

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 28, 2016 – 1:00 PM
Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, MI

IN ATTENDANCE:

Directors: Matt Meersman, Danielle Meersman, Bob Jones, Daragh Deegan, John Law, Ray Leising, Eric Kerney

Watershed Council: Carolyn Grace, St. Joseph County MI CD; Bill Courliss, Union Lake Community Association; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band

Visitors: Carol Higgins, St. Joseph County MI CD Board President; Patty Hoch-Melluish, Keiser & Associates; Renaldo Hernandez, League of Women Voters; Aaron Damrill and Allison Klement, Army Corps of Engineers

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:03 PM, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions.

Minutes of the December 2015 board meeting were reviewed to approve. No corrections were noted. Ray Leising moved to approve the minutes as printed and John Law seconded. Motion passed.

Treasurer's Report was presented by Danielle Meersman. As of January 28, 2016, net income was \$766.66, with total liabilities and equity at \$61,166.60. Renaldo asked if we have a budget. Danielle stated we were not currently using one. Eric Kerney moved that Danielle prepare a 2016 budget for the Annual Meeting. Ray Leising seconded. Motion carried. Eric then moved to approve the treasurer's report as printed. Ray seconded. Motion carried.

Matt asked if we could move the ACOE Dam Removal Presentation up to accommodate Aaron and Allison. The board approved.

Aaron Damrill led a powerpoint presentation on Indiana's dam removal procedures. His emphasis was on Section 404 of the Clean Water Act and what conditions determine the need for a permit. Discussion followed concerning Michigan differences and which agencies are responsible the different determinations. Some situations are not in the realm of ACOE but with different state agencies or the DNR. The presentation was enlightening.

OLD BUSINESS

RCPP Updates – After a brief summary of the project Matt noted that the FotSJR's partner contribution was in outreach and utilizing data for targeting funds for wetland restoration. Carol Higgins of the St. Joseph County MI CD board expressed concerns and frustration on the promise of the availability of an engineer/technician to assist St. Joseph County in implementing this RCPP Project. She has contacted several officials by e-mail for an answer and

has not received any response. Discussion ensued on the implementation of the plan and what promises were made and what was verbal and what was part of the contract. John Law moved to have the FotSJR Board compose and send a letter to the Michigan Department of Agriculture and the Michigan NRCS questioning how the availability of funds for technicians is to be used and why we are not receiving responses to e-mails concerning this issue. Ray Leising seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Annual Meeting – Matt has been talking with our keynote speaker, Bob Barr, about a title for the meeting. They suggested “Down the Drain – Managing Water in a Changing Landscape”. Everyone felt that was a good title. Grant Poole, Matt, and Jeff Wenzel will work on getting the flyer together ASAP. Daragh Deegan will get the Silent Auction form sent out to all members soon. All agreed the same menu as last year will be fine. Matt urged all to contact county drain officials, county surveyors, and county/city road managers to attend the annual meeting because the topic is directly relating to them. Al Smith Award nominations were due today. One has been submitted so far. We will extend submitting nominations for two weeks. We also have four board members who are at the end of their terms and cannot re-up and one who can. John Law and Daragh Deegan will work as the nomination committee to find replacements. Matt made several suggestions of people who have been coming to meetings and shown they have an interest in our mission. They included Jeff Reece, Dona Hunter, Bill Courliss, Roxanne Barton, Grant Poole, and Patty Hoch-Melluish. Those who have to go off the board are Melanie Stoughton, Bruce Barton, Ron Niezgodski, and Jim Coury. Ray Leising may run again. Matt read a note from Jim. Jim will be having open-heart surgery on February 1st. It is a 98% successful type of surgery. All our thoughts and prayers are with Jim and his family as he goes through this surgery and recovery.

Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program – Matt has been in discussion with Sara Peel of Arion Consultants about submitting a grant proposal to support drain officials in creating incentives for better land use and management. There is money available through the Healthy Watersheds Consortium Grant Program to accelerate strategic protection of healthy, freshwater ecosystems and their watersheds. The best fit for the current project idea would fall under the category of:

- Supporting innovative or catalytic projects that may accelerate or broadly advance the field of practice for watershed protection efforts.

Matt suggested that the FotSJR apply for this grant to create resources and tools for our partners to use, especially developing an online sediment calculator for Conservation Districts, Drain Commissioners and County Surveyors. John Law moved to support Matt in writing a grant proposal for the FotSJR. Daragh Deegan seconded. Motion passed. The grant proposal is due March 14, 2016. The grant is a 3-year grant and the goal would be having one or more drain offices implement a 2-year trial program to create incentives for better land use.

SJRBC Project Updates- The SJRBC is having a workshop on the Elkhart River Watershed Conservation Initiative on Thursday, February 25, 2016 at 2:00 PM at the Farmers State Bank LaGrange office. For further information and registration for this free workshop, contact Jeremy Reiman at jreiman@macog.com.

NEW BUSINESS

Board and Watershed Stewardship Award Nominations – Al Smith Stewardship Award nominations were due today. As mentioned above, one nomination has been submitted. We will extend the deadline for a couple weeks. Refer to Annual Meeting notes above for board nominations. John Law and Daragh Deegan are the nomination committee.

OTHER

- Matt received an e-mail request from Bill Courliss of Union Lake Community Association for a letter of support and sponsorship for a grant. Matt indicated that they were looking for a sponsor organization that is audited and has paid professional staff. Unfortunately, FotSJR does not meet either of those criteria at this point.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- Matt will be in Washington DC for Great Lakes Day on Thursday, February 25, 2016.
- With Matt being gone and the Elkhart River Workshop being on the same day as our next meeting, the February FotSJR meeting may be moved to the third Thursday (2/18/16) depending on availability of the meeting room. Matt will advise via e-mail.
- There is a meeting on the Pucker Street Dam in Niles, MI on February 8, 2016 at 6:00 PM
- Matt received a note from Jim Coury that he will be having open-heart surgery on February 1st. He knew this was coming and expressed the procedure has a 98% success rate. The entire board and council wishes a successful surgery and recovery for Jim.
- Carol Higgins asked a question about stream crossing signage. Several members mentioned county/township restrictions on signage that you may have to check on first.
- Patty Hoch-Melluish mentioned the USDA has 9 million dollars available for wetland mitigation banks for ag only practices.

Motion to adjourn at 3:15 PM was made by John Law and seconded by Daragh Deegan.

Motion carried.

NEXT MEETING

Next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, February 25, 2016 with the possibility of being moved to Thursday, February 18, 2016 at Three Rivers Public Library. Matt will verify via e-mail.

Respectfully submitted by Acting Secretary, Bob Jones