

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, February 26, 2015
Three Rivers Public Library-Three Rivers, MI

IN ATTENDANCE:

- **Directors:** Bob Jones, Zac Martin, Bruce Barton, Jim Coury, Ray Leising, Eric Kerney, Ron Niezgodski, Daragh Deegan, Jeff Wenzel
- **Watershed Council:** Marcy Colclough, Carolyn Grace, Kathy Worst, Grant Poole
- **Visitors:** Patty Hoch-Meluish, Kieser & Associates; Kyle Alexander, MDEQ-WRD; Rich Walag, I&M AEP; Carol Higgins, St. Joseph County CD

Vice-president Daragh Deegan called the meeting to order at 1:05 PM in the absence of President Matt Meersman. Matt was in Washington D.C. speaking as an advocate for Healing Our Waters (HOW). Daragh welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions.

Minutes of the January 2015 board meeting were not ready and will be presented at the March 2015 board meeting for approval.

Treasurer's Report was presented by Daragh Deegan in the absence of Danielle Meersman. Motion to approve the treasurer's report was made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Jim Coury. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Annual Meeting Planning:

- It was encouraged to invite city, county, and township planners and engineers to the annual meeting as the keynote speaker, Jim Patchett, will address sustainable land use planning and design.
- Annual Meeting promotional flyer and registration is available on the FotSJR website.
- Marcy Colclough volunteered to create a press release.
- We have four (4) outstanding candidates for the Al Smith Stewardship Award. Most of the directors have voted with a few more to vote. Once those votes have been cast, the award winner will be announced.
- Anyone with silent auction items should e-mail Matt at paddleheadz@gmail.com so he can prepare information sheets for each item. Bob Jones volunteered to keep track of all donation forms. Daragh will e-mail everyone the donation form. Once you fill it out, e-mail to Bob at Robert.jones@in.nacdnet.net.
- Marcy Colclough volunteered to be point person on exhibitor displays. It was mentioned that we should encourage commercial exhibitors to participate.
- Matt Meersman will be confirming all reservations with Sturges-Young Auditorium.
- LaGrange SWCD will provide the big screen for powerpoint presentations and Marcy Colclough will provide projector.
- The March business meeting will be at 2:00 PM at Sturges-Young Auditorium.

RCPP Update:

Marcy Colclough reported the RCPP project through lead agency MDARD will provide \$6.8 million of cost-share for agricultural best management practices over five (5) years. Much of the implementation will be through cooperation of Indiana and Michigan NRCS offices and personnel. It was thought that the entire award was for cost share, but MDARD was informed after the fact that 20% of the \$6.8 million is for NRCS staffing. The team working on the structure and implementations of the project is going to have to do some realigning of funds. The goal is to have the contract structure finalized by mid-March with an actual contract by the end of May. Marcy said they were trying to find separate funding (possible foundation grants) for a project manager and marketing campaign. This project is a complicated one and it is important to have one person keeping an eye on all the different facets of the project. The team is also hoping to maybe partner with organizations who may already be doing monitoring in different parts of the watershed. It was mentioned that some energy companies have some small grant monies available that we might be able to tap.

Ron Niezgodski applauded Marcy for all the work she has done in doing the grant writing and coordination needed to make this happen in a short period of time. All agreed!

NEW BUSINESS

Prior to the meeting, Matt Meersman had contacted board members by e-mail regarding two (2) action items for the FotSJR Board. The first was with regards to Healing Our Waters Great Lakes Coalition (HOW). Matt was contacted by a member of the HOW Governance Board. He was asked to represent the FotSJR and our region at the 2015 Great Lakes Day in Washington D.C. to advocate for continued funding of Great Lakes watershed restoration efforts. He agreed to attend and was awarded a scholarship to cover his costs. We (FotSJR) have been asked to formally sign on as a member of the HOW Great Lakes Coalition. There is no cost to being a member and no special obligations beyond being an advocate for Great Lakes health.

The second action item was to support Pokagon Band of Potawatomi DNR. Grant Poole requested support in seeking grants for their project to reconnect a 3 mile stretch of natural meanders on the Dowagiac River. They are applying to 2 separate grant programs (Save Our Great Lakes and the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative) and they are looking for FotSJR support without any commitment of matching funds or services. The board authorized by e-mail for Matt to send both support letters.

A special event relating to the RCPP grant was a news conference on President's Day, February 16, 2015, with US Senator Joe Donnelly from Indiana and US Senators Debbie Stabenow and Gary Peters from Michigan. The news conference was to highlight the \$13.6 million public/private investment of the St. Joe River Watershed. Senator Stabenow stated *"This innovative project is truly driven by local farmers and partners, from Michigan and Indiana, who have the most at stake when it comes to taking care of our land and water. Working*

together, this partnership will protect the St. Joseph Watershed for families, boaters, hunters and anglers to enjoy."

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- March 4, 2015 – Steuben County Indiana Annual Meeting
- March 5, 2015 – LaGrange County Indiana Annual Meeting
- March 7, 2015 – Canoe & Kayak Show at MSU Pavilion
- March 10, 2015 – Public meeting for Pucker Street Dam
- March 14, 2015 – Branch County Conservation Expo & Annual Meeting
- March 14, 2015 – St. Joseph County Michigan youth hunt
- March 25, 2015 – St. Joseph County Michigan Annual Meeting
- April 1, 2015 – Input due for River Country Local Food & Recycling Guide
- Kathy Worst informed the group that the invasive species grant that she applied for in partnership with many others was denied. She indicated that the opportunity was highly competitive and only 20 of 68 proposals were funded.
- Daragh handed out education material that is being used by the Elkhart County Stormwater Partnership. The partnership is a member of the Clear Choices – Clean Water campaign and as such can use their educational materials but customize to our watershed. They have had numerous copies of the “Superheroes Guide to Protecting Our Water” made, which includes a map of the St. Joe Watershed. The guide is focused on water quality education for children.
- Daragh passed out concept renderings for the Christiana Creek fish passage study he has been working on. He explained a couple of the projects on Christiana Creek that may be of interest to other stakeholders. So, as part of the project they developed some artistic renderings that will be used as an outreach tool in engaging the stakeholders.
- Daragh announced that at the December, 2014 St. Joseph River Basin Commission Meeting, their guest speaker was Jack Wittman who developed a Water Supply Study for the State of Indiana. The study was completed for the Indiana Chamber of Commerce. Mr. Wittman provided projections on water use and supply issues in the next several decades in the State. Mr. Wittman is promoting significant management and study of Indiana’s water supply. The SJRBC voted to support Mr. Wittmans efforts.
- Tree Sale in St. Joseph County Michigan
- St. Joseph County Michigan has added/updated the river trail on their county website.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on **Friday, March20, 2015 at 2:00 PM** in Sturgis, MI at the Sturges-Young Auditorium prior to our Annual Meeting.

Ron Niezgodski moved to adjourn and Jeff Wenzel seconded the motion.

Respectfully submitted by acting secretary Bob Jones.