

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 28, 2019 – 1:00 p.m.

Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, Michigan

IN ATTENDANCE:

- **Directors:** Daragh Deegan, Carolyn Grace, Carol Higgins, Ron Niezgodski, Jeff Reece, Kim Sinclair, Dona Hunter
- **Watershed Council Members:** Matt Meersman, SJRBC; Nancy Carpenter, Berrien Co. CD
- **Visitors:** Howard Avildsen, SJC CD; Jeffrey D. Sedlarik, St. Joseph River resident

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. Nancy Carpenter with Berrien Co. Conservation District submitted a signed Partnership & Cooperation Agreement to Jeff Reece.

MINUTES of the February 28, 2019 meeting were **approved on a motion made by Carol Higgins and seconded by Ron Niezgodski.**

TREASURER’S REPORT – Treasurer Kim Sinclair submitted the financial report with the balance sheet showing Total Liabilities & Equity of \$67,534.79. There are still several things that need to be sorted out from the Watershed Celebration concerning finances (membership dues, donations, meal payments). Kim will get through all of it and have a more detailed financial report at the April meeting. It was noted that there were several donations including ones from Gene Lightner, Great Lakes Adventure Club and Alliance Architects from South Bend. The financial report was **approved on a motion made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Daragh Deegan.**

OLD BUSINESS:

- **12th Annual Watershed Celebration Recap** – Everyone thought it was a great meeting, just wished more people had been there to enjoy the evening. Jeff Reece thanked Matt Meersman for doing such a great job as the emcee for the evening. It also made the evening go well with help from Danielle Meersman and Bob Jones. Bob came back and set up the audio equipment and screen. About 50 attended the meeting taking advantage of the good food, fellowship and an excellent presentation. Amy Pico did a fantastic job with the raptors. She was reluctant to go into much of her background, but it came out as she talked or was asked questions. She is so dedicated to the care of the raptors that come to the facility. Matt noted that this was the only time that the staff from the Sturges-Young Auditorium had asked if they could stay for the presentation. Some of them even asked if they could have their pictures taken with the Eurasian Eagle Owl.

Carol Higgins asked if a news release was going to be sent out about the meeting. Matt said that Kim Sinclair is going to work on a news release about the Al Smith award winner – Kevin Haight and something could be added to that. Dona asked if Carol was the one who said they would work on putting together a master list of media outlets in the watershed. Carol said she was. Matt said he had a list that he would share as a way to get started. Promotion before the meeting was discussed. Possibly a news release might generate some interest from those who are not members along with a post on Facebook.

Carol asked about considering something on the dinner menu for Lent for next year. Most felt there were plenty of salad options for those who could not eat meat. It is something to be considered for coming years. The silent auction was very successful - raising \$445. Nancy Carpenter said she would donate a rain barrel for next year.

- **Wild Apricot Payment Service** – Kim Sinclair stated there was really no reason not to use the online payment plan offered by Wild Apricot. It will save money on the use of the website for all the other administrative

features provided by Wild Apricot. **Ron Niezgodski made a motion authorizing Kim to go ahead with the change; motion seconded by Carol Higgins; motion carried.**

- **Update on Branch Co. Wind Farms** – Jeff reported that Sherwood Township approved a shorter set back distance than what Fish & Wildlife had recommended according to Bill Courliss. Jeff pointed out that the US Fish & Wildlife recommendations were addressing the Great Lakes shoreline and would not apply to this situation. Carol Higgins had talked with Anna Kiem at the Watershed Celebration and she said that the letter was well received by the townships that had received it. It was important to have stakeholders come to the Friends board with concerns in the watershed. Anna felt like they received a good response and support from the board. Even Amy Pico mentioned the wind farms impact in migration patterns of raptors/birds in the watershed during her presentation. Carol Higgins will share the letter with her township because they are just beginning the process of looking into wind farms for their area. Jeff Reece offered to address a letter to her specific township if she wanted him to.

NEW BUSINESS:

- **Election of New Directors** – Board of directors 3 years terms which end in 2019 include Roxanne Barton, Bill Courliss, Dona Hunter, Grant Poole and Jeff Reece. Jeff has talked with these 5 individuals and they are all willing to serve another three year term. New officers will be elected at the April meeting. There is still one vacant position since Bob Jones no longer lives in the area. An attempt will be made to fill this position by next year. **Kim Sinclair made a motion to approve the 5 directors listed above; Carol Higgins seconded the motion; motion carried.**
- **Adoption of Budget** – Kim Sinclair will put together some information using the current budget as a guide and have it ready to present in April. She will send a preview to everyone ahead of time for their review. New budget items discussed included something for leadership development (scholarships, etc.) and outreach and education (newsletter, etc.).
- **2019 Meeting Schedule** – Jeff Reece announced that the April 25 board meeting will be held at the Steuben Co. Community Center, Angola, Indiana, beginning at 12:30 p.m. *[NOTE: subsequently changed back to 1 p.m. when the President later discovered there is no conflict at the venue with the normal meeting time of 1-3 p.m. – JNR 4/15/19]* Jessica Merkling, Urban Wildlife biologist in Columbia City, will do a presentation at the April meeting. An election of officers will be held. All other dates for 2019 have been scheduled with the Three Rivers Public Library unless other locations are identified. Jeff will notify the library the days when meetings will be at a different location. June 27 the meeting is scheduled to be held in LaGrange. Dona Hunter will confirm with Martin Franke. Matt Meersman volunteered to host one at Macog offices in South Bend for September or October. Daragh Deegan volunteered to host one in Elkhart County and do a fish demonstration. Right now meetings are not scheduled for July, November, and December unless there is a need. The by-laws state that at least 6 meetings a year need to be held and right now there are 9 scheduled. Jeff asked if there was a need for a July meeting. Kim said she didn't think there was a need to schedule additional meetings at this time. Carol Higgins volunteered to submit press releases for upcoming meetings since several will be held in alternate locations.

Other Business/Announcements:

- Matt Meersman said that the information on the website relating to the Watershed Stewardship Awards needs to be updated. Daragh Deegan's info along with Kevin Haight's is not there. Matt said he would send the info to Jeff Reece, so he could make the updates.
- April 13 is the date scheduled for the South Bend River Clean-up starting at IUSB Veterans Park.
- Carolyn Grace announced the St. Joseph CD first river clean up this year would be June 1 and then every other Saturday after that at different locations in the county.

- May 10 is the date set for the 19th St. Joseph River Basin Symposium. This year is the first year it has been held at a different location other than Fernwood. It will be held on the opposite side of the watershed at the Potawatomi Inn in Pokagon State Park in Steuben County. A continental breakfast and lunch will be provided at no cost for the first ones to register. Speakers will include Rob Barr, Kankakee River Project; Dr. Pete Hippensteel, retired professor from Trine University; and Dr. Ron Hellenthal, Juday Creek Task Force.
- Daragh Deegan asked if the Friends of the St. Joe would be interested in helping to cover cost overruns for the Symposium. They have donated some money in the past. This would come under the leadership development portion of the budget and might allow a few more people to attend without paying for the cost of the meal, which is \$30 each. This is a larger facility, so more people could potentially attend. After a short discussion, **Kim Sinclair made a motion to spend up to \$600 for registration at the Symposium for this year; Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion; motion carried.**
- Daragh Deegan announced that the Annual Elkhart River Celebration sponsored by the ERRA is scheduled for June 7 in conjunction with downtown Goshen's Friday celebrations. He also mentioned the Elkhart County Fish Fest on June 1. The primary purpose is to promote fishing. Last year about 200 attended with 4000" of fish caught during the day.

Jeffrey Sedlarik, resident of St. Joseph River, was at the meeting asking for help with a water quality problem in the river near Mendon. He had sent a letter and pictures to the Friends last year and had pictures taken recently in the same area. There is a toxic sludge floating on the river, which comes up from the bottom and smells like cow manure. In 2017 this occurred from June to October, during warm weather, but a couple of weeks ago the water was a lime green. This usually occurs when the water is warmer and right now it is still very cold. This section of the river is serving as a sludge basin. There is a 400-500 dairy operation in this area which irrigates and spreads the manure at least twice a year and sometimes more. They are purchasing or renting more ground along the river to have places to dispose of the animal waste. The beach near the town of St. Joe has been closed several times because it is not safe to swim in the water there. Jeffrey sent his information to DEQ but didn't get any response and was wondering if the FotSJR could help. Jeff Reece stated in Grant Poole's absence that Grant had taken the information Jeffrey had sent and had made contacts with DEQ. This facility should be permitted by DEQ and have a manure management that addresses the amount of manure that can be applied to fields and how often. There is a state agency that can be contacted and they will pass the information on to the local conservation district. A representative can go out and try to work with the landowner on a voluntary basis to correct the problem. Kim Sinclair gave Jeffrey the number to call. There is an effort in Lansing right now to prohibit spreading on frozen ground, so contacts need to be made with your legislators. If passed, it will probably take concerned citizens to notify DEQ of violations. Jeffrey expressed his appreciation for the information he received.

Next Meeting – Scheduled for Thursday, April 25, 2019 at the Steuben County Community Center in Angola, Indiana from 12:30 – 2:30 p.m. *[Note from President: After these minutes were taken, the President was subsequently made aware that there will be no time conflict at the Angola venue. Therefore the meeting time on April 25, 2019 is to remain at 1:00 – 3:00 p.m., thus being the same meeting time as at past meetings. – JNR 4/15/19]*

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

Minutes recorded by Dona Hunter, Secretary