

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, Michigan
Thursday, October 27, 2011 – 1:00 p.m.

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Directors - Bruce Barton, Jim Coury, Eric Kerney, Ray Leising, Matt Meersman, Danielle Meersman, Ron Niezgodski, Maria Schaefer, Dona Hunter
- Watershed Council Members – Chris Bauer, MDEQ Water Resources Division; Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Joe Parman, Van Buren County Drain Commission; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph County Drain Commission; Bill Courliss, Union Lake Community Association; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and asked for introductions.

Minutes of the September meeting were approved on a motion made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Ray Leising after one correction. Chris Bauer noted that both of the NOIs were approved for full proposals, not just one as reported.

Treasurer's Report for October was presented by Danielle Meersman, Treasurer. Danielle reported that net income from the Fish Migration Barrier Workshop was approximately \$2,000. Total assets as of 10/27/11 are \$50,646.23. The treasurer's report was approved on a motion made by Dona Hunter and seconded by Jim Coury.

Wetland Partnership Project – Matt Meersman reported that collecting the GIS parcel data is going surprisingly well. Some counties are slower than others in getting the GIS information, but it is coming. The next quarterly meeting will be held on November 17 at the library.

Fish Migration Barrier Workshop – It was a very good workshop with 35 people in attendance, split about evenly between Indiana and Michigan attendees. Matt thanked Marcy, Daragh and Maria for their assistance in setting it up. The common comment from those in attendance on the tour was they will not look at stream culverts in the same way again. This would be a good workshop to do again or expand on. It was also suggested expanding the stream crossing inventory, since it was not a complete inventory.

Purdue NSF Grant Support – Matt contacted board members by email for action on a support letter for this project proposal to the National Science Foundation. Support was unanimous from those who replied and the letter was submitted.

Pucker Street Dam RFP – This dam is located on the Dowagiac River 5 miles from the confluence with the St. Joe River. Ken Crowe with Riverkeepers gave a presentation at a past board meeting talking about removal of the dam due to safety hazards. The City of Niles owns the dam and has received interest from a company to upgrade and repair the dam for hydropower generation. The city has released an RFP requesting proposals to do the repair and upgrades. Ken wants to put together a

proposal focusing on removal of the dam with grant related funding source and the reasons to remove instead of repair. He is looking for support from various organizations in the watershed. Matt said that he does not want to author the proposal, but would like to have the official support of the FotSJR if such a proposal is submitted. Jim Coury asked about the cost for restoration of the dam. The feasibility study completed on the dam reported that the cost of restoration would be very high and it advised against repair and upgrades. Army Corp of Engineers will do a free study for the City of Niles concerning restoration versus removal. It sounds like there is strong evidence for removal.

Marcy said that she was surprised by the controversy that arose around the removal of the dam at Watervliet. There is strong support for “green energy” and they look at hydropower as being green. Hydropower as we know it is not really green energy. It is carbon free, but still not good for the river. The company interested in restoring the dam for power generation will be using new technology, but it has not been proven if it is better or not.

Jim Coury made a motion to support the removal of the dam from a river health prospective and to authorize Matt to write a letter of support for Ken Crowe and the proposal he is interested in submitting. Hydro dams are an outdated source of energy generation and not really green energy. Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion; motion carried.

MS4 Communities – Matt and Marcy attended a meeting with MDEQ in Lansing. One of the components under the requirements for MS4 communities covers education and outreach. Matt was wondering if this would be a way for FotSJR to assist these communities with developing education materials and conducting meetings/workshops and at the same time raise some funds to continue supporting staff. After some discussion it was apparent there is not much money available for these activities and most communities are providing this with a small amount of support from outside the organization. It was determined that this is probably not a way to generate funds, but another way for FotSJR to provide support to these MS4 communities in education and outreach.

December Meeting Date – A date was discussed for the December meeting, since the normal meeting date is right before Christmas. The possibility was raised about the need for a December meeting and if it could be cancelled. It will be discussed again at the November meeting.

Other Items:

- Dave Forester was not able to attend today’s meeting, but asked Matt to share information about the Two Rivers Coalition Annual Meeting. The meeting is scheduled for December 14 at the Van Buren Conference Center in Lawrence in the evening. Two speakers will be featured. A representative from Eaton County will discuss the Time of Sale Septic Inspection Ordinance adopted for their county. The second speaker is Chuck Nelson Sarret Nature Center in Benton Harbor discussing the glaciers and how they affected this area. He is a very interesting speaker.
- John Nelson sent word that Amy DeShon is no longer with the St. Joseph County CD in Michigan and they will be looking for another employee after the first of the year. Becky Shank, who was elected to the Conservation District Board, has also resigned. John reported they had six river

clean ups in 2011 with over 3 tons of metal being collected. They have nine clean ups scheduled for 2012 and 11 scheduled in 2013.

- Jim Coury asked about the 319 grant proposals within the watershed. Chris Bauer reported they only had 28 submitted for the entire state with 5 from this area – 4 for implementation and 1 for planning.
- Chris Bauer reported that the data from the Biological Survey for the Upper St. Joe Watershed has been released, if anyone is interested. Overall the condition of the waters is good.
- Marcy Colclough, SWMPC, has been appointed to serve on a Resources Council formed by DEQ. The council will be reviewing water withdrawal and assessment tool addressing water withdrawal in Michigan from the law that was passed in 2008. Is this the right tool to be used in this portion of the state? It looks at groundwater withdrawal and the effect it has on surface waters.
- Jim Coury reported on the installation of 5 or 6 public access sites in the oil spill area that are being funded by Enbridge. He attended a tour a few days ago. The company is awarding \$10,000 to \$15,000 grants for conservation projects in the spill area, but is spending \$750,000 plus for each of the public access sites they are developing. That stretch of the river is expected to remain closed until the middle of 2012.

The next meeting is scheduled for November 17 at 1:00 p.m. in the Three Rivers Public Library.

Meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m. on a motion made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Matt Meersman.

Minutes recorded by Dona Hunter, FotSJR Secretary.