

River Currents

The Voice of the St. Joseph River Watershed

WINTER/SPRING 2013

A Publication of the Friends of the
St. Joe River Association, Inc.

6th Annual St. Joseph River Watershed Council Meeting

March 18, 2013
5:00 p.m. – 9:00 p.m.
Sturges-Young Auditorium ~ Sturgis, MI



LIVING WATER TEACHINGS OF THE WATER WALKERS

The water is alive, we feed it and it feeds us. We grow food with it and we eat fish from it. We swim in it and we paddle on it. It is a part of our everyday life and sometimes we don't even recognize it. As individuals and organizations, many of us are working to protect and restore the land and water that flows to the St. Joseph River and beyond.

For the Potawatomi, women are recognized as life givers and the protectors of water. In order to raise awareness about the importance of clean water, Andy Jackson and other Potawatomi Grandmothers started an annual "Water Walk" along the Dowagiac River. The idea began when First Nations Ojibjwe Grandmother, Josephine Mandamin, walked the circumference of each of the Great Lakes to raise awareness about water issues.

Jackson met Josephine on her walk around Lake Michigan near the mouth of the St. Joseph River. It was there that Jackson decided she must bring the idea home to the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi.

Andy Jackson and others will share stories, drum and sing to help us understand *Ezh gda bamendamen*—the way which we should all mind the water. The event will foster respect and appreciation for the water that is too often taken for granted.



Register for the event at www.fotsjr.org/upcoming_events

About Us

The Friends of the St. Joe River Association, Inc. (FotSJR) was established in April of 1994, and operates as a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization.

Mission

To unite a diverse group of stakeholders throughout the watershed in a collaborative effort to protect, restore and foster stewardship of the St. Joseph River Watershed.

Become a Friend

Join a group of stewards restoring and protecting this natural resource. We offer a variety of tax-deductible membership levels for both personal and business contributors.

It's never too late to renew your membership!
Visit www.fotsjr.org/JoinUs

LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR “WETLAND ACCEPTANCE”

FotSJR is Spreading Swamp Love from Hillsdale to St. Joseph

In 2011, the Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotSJR) was awarded funding from the U.S Environmental Protection Agency to study and wetlands and perform outreach about wetland preservation and restoration in the 4,685 square mile

St. Joseph River Watershed (SJRW). As the third largest land area draining into Lake Michigan, the SJRW has



exhibited a loss of more than 50% of its wetlands since this region was settled. The project empowers FotSJR to begin working to reverse the wetland loss trend and bring awareness to the need for wetland conservation.

Undoubtedly, this award was a pinnacle achievement for the FotSJR organization and created a unique opportunity to fulfill many aspects of their mission. More importantly, the award has set the stage for a watershed-wide “call to action”, as well as a push to develop tools that will equip soil and water conservation districts, surveyors drain commissioners, municipal planners, and public works professionals to better safeguard wetlands and the functions they serve in their everyday work.

A strong partnership has been formed between the FotSJR and other regional non-profit and governmental entities working in conservation to steer the project. A landscape level wetland functional assessment was performed which created new data for every existing and lost wetland within the watershed. The result was a dataset that determines what water quality and wildlife habitat functions these wetlands serve and how well they perform those functions.

Since the spring of 2012, FotSJR has been working in partnership with Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission to hold outreach events for the project. These outreach events have targeted landowners with the most

significant wetlands for protecting water quality. In addition to these critical landowners, the general public has been invited to learn about the programs and incentives available for protecting and restoring wetlands.

The FotSJR and partners have already held three successful events. The first event, located at the Branch Conservation District Expo, highlighted large clusters of healthy wetlands that are prime for protection. The event was well attended and resulted in several inquiries about tools to protect a property owners land.

The second event, “Wet N’ Wild at the Wellfield” targeted the Elkhart, IN area, but more specifically the Christiana Creek sub-watershed.

With 50 people in attendance, the event was held at the Wellfield Botanic



Gardens and highlighted the importance of the Christiana Creek headwaters and the high quality wetlands that are in that region.

The third event, “Conservation What, Why & Where in Howe” was held at the Bouton Auditorium in Howe, IN. With 35 in attendance, landowners heard from the LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District, the FotSJR and other partners as well as from landowners who have already protected or restored wetlands on their property. It was an informative event and many attendees were interested in more details regarding their own wetlands.

To continue with our mission of bringing this information to the public, the FotSJR and its partners are planning additional outreach events. To see if an event is coming to your area check out www.fotsjr.org for upcoming events. If you’d like more information on our Wetland Partnership Project, details can be found at www.fotsjr.org/WetlandPartnership.

JOIN US!

FotSJR meetings are typically held on the fourth Thursday of the month at the Three Rivers Public Library.

Meetings begin at 1:00 p.m. EDT and are open to the public.

Visit www.fotsjr.org to verify meeting schedules

Have an event you'd like to share?

Email us at fotsjr.outreach@gmail.com

Dirty facts about Sediment

- Sediment is the most common pollutant in our lakes, rivers and streams
- Natural erosion produces nearly 30% of total sediment in the U.S., while human use of land accounts for the remaining 70%
- Nutrients transported by sediment can activate growth of algae
- Sediment in rivers can alter the flow of water and reduce water depth limiting navigation and recreation
- Excess sediment can bury habitats that small organisms rely on as well as eliminating fish spawning grounds

The Grand Kankakee Marsh

“Everglades of the North”

Less than a century ago, an area located in Northwestern Indiana resembled the vast swamplands of Florida’s Everglades. This region covering 500,000 acres was known as the Grand Kankakee Marsh or the “Everglades of the North.” It was one of the greatest freshwater wetland ecosystems of the world. The Kankakee Marsh was an obvious settling grounds for the Potawatomi as the marsh provided all the supplies the tribe could need. It was home to abundant amounts of wildlife and plant life to sustain the Potawatomi and their way of living. After Europeans began settling in North America, Louis the XIV of France claimed this land as part of “New France” and began to trade with the Potawatomi.



The Grand Kankakee Marsh (www.vimeo.com)

The marsh supported a great local economy, built around fur trading and hunting of waterfowl. With an abundance of wildlife, sportsmen came from all over the world to

hunt, and fish. These sportsmen eventually included a few Presidents of the United States. The marsh provided a seemingly endless supply natural resource including barrels of frog legs and railroad cars full of wild game headed to Chicago markets.

Changes in the marsh came with the growing human population and developments. The fertile soils would provide a great opportunity for growing crops if the land could be drained. As the demand for fertile soils grew, a massive effort to drain the area began.



Dredging Machine on the Kankakee River (www.gokankakeeriver.org)

The first efforts to drain the and were completed using shovels to make trenches; however, as technology advanced a dredging machine was created that could do in 20 minutes what shoveling did in 10 hours. These dredging machines channelized the river and its tributaries, which resulted in a transformation of the Grand Marsh from a great producer of wildlife and plants into an impressive producer of crops. With this immense change, wildlife in the region

vacated as habitat was removed . A new farming economy emerged from where the former fish and game economy had boomed.



Only 5% of the marsh is still in existence today and very few areas remain as they appeared 200 years ago. Restoration to the Grand Marsh has taken place in the last 20 years as part of the Indiana Grand Kankakee Marsh Restoration Project. In

www.kankakeeriver.com

fact, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi have restored 1,100 acres of wetland in the marsh. The efforts have already had an impact with wildlife returning to the area. With better understanding of the important roles wetlands play in the environment, a local and federal effort continue to raise awareness and restore the Grand Kankakee Marsh.

For more information or to purchase the DVD “Everglades of the North” visit www.kankakeemarch.com

Creature Feature

Northern River Otter (*Lontra Canadensis*)

This member of the weasel family is known for its playful behavior where wrestling and chasing are common games to pass the time. The adult river otter weighs anywhere from 11-31pounds and is covered by a thick, waterproof coat of fur. They typically feed on fish, turtles, crayfish and other amphibians. Breeding takes place in the Fall with birth in the Spring resulting in “kits” of 1-3 offspring. The young are capable of independence in just a few months but often stay with the family until the following spring.

The river otter is very susceptible to any changes in their environment. Their populations have been significantly reduced by habitat loss as well as their limited tolerance of environmental pollution. Even the smallest amounts of pollution will drive these critters out of their habitat and to healthier habitats.

Populations have been impacted for years, but through improved natural resource management and water quality protection populations are returning. Recent sightings within



Photo Courtesy of U.S. Fish & Wildlife
(www.fws.gov/midwest/images/riverotter.jpg)

**Looking for an event?
Hosting an event?**

Email fotsjr.outreach@gmail.com to promote your event
or visit www.fotsjr.org/upcoming_events to search for events in your area

FotSJR supports local projects!

FotSJR partners with many local organizations in an effort to support projects that protect the water quality and habitats of our great watershed. Below is a list of projects we are currently involved in. We look forward to continuing our support of these projects and new projects for the coming years!

EPA Wetland Partnership Project

Stream Monitoring in the Hodunk-Messenger Chain of Lakes Watershed

Prairie River Watershed Planning Project

Agricultural Water Enhancement Program (AWEP) Implementation in Michigan

Improving Water Quality in the Paw Paw Watershed

Portage River/Little Portage Creek Planning Project

Pigeon Creek Planning Project

Christiana Creek Fish Passage Feasibility Study

Nottawa Creek Planning Project



SUPPORT THE FRIENDS

The Friends of the St. Joe River are working with individuals and partner organizations to implement important restoration and protection projects throughout the watershed.

Pledge your support for our efforts by making a tax-deductible donation. Your support and generosity will help us improve and protect the quality of the water and other natural resources we depend on. Visit www.fotsjr.org for more information.

**P.O. Box 1794
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