

**Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, February 27, 2020 – 1:00pm**  
**Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, MI**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

- Directors: Jeff Reece, Ron Niezgodski, Grant Poole, Eric Kerney, Carolyn Grace, Matt Meersman, Daragh Deegan, Carol Higgins, Kim Sinclair, Jeff Wenzel
- Watershed Council: Jan McGowan, LaGrange Co. SWCD; Korie Blyveis, Cass County CD; Bruce Howe, SWMLC
- Visitors: Melissa DeSimone, MI Lakes and Streams Assoc., Annie Klehfoth, Elkhart Environmental Center; Shaun Grace, St. Joseph Co. CD; Allyson Wentela, St. Joseph Co. CD; Terri Loomis, City of Three Rivers; Gabby Metzner, Kieser & Associates; Ike Pangle

President Jeff Reece called the meeting to order at 1:00pm, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions.

**Minutes** of the January 23 board meeting were approved as submitted with a motion by Matt Meersman and, a second by Jeff Wenzel.

**Treasurers Report** was presented by Kim Sinclair. Kim noted that the 3 big donations have been received this year, which have helped keep the fund balance for this year low considering the expense for the Leadership Academy Sponsorship. Matt let the group know that a donation of \$130 was given to the Friends from folks at the Crooked Ewe brew pub. The treasurer's report was accepted with a motion from Ron Niezgodski and a second from Carolyn Grace.

**Old Business**

**Wetland Partnership Project – Newsletter Update**

Erick Kerney indicated that he has completed a final draft of the newsletter which he has shared with Jeff. Jeff will email the newsletter out soon along with information related to the annual celebration. Carol Higgins asked about how someone would go about getting on Jeff's distribution list. Kim Sinclair indicated that getting on this list can be done through the Friends website.

**Al Smith Watershed Stewardship Award**

Jeff indicated that he received one nomination for the award. He indicated that the awardee would be kept secret until the annual celebration and that he would work with Board members to get the awardee to the meeting.

**Watershed Celebration Planning**

Jeff indicated that things are all set with Sturges-Young Auditorium for the Watershed Celebration. Jan McGowan indicated that LaGrange Co. SWCD could once again help with the projector screen and the AV needs. Jeff also indicated that 17 people had already registered for the event. Jeff will work with Daragh to get forms related the silent auction and exhibitors distributed. Grant Poole said that he would be bringing silent auction items. Other potential silent auction items and meeting logistics were discussed.

## **Meeting locations and schedules**

Meeting locations were discussed for upcoming meetings. Jeff Reece indicated that he would check on the Potawatomi Zoo in South Bend for the April Meeting. Kim Sinclair indicated that she would check with the Sarett Nature Center in Berrien County for the May meeting. Terri Loomis indicated that Conservation Park in Three Rivers would be available for an upcoming meeting. This is an outdoor setting with an outdoor pavilion. Jeff Wenzel suggested the St. Joe County, MI Farm as a very nice venue for the September or October meetings. This location has a historic covered bridge crossing the river. Other locations were discussed.

## **Board Recruitment**

Daragh indicated that all board members with terms expiring (Matt Meersman, Carol Higgins, Ron Niezgodski, Kim Sinclair, and John Law) were willing to stay on the board for another term. He also said that Annie Klehfoth indicated that she may be willing to fill the vacant board seat. Daragh said he would confirm Annie's desire by the next board meeting.

## **Potawatomi Zoo**

Jeff indicated that he has been in contact with Skye Hoffman with Potawatomi Zoo regarding a potential collaboration between her organization and the Friends. Jeff suggested that Skye would like to attend an upcoming board meeting to discuss. Jeff and Ron Niezgodski also plan to team up to provide an automated sandbox and the Zoo's Earth Day event in April.

## **Other?**

In a previous meeting, Matt had discussed that the PBS television station in South Bend had been in contact with him about doing a documentary on the St. Joe. Matt updated the board, indicating that the PBS station had secured a sponsor for the documentary and that it should be moving forward soon.

## **New Business**

### **Dowagiac River Watershed Plan Update Support Letter**

Korie Blyveis indicated that she is working with Marcy Hamilton and Grant Poole on applying for a 319 Grant to do a WMP update on the Dowagiac River. The grant application is asking for a \$100,000 to complete the update, which will also fund a position at the Cass County CD. Korie asked the Friends for a letter of support and potential match towards the project. The Friends can provide in-kind match towards the project in the form of stakeholder meeting participation. Ron Niezgodski agreed to participate. The request was approved with a motion by Kim Sinclair and a second by Carol Higgins.

## **Other**

Carol Higgins and Jeff Wenzel made a proposal to the Friends about collaborating on a regulated drain project in the Three Rivers area. Jeff Wenzel indicated that he is working with MDOT on the design of the project and would like to get input from the Friends so that potential conservation practices could be implemented. A discussion about conservation strategies and potential implications from the Friends involvement was discussed. The group generally agreed that this was a very good collaboration opportunity. In a motion by Matt and a second by Carol Higgins, the board agreed to provide Jeff Wenzel with a partnership letter that will suggest potential recommendations for the project, and also suggest a desire for the Friends to review the project design plans.

## **Items from the Floor**

Two of the 2019/2020 Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy Scholarship Awardees (Melissa DeSimone and Annie Klehfoth) were in attendance and provided an update of their activities and experience thus far at the academy.

Melissa DeSimone indicated that the Michigan Lakes and Streams Association Annual Conference will take place on May 1st and 2<sup>nd</sup> at Crystal Mountain Resort in Thompsonville, MI. She said that there is a great list of speakers and presentations.

Melissa DeSimone indicated that the Governor's Office vetoed funding for the Cooperative Lakes Monitoring Program (CLMP) in 2020.

Daragh gave an updated on the Elkhart River dam removal project and indicated that since the past meeting the dam had been removed and the project was going well.

Matt announced that the annual St. Joseph River Basin Symposium will take place at Fernwood Botanical Gardens on May 8<sup>th</sup>. He indicated that Eric Eckl with Water Words that Work will be a guest speaker.

Carolyn indicated that the St. Joseph County CD will be holding their annual meeting on March 25<sup>th</sup> at the Intermediate School District. The theme will be "All About Aquatics".

Kim indicated that on March 10, the Van Buren County CD will host a Farming for the Future Event with Gabe Brown as a guest speaker. Carol and Matt both commented on how great that this program is.

Jeff indicated that he has been trying to get a hold of a community outreach person with AEP to see if he can secure sponsorship for the annual celebration.

Korie Blyveis had several updates for Cass County:

She indicated that Dr. Lawless Park was recently was designated as an international Dark Sky Park. She also announced the Hike with a Naturalist Program that is being hosted by the Conservation District. This events take place on the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday of the month at Dr. Lawless Park and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of the month at Russ Forest. Korie also announced that the CD would also be hosting an Oak Wilt workshop on February 29 in Marcelus. She announced that the CD has hired a new soil erosion inspector. Lastly, Korie announced that a large gas facility was being constructed in the Niles area on a very large brownfield site.

Grant Poole announced that the Two Rivers Coalition will be hosting an event called Kayak with Naturalist. He suggested looking for additional information on the group's webpage.

## **Next Meeting**

March 26<sup>th</sup>, 1:00pm at the Three Rivers Public Library

Meeting adjourned at 3:00 pm