

Friends of the St. Joseph River

Board Meeting held via Zoom – Thursday, April 25, 2024

Respectfully submitted by Chris Temple

Mat Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:02 PM.

Board Members Present: Matt Meersman, Annie Klehfoth, Chris Temple, Grant Poole, Jeff Reece, Kim Sinclair, Jordan Shedd

Watershed Council and Other Attendees: Aimee Wentworth, Ross St. Clair, Teresa “Terri” Loomis

Minutes: Matt asked if anyone had questions about the minutes from the last meeting in March that had been posted on the Friends website. There were no questions. Kim Sinclair made a motion to accept the minutes from the last meeting, and the motion was seconded by Jeff Reece. The motion passed with unanimous consent.

Treasurer’s Report: Kim Sinclair presented the Treasurer’s Report, and Matt also shared the report with everyone on the Zoom meeting. Jeff Reece moved to accept the report, and Chris Temple seconded the motion. The motion passed with unanimous consent.

Old Business:

1. Chris Temple reported that the Friends group purchased liability insurance and D&O insurance coverage from Alliant. The invoice should arrive to the Friends P.O. Box soon. The Alliant insurance coverage became effective as of April 2, 2024.
2. Matt Meersman gave an update on the upcoming Watershed Celebration Event. It will be held on Friday, May 10th at Covered Bridge Farm Park near Centerville, Michigan. Carolyn Grace and Matt recently visited the site for a wedding, and the facility is very nice. The event’s guest speaker will be Jon Coleman who is a history professor from Notre Dame and has written books on the history of the American wilderness and is currently working on a book project regarding the Kankakee Marsh. The caterer is arranged with great food options, and Carolyn is providing linen, plates, cups, and silverware which is a huge help! The dinner price of \$20 is staying the same as last year. Matt is also working on the separate program for the St. Joseph River Basin Commission’s annual Symposium which will take place in the same location that afternoon. For the Watershed Celebration, there will be similar beer and wine options at a cash bar like last year. For other drinks, the group decided to keep things simple and offer coolers of water. **Kim volunteered to take care of water with basil and/or lemon. Kim said she would work with Carolyn on this.** Matt confirmed that the speaker’s dinner and honorarium would be covered, and he has communicated with Jon about the theme for the evening and the inclusion of both the Michigan and Indiana attendees. Matt encouraged everyone to register for the event. Matt also mentioned the issue of water availability being a theme for the Symposium and its relevance to the Prairie River in St. Joseph County and irrigation well permits for farmers. Managing Great Lakes groundwater is a complex topic that will be discussed. Treaty obligations between the United States and Canada require that states demonstrate management of Great Lakes water resources. On a related note, the [LEAP Lebanon Project](#) in West Lafayette could transfer massive water resources from the Wabash River basin for economic development. The Symposium will focus on managing these types of challenges.

3. For the 2023 Al Smith Watershed Stewardship Award, there have been three nominees. Matt will email the nominees to the Board and ask them to vote for a recipient. The winner will be surprised as the recipient at the Watershed Celebration event with presentation of the travelling trophy.
4. Matt passed along the sad news that Bob Owens passed away recently at the age of 91. Bob was the very first winner of the Al Smith Watershed Award and received it in 2012. Bob paddled the whole length of the river many times. Bob loved the St. Joseph River watershed and would recruit friends to join him on boating trips along some of the watershed's most challenging routes and tributaries. Bob was a great friend and leader in the Friends organization, and he will be missed.

New Business:

1. A Michindoh Aquifer Groundwater Governance Workshop will be held on May 9-10. The large aquifer lies at the intersection of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan. Groundwater withdrawal projects such as a large one in northwest Ohio have generated concerns about water resource management. As an area stakeholder, the Friends of the St. Joseph River was contacted by email about the two-day event. Jon Roterman was the point of contact who reached out. The event happens to overlap with our Watershed Celebration event. Grant Poole said that he planned to attend the Michindoh Aquifer Workshop.
2. The group discussed the Friends summer meeting schedule and the balance between meetings in person versus virtual meetings with Zoom. It was decided that the next meeting would be virtual on May 23rd. Terri offered to host the meeting in person on June 27th at Conservation Park in Three Rivers. A motion to have the meeting at Conservation Park in Three Rivers was proposed by Kim Sinclair. It was seconded by Annie Klehfoth. The motion passed with unanimous consent. For future meetings, Annie mentioned the possibility of hosting the group at the Elkhart Environmental Center or making the meeting be a hybrid in-person/virtual meeting with the use of an "OWL" device that serves as a 360 degree camera and speaker. A future meeting possibility of August 15 was discussed, but it was decided to decide on the date and location later.

Announcements:

1. Aimee Wentworth announced that Steuben Conservation is looking for a new resource conservationist because she is leaving to become the naturalist at Pokagon State Park.
2. Matt publicly thanked Carolyn again for all of her event logistics help!
3. Jeff Reece shared that he heard Annie did a great job in her recent presentation to the Elkhart Conservation Club. Chris said that Annie received a standing ovation.
4. Matt shared that he recently gave a presentation at the Izaak Walton League in South Bend for its 100th anniversary celebration. There were over 100 people in attendance, they were giving away trees, and it was a great event. Jeff Reece mentioned the historical fact that AEP played a role in getting the land for the Izaak Walton League's location.

Matt said that he was hoping to see everyone in person at the Watershed Celebration on Friday, May 10, 2024. The next Friends meeting will be held via Zoom on Thursday, May 23, 2024 from 1:00-3:00 PM.

Chris Temple motioned to adjourn the meeting. Jeff Reece seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Matt adjourned the meeting at 1:41 PM and thanked everyone for their attendance.