

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, June 28, 2012—1:00pm
Bristol Public Library—Bristol, IN

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Directors: Eldred Adams, Melanie Stoughton, Ray Leising, Matt Meersman, Jim Coury, Geoff Cripe, Ron Niezgodski, Danielle Meersman, Bruce Barton, Brian Musser, Eric Kerney
- Watershed Council: Jeff Reece, IMP; Don Stohler, Christiana Creek Coalition; Dave Foerster, Two Rivers Coalition; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph Co. Drain Comm. (MI); Karen Mackowiak, St. Joseph River Basin Commission; Jen Miller, St. Joe Co. CD (MI); Nancy Brown, Elkhart Co. SWCS
- Visitors: Eric Zell, Christiana Creek Coalition; Melissa Kinsey, CCWP-Goshen; Roxanne Barton, Landowner; Alex Bozymowski, USDA-NRCS Cass Co.; Leslie Raymer, LaGrange Co. Lakes Council

MINUTES of the May Meeting had one error. Brian Musser did not attend the May meeting, and did not make the comment regarding the pace of our association's projects and the sustainability of our funds. Minutes were corrected to reflect the change. A motion to approve the minutes was made by Matt Meersman and seconded by Geoff Cripe.

TREASURER'S REPORT—was presented by Danielle Meersman, Treasurer. The report reflected that we are down \$2,200 over the year. Danielle also mentioned that our CD would be due soon. A motion to approve the treasurer's report was made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Brian Musser.

WETLAND PARTNERSHIP PROJECT— Matt Meersman reported that he and Marcy Colclough have been finishing up the quarterly report. Eldred Adams asked about the timeline of the project and where we were at. Matt Meersman reported that we are currently in the seventh quarter of our three year grant. Raw data has been completed, and will be distributed upon request to those who have GIS software. The last year of the grant will focus on education and presentation of the tool. Dave Foerster asked if MSUE and the Citizen Planner program had been included in the education. He mentioned that there could possibly be a way to tie these workshops in with the Citizen Planner and Master Citizen Planner courses, and generate Continuing Education Credits for participation.

MEMBERSHIP STATUS REPORTS— Matt Meersman let the group know that Leah Cooper had prepared a report, however problems with the Wild Apricot software were creating inaccuracies, so the report would not be distributed to the group. Currently there are 55 active members, 20 overdue members, and one new membership. There are also two pending memberships. Discussion on finding a significant funding source to help cover the costs of the website and newsletter led to the possibility that perhaps management of the website becomes the responsibility of the board. Overall, the board is pleased with where the funds are being spent, but would like to increase fundraising to prepare for the future.

Ideas from the board included increasing our annual meeting into the “major” fundraising event of the year, with smaller events throughout the year as well. Matt Meersman brought up the an event called Paddlefest, which includes a trail run and paddle event. Putting on these kinds of events can serve a similar purpose as a river cleanup, however it could get people who do not normally recreate along the river to enjoy the water and gain a desire to help protect it for future use. Dave Foerster updated the group on the subcommittee formed with Dave, Brian and Geoff. The question they raised to the group was, “How do we partner to get word out?”

Jen Miller raised the idea of offering deals where if you are a member of the FotSJR, you would receive discounts at liveries, or sporting good stores. Jim Coury proposed that the group set up a donor page to donate in honor or dedication of someone. Brian Musser added that we could also include these special donations in our newsletter. Ron Niezgodski recommended selling advertising to cover the cost of our newsletter. To receive funds in a quick manner, Jim Coury proposed the group look at capacity building grants within the watershed, listing the Battle Creek Non-Profit Alliance as a possible resource. Nancy Brown raised the idea of linking websites of complimentary groups within the watershed to increase membership drive. For example, lake association groups could look to donating to other organizations like the FotSJR.

A “Run for the River” running race was proposed, which also led to the idea of a bicycle race. Jim Coury reminded the group about the possibility of doing an end of the year appeal in November or December. Grant Poole added hosting a fishing tournament during the summer months. Ron Niezgodski agreed to check on upcoming tournaments to get an idea of how successful it would be for the group to pursue as a fundraiser for next year. Danielle Meersman agreed to look into the group hosting a running race. Dave Foerster asked permission to link the FotSJR newsletter to the Two Rivers Coalition website, and Matt Meersman said it sounded good to him.

To compile all ideas from the board, Geoff Cripe will create a summary to present at the next meeting in August. In between then, Geoff will try to schedule another subcommittee meeting to bring more ideas to the group.

NEW BUSINESS—

Christiana Creek Wetland Event—This is the first official outreach event of the Wetland Partnership Project. The discussion of piggybacking on the momentum from the Christiana Creek Coalition to increase visibility of the wetland project and the FotSJR led to the suggestion of having the Coalition host the event with the idea that a smaller, more local group to the area may gain people's interest in attending rather than a group covering many counties. Both the Coalition and the FotSJR could benefit, with the mailing costs for an event covered by the wetland grant, and using more groups to spread the word.

FotSJR Publicity—Eldred Adams voiced his concerns about increasing the FotSJR's visibility through publicity. A request to Leah Cooper will be made to increase the amount of press releases put into the local media. Ron Niezgodski suggested that Leah send the newsletter to local community pages, and let them choose articles from the newsletter to print. Jim Coury recommended to other board members to personally take in newsletter to local media, and when doing so, have a specific article/topic in mind, and know which reporter to approach about the topic. It was suggested that local news stations be contacted to attend the annual meetings, and highlight our annual watershed award winner.

ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR—

- Alex Bozymowski/Geoff Cripe—announced the protection of land within the Pigeon River. Dona Hunter spoke at event on what LaGrange County is currently doing. Alex spoke highly of the event and of the speaker.
- Jen Miller—The St. Joseph County Conservation District will be hosting a Paddle Poker Run on September 1st. It will be from the Covered Bridge to Mendon, with five stops along the way
- Melanie Stoughton—announced that the Calhoun Conservation District was awarded a 319 watershed grant for the Portage River and Little Portage Creek watersheds, totaling approximately \$270,000. Melanie also announced that Rachel Smith, Watershed Coordinator for the Prairie River Watershed is hosting an event on invasive species. It will be held at Glen Oaks Community College on Saturday, July 28th.

NEXT MEETING –There is no July Meeting. The next meeting will be held on Thursday, August 23rd at the Three Rivers Public Library.

Meeting adjourned at 2:20 pm