

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes

Thursday, February 28, 2019 – 1:00 p.m.

Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, Michigan

IN ATTENDANCE:

- **Directors:** Roxanne Barton, Bill Courliss, Carol Higgins, Eric Kerney, John Law, Ron Niezgodski, Grant Poole, Jeff Reece, Kim Sinclair, Dona Hunter
- **Watershed Council Members:** Tara Lee, Steuben Co. SWCD; Matt Meersman, SJRBC; Roey Marcon, LaGrange Co. SWCD
- **Visitors:** Howard Avildsen, SJC CD; Tom Thrum, CCBC; Cheryl Thrum, CCBC; Pamela Reed, CCBC; Anna Keim, CCBC; Lyndsay Morrison, Branch CD; Jared Harmon, SJCD/SMIST; Doug McLaughlin, Keiser & Associates; Rebecca Shank

CALL TO ORDER – Jeff Reece, President, called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. He thanked everyone for coming and asked for introductions.

MINUTES of the January 24, 2019 meeting were approved on a motion made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Kim Sinclair.

TREASURER'S REPORT – Treasurer Kim Sinclair submitted the financial report with the balance sheet showing Total Liabilities & Equity of \$65,973.80. She reported there has been some activity with new memberships and reservations for the Watershed Celebration coming in. Someone asked about the Profit & Loss statement showing a negative balance. Kim said she thought it was due to the two Leadership Academy Scholarships that were awarded. Bill Courliss made a motion to approve the financial report; Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion; motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS:

- **Strategic Planning** - Dona Hunter reported that the newsletter had been distributed. Approximately 150 were mailed through the USPS. Since they were sent first class mail with a return address, we will be able to update the mailing list and delete any that are returned. Jeff put the newsletter on the website and distributed to the electronic mailing list. He has received a couple of replies from individuals, who received both an electronic copy and a hard copy, stating they only wanted an electronic copy. These individuals will also be removed from the hard copy mailing list.
Facebook – Grant Poole reported that he can set up a community page connected to his Facebook page. Grant will go ahead and get it set up. He asked for pictures of Watershed Celebration items for the silent auction so he could place those on the page also. Jared Harmon said that Instagram was also a good place to post pictures.
- **12th Annual Watershed Celebration Update** – Jeff confirmed that the event has been scheduled with Sturges Young Auditorium with the menu for dinner the same as in past years. Registration is requested by March 15. 12 people have registered so far. The raptor presentation has also been scheduled. Jeff sent out the forms for silent auction items and they should be returned to him. Items should be there so attendees can begin bidding when they arrive, which is usually around 5:00 p.m. Dona talked with Martin Franke about the screen and PA system from the LaGrange Co. SWCD. Matt Meersman is going to contact Bob Jones about possibly coming up and setting it up and running the equipment, so that Martin will not have to. Matt also reported they have a new credit card swiper to process payments, so there should not be a problem this year. Matt will be serving as emcee this year and will update the power point presentation from last year. Bill Courliss said he would send him some additional pictures. Matt is also taking care of the traveling trophy for the Al Smith Watershed Award. There will not be a board meeting before the watershed celebration. The regular monthly meeting will be on March 28 and will serve as the annual meeting for the election of new directors.
- **Support letter for Concerned Citizens of Branch County** - There was a lengthy discussion about the support letter that was requested by the CCBC concerning the regulations for the installation of industrial wind turbines in

Branch County. Everyone was in agreement that a support letter should be sent, but that the letter needed to be revised. More emphasis needs to be placed on water quality and conservation efforts, which are of primary concern to FotSJR. Any related construction activities during installation should take into consideration water flow in these areas, especially when putting in new or using existing access roads. Michigan government is different than Indiana when it comes to passing regulations. The Michigan townships have that responsibility and it is sometimes difficult for those individuals to have all the information necessary to make informed regulations. It was agreed that FotSJR should support the recommendations established by Fish and Wildlife and that these should not be watered down. Also discussed was addressing the letter specifically to townships directly affected and not just generic to all townships in Branch County. Anna Keim said there are 4 townships that are involved in this project right now. Jeff Reece reviewed some changes that he would like to see made to the letter. Jeff, along with Grant Poole and Bill Courliss will work on revising the letter before it is sent.

John Law made a motion for Jeff Reece, Grant Poole and Bill Courliss to revise the support letter including suggestions about water quality and conservation issues, along with addressing the 4 specific townships in Branch County affected. Revisions will be worked on March 8 with pdf copy with Jeff's signature submitted to CCBC by March 13. Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion; **motion carried**. The board will get a copy of the letter before it is sent out.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Watershed Stewardship Award** – This had already been discussed earlier in the meeting, with Matt taking care of inviting the individual to the meeting and having the traveling trophy.
- **2019 Annual Membership Meeting** – This meeting will be held on March 28 at Three Rivers Public Library. Jeff will be in contact with those individuals whose terms are up this year – Roxanne Barton, Bill Courliss, Dona Hunter, Grant Poole, and Jeff Reece. New officers will be elected at the April meeting. There is one vacant seat on the board which occurred when Bob Jones moved out of the area. If anyone knows of someone interested in becoming a board member, please contact Jeff. FotSJR is always interested in getting new people involved.
- **Donation to Lake Milton Raptor Education Center** – Matt suggested making a \$200 donation, instead of just \$100 as had been discussed earlier to the Center for their presentation. Kim Sinclair made a motion to donate \$200; seconded by Bill Courliss; **motion carried**.
- **Mendon Women's Club** – Carol Higgins had a request from the Mendon Women's Club for a presentation on the FotSJR and the St. Joseph River at the July 15 meeting. The meeting will be held at the United Methodist Church in Mendon, Michigan. Matt Meersman volunteered to do the presentation.

ANNOUNCEMENTS/ Other Business:

- **Smithsonian Exhibit on Waterways** – Grant Poole reported that even though the FotSJR did not set up a display at the final Saturday event, copies of the latest newsletter were available at the display which Grant had set up.
- **River Clean-up** – Matt announced the date for a river clean up sponsored by one of the oldest groups in the watershed that is still involved in doing this. It is scheduled for April 13 at 10 a.m. and will begin in Veterans Memorial Park.
- **WNIT Documentary** – WNIT, Elkhart PBS Station is interested in doing a documentary on the St. Joseph River – “Seven Generation River” – to celebrate the river. This is a quarter million dollar project and they are looking for corporate sponsors. There will be a broad base of topics covered including the two tribes in the watershed. They will be contacting local museums up and down the river and every town along the river. Businesses in the watershed mentioned as donors included Whirlpool, Coca Cola, and Indiana and Michigan Power. Contact Matt if you think of others.
- **Wild Apricot** – Jeff received notice from Wild Apricot concerning a payment system and servicing fee that will take effect in October. Kim said that she and Danielle Meersman will look into it and have a report between now and October.

- **Presentation by Jessica Merklng** – Jessica is the Urban Wildlife Biologist stationed in Columbia City, Indiana. She is interested in doing a presentation at a meeting, but can't go outside the state. It was suggested she could come to the June meeting which is usually held in LaGrange.
- **Indiana Michigan Power** – Jeff has been in contact with Maggie Beggs about a donation to FotSJR . They would consider a \$1,000 donation, but would like to see a sponsorship package showing how the funds would be used and how the donation would be announced.
- **Watershed Leadership Academy Scholarship Winners** – Jeff announced the winners of the 4 scholarships sponsored by FotSJR and St. Joseph River Basin Commission. They were Zach Holsinger, LaGrange Co. Surveyor; Carolyn Grace, St. Joseph Co. CD; Kristen Thomas, City of Angola MS4 Coordinator; and Joe Parman, Van Buren Co. Drain Commissioner.
- **Steuben Co. Annual Meeting** – Tara Lee reported that it would be on March 13. Contact her for more information.
- **Upcoming meeting locations** – The March 28 meeting is scheduled to be held in Three Rivers at the library. Tara Lee volunteered to host the April 25 meeting in Steuben County. Jessica Merklng will be invited to attend that meeting.
- **Starry Stormwort Meeting** – Jared Harmon invited anyone interested to attend the meeting on March 15 from 10 a.m. – 3:30 p.m. sponsored by the Michigan Waterfront Alliance.
- Becky Shank talked about the documentary done entitled “Everglades of the North” and hoped that the new documentary being planned would cover some of those same environmental impacts and wetland loss in the St. Joseph River Watershed.
- Carol Higgins announced the St. Joseph County CD Annual Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, March 20.
- **“A Thousand Mile Walk”** – Kim Sinclair suggested this presentation for the 2020 Watershed Celebration. It covers a walk around the shores of Lake Michigan and covers the geology of the watershed. Charge for the presentation is only \$500 and it is a fantastic program put on by the lady who completed the walk.

Next Meeting – Scheduled for Thursday, March 28, 2019 at the Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers Michigan at 1:00 p.m.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned on a motion made by Kim Sinclair and seconded by Grant Poole.

Minutes recorded by Dona Hunter, Secretary.