

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, May 23, 2013
Three Rivers Library – Three Rivers, MI

IN ATTENDANCE:

- ❖ Directors: Matt Meersman, Rachel Smith, Ray Leising, Eldred Adams, Ron Niezgodski, Maria Mast, Jim Coury
- ❖ Watershed Council: Marcy Colcough, SWMPC; Mandy Courtright, Steuben SWCD; Bill Courliss, ULCA; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi; Chris Bauer, MDEQ; Jen Miller, St. Joseph County, MI CD; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner
- ❖ Visitors: Christine Hartzell; Jessica Simons, Potawatomi RC&D

MINUTES

No changes to the minutes. Minutes from the April Meeting were approved on a motion made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Maria Mast.

TREASURER'S REPORT

In the absence of FotSJR treasurer, Danielle Meersman, the report was presented by Matt Meersman noting these were the final numbers for the year end. Matt noted that there were changes from the previous report given in April now that the final numbers have been incorporated. In April it was noted that the organization made \$5 which was a great thing given past losses that were substantial. After final numbers are in, the organization had a net loss of \$103 over the year. Contribution income was generated from Danielle Meersman's office as they did a "jeans" day. Employees of her office were able to pay a certain amount to wear jeans and the proceeds go to a charity or group and over a month, dollars were collected and donated to the FotSJR. Also, members of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi that presented at the annual meeting became members.

Eldred Adams asked if there was a break down from the Sturges Auditorium for the cost of the annual meeting. Matt indicated that after event income and expense the group netted about \$2,000 but he hasn't received a paper invoice at this point. It was noted that approximately \$1,000 of the \$2,000 made was generated from the silent auction.

Treasurer's report was motioned for approval by Marias Mast and seconded by Jim Coury.

OLD BUSINESS

WETLAND PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

Jim Coury gave a brief overview on what the wetland partnership project is to the group noting the benefits for different types of work. Matt Meersman added that getting the work out to the right people allows us to make the public aware of programs available for restoration. Ray Liesing explained he has completed workshops discussing the wetland work being done and noted that the public seems to really connect with the idea that the watershed is home to many migratory birds. Matt Meersman explained that total wetland loss for the St. Joe Watershed is 50% but this has led to an increase in waterfowl habitat due to areas becoming more wet after drainage providing a better habitat.

Ron Niezgodski noted that migratory routes are changing.

Matt Meersman expressed there has been lots of attention on the project in part due to May being American Wetlands Month. Matt was contacted by EPA and the Association of State Wetland Managers to do a special webinar on restoration as part of wetlands month. There was over 115 people from all over the country who participated in the webinar. Many of them noted that we are really lucky to have this advanced wetland data. This information is far beyond what other states have, even the basic wetland coverage is better than what other areas in the country have. The audience of the webinar loved the opportunities that could come with this level of data.

Additionally, Matt was asked to partake in the Middle Grand River Watershed Steering Committee Meeting. This area had already had DEQ attend and show the basic data but they were interested in seeing how the information has been applied and how it could be used in a watershed plan.

Lastly, Matt attended the River Network National River Rally in St. Louis, MO. Matt was asked to be a co-presenter discussing the wetland partnership project. There was a lot of interest in how the data is being utilized from participants. He noted that the event itself was energizing for watershed efforts.

Marcy Colclough suggested that Matt give the presentation from the webinar at the next partnership meeting to bring it all together for the group. She also noted that if it couldn't be done at the Wetland Partnership meeting that possibly it could be done at the next FotSJR Board meeting.

Marcy also discussed the outreach moving more towards municipalities. She is learning more on the Indiana side of the watershed related to municipalities. The plan is to offer workshops in the fall. There has been a committee formed and they have met in both Indiana and Michigan. The first step will be a booklet for local officials pulling from different sources and will be partnering with MSUE's Citizen Planner program. Looking at fall workshops and also there are spring possibilities as well. Maria Mast asked if the workshops and information given will be geared toward areas that have the wetland partnership project data or if they will be more about planning to protect wetlands in general. Marcy explained that the majority of the workshops will focus on planning options where the wetland functional data isn't required. But by highlighting loss of function, it can help give more meat and start to mean something to those that plan.

Matt reiterated that the data is great for getting a community to think about wetland planning. He stated that there are many assumptions that wetlands are protected but working closer with wetlands it has been found that they are not as protected as you think. Local governments have the ability to fill the gaps and protect wetlands.

Chris Bauer asked about the status of the grant extension, Matt noted that all the paperwork is in and it appears it will likely be extended. Chris expressed it was great that there was the possibility of an extension and wondered if there was any interest in applying for Great Lake Restoration Initiative grants to continue the excitement that has been generated by the program. Marcy Colclough mentioned that the GLRI unfortunately we were not in an area of concern last time but believes if DEQ and IDEM are interested that there may be a possibility. Chris mentioned that all the attention for this might be a good push to getting GLRI and encouraged the group to look into it when information became available.

Matt suggested that it might be good to sit down with DEQ and IDEM to discuss the likelihood of being able to apply.

MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT/FUNDRAISING

Matt Meersman expressed that Geoff Cripe, who was not in attendance, has been working on some options for fundraising. Matt reiterated the purpose of fundraising would be acquiring a pot of money in which local groups could apply for small grants through the FotSJR for small on the ground projects.

At the last meeting it was stated that Matt, Geoff and Daragh would be attending a Green Drinks informal meeting. Matt informed the group that the meeting was good and that he explained to them about FotSJR and what the thoughts were related to businesses getting involved to help create this pot of money.

Matt stated that Geoff has talked to a couple of cafés in the region about possibly doing a point of sale fundraiser. There was some discussion on the system used to have that ability; nothing has been put into concrete yet. Matt also mentioned that Fluid Fun out of Bristol & Mongo, IN seemed receptive to the idea of a point of sale option. Matt noted that this would be a great partnership as these individuals are directly related to water and using the rivers for recreation.

GREENING THE BEND

Matt Meersman explained the project that “greening the bend” is trying to complete. The group has started a capital campaign to put a green roof in South Bend on the Century Center that would help promote stormwater management and have asked FotSJR to partner. Matt noted there are no new updates on the progress of this project.

NEW BUSINESS

FISH PASSAGE PROJECT

Matt Meersman introduced Jessica Simons who is new with the Potawatomi RC&D and was happy to hear Jessica picked up the Fish Passage project, a project the FotSJR was involved in.

Jessica stated she was excited to find this fish inventory for the St. Joe Watershed and excited about the possible grant opportunities that could be generated from the document. She noted she would like to build a structure of some sort in order to keep all the information in one place and is excited to see where it can be taken. She expressed she needs volunteers to determine viable project sites for implementation throughout the region.

Marcy Colclough stated that the USFWS funded the inventory and they would like to see projects in the area. She expressed how happy she was to have this document picked up to move forward on possible projects.

Ron Niezgodski noted that Jessica should get in touch with Karen Mackowiac from the St. Joe River Basin Commission about the inventory.

Jessica continued by saying she had a great discussion with Brian Gunderman of the Michigan DNR at an earlier meeting and noted he was very interested in this.

Matt followed by stating that the USFWS is funding a feasibility study on Christiana Creek in the Indiana portion of the St. Joe Watershed for 5 structures. The inventory was used by the City of Elkhart to apply for these funds.

Matt wondered if RC&D could cross state boundaries on projects. Jessica expressed hope that they could.

OTHER

Matt Meersman discussed the St. Joseph River Basin Commission Symposium. The basin commission focused its presentation on agriculture this year as 70% of the watershed is agricultural lands. Matt noted that the speakers for the event were great and covered topics that included, cover crops, no till/low till, soil health and did a great demonstration on no till versus conventional tillage practices. Matt noted the presentation really hit home for the attendees about how no till helps keep soil on the land.

Ron Niezgodski noted that even the urban related attendees were in awe after the presentation

Marcy Colclough noted that this presentation should be done over and over throughout the watershed and suggested that even drain commissioners do this at their meetings or even watershed coordinators as a part of their steering committees.

Ron followed by stating sometimes farmers do not see the benefit to no till, but this presentation is hard to argue with noting how impressive it was to see the effectiveness of no till on the soil.

Maria Mast took a moment to thank Matt and Marcy for all of their efforts in promoting the FotSJR and their projects to larger audiences. She gave them a sincere thank you for all the time they spend representing the group outside of the regular meetings.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

--Marcy Colclough wanted to mention that the Two Rivers Coalition will be hosting a forum on Fracking in Lawrence, MI on June 12th. It is at 6:30 at the Lawrence Conference Center and more information could be found on the Two Rivers Coalition website.

--Marcy also noted that on October 10th and 11th it would be Green Town Michiana, located at the Doubletree in South Bend. Marcy noted that it would include 5 topics including transportation, energy, local foods and a couple others. She noted that there were no water topics however she was working on an opportunity to squeeze water in since there is time on the Oct. 10th date. She stated she is putting together a planning committee to create a program for this spot.

Maria Mast volunteered to be on this committee

Marcy expressed that they are looking for input from anyone on goals for the event.

--Matt Meersman stated the next meeting will be in Bonneyville Mill County Park in Bristol, IN. Also, Geoff Cripe extended an invite to paddle again at his parent's cottage after the meeting. Matt noted he will send out information later

Ron Niezgodski motioned to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Maria Mast

Meeting Adjourned at 2:14pm