creek Festival**— It was announced that the Friends of Cobus Creek intend to carry out inventories of threatened and endangered species within Cobus Creek in Elkhart County. (It

was noted that FotSJR wrote a letter opposing the Ontwa Twp. Wastewater Treatment plant last year at the request of concerned residents of the area). An invitation to provide a display at an event hosted by the Friends of Cobus Creek at the Cobus Creek Co. Park on August 1, 2015 was extended to the FotSJR. Matt asked if John Law would be able to put out the display since he may already be attending if nobody else could attend. John replied that he would be willing to manage the display at the August festival at Cobus Creek County Park.

## **OTHER**

### **Board Member Business**

**Matt Meersman**—Matt asked if Bob Jones could look into having the June 25<sup>th</sup> meeting at Pine Knob County Park, as well as speak to Jon Senecal regarding providing the equipment to paddle on the Pigeon River again after the meeting. Bob agreed to set up the June meeting, and will contact Matt if an alternate plan is needed. Matt also mentioned that South Bend river bank cleanup at Veteran’s Park is this upcoming weekend.

**Bill Courliss**—Bill announced that Progressive AE will be completing a GIS Study of Union Lake System. The study will use sonar to find stumps in the lake. The study will also complete an aquatic vegetation survey, and evaluate land use in the watershed. Cost is about \$16,000 for initial study, in addition to \$7,000/year for exotic weed control.

**Jeremy Reiman**—Announced the May 15<sup>th</sup> St. Joseph River Basin Symposium, which will include speakers addressing Great Lakes issues. It will be held at Fernwood Botanical Gardens.

**Dennis Bradley**—A program on Shoreline Landscaping will be held at the Fabius Township Hall. Speakers will include Jane Herbert, MSUE, Anna K. from the Kalamazoo Nature Center, and Derek Haroldson from the Kalamazoo District DEQ. The event is free. A flyer promoting the event was distributed to the group.

**Marcy Colclough**—A wetland workshop similar to the Indiana program for municipalities will be held on June 18<sup>th</sup> (Thursday) at Harbor Shores on the St. Joe River, and will include a walking tour along the golf course. Fee is not set, but estimated at \$15. Marcy Colclough asked Dennis Bradley if he, or someone from the Fabius Twp. Wetlands Council would be willing to speak on the wetland ordinances adopted by their township. Marcy noted that Master Citizen Planner CEUs will be available. More info coming soon. Marcy also noted that Friday, August 14<sup>th</sup> is set as “Lake Michigan Day”, a day started in Wisconsin for educating people about Lake Michigan. Marcy announced that she is looking for groups to help plan fun and educational events for the day, and to contact her with any ideas.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting is scheduled for May 28<sup>th</sup>, 2015 at 1:00 p.m. at Three Rivers Public Library.