

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, 1/26/12 – 1:00 p.m.
Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, Michigan

IN ATTENDANCE:

- **Directors:** Eldred Adams, Bruce Barton, Eric Kerney, Matt Meersman, Geoff Cripe, Brian Musser, Dona Hunter, Ron Niezgodski, Jim Coury
- **Watershed Council Members:** Chris Bauer, MDEQ Water Bureau; Jeff Reece, Indiana Michigan Power; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph County Drain Commissioner; Bill Courliss, Union Lake Community Association
- **Visitors:** Grant Poole, Pokagon Band; Roxanne Barton; Rachel Smith, Branch Conservation District; Linda Novitski, MDEQ Student Intern; Korie Bachleda, Earth Day; Jeff Blyveis, Earth Day; Rebecca Shank, Fabius Township Citizens' Coalition

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

MINUTES of the November board meeting were approved as submitted on a motion made by Geoff Cripe and seconded by Ron Niezgodski.

TREASURER'S Report was submitted by Matt in the absence of Danielle Meersman, Treasurer. It shows total assets of \$49,625.81. The report was approved on a motion made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Jim Coury.

WETLAND PARTNERSHIP PROJECT: Matt brought everyone up to date on progress being made with the project. It will continue for the next year and a half or a little more, is EPA funded, and the end result will be a complete wetland assessment of the St. Joe River Watershed. The next meeting will be in February and the data set should be almost complete by then and ready for use. The 5th quarterly report was submitted on December 30 to EPA. An invoice was finally received from MDEQ for work completed through September. That invoice was for almost \$25,000 and should be reflected on the February treasurer's report. There are primarily two people at MDEQ working on the project and there are about 20 people serving on the Steering Committee.

OUTREACH COORDINATOR CONTRACT: Matt worked with Leah to revise both the contract for her assistance to the Friends and the contract for work to be completed under the Wetland Partnership Grant. The Wetland Contract is not to exceed \$6,500, which is much less than before. SWMPC – Marcy Colclough – is assisting Matt with the reporting, so Leah is not responsible for that. The upper cap on FotSJR contract is \$10,000 down from \$15,000. These revisions were sent to the board by email and 85% of the board replied within 3 days giving Matt approval to have the contracts signed. Matt met with Leah on January 6 and now has signed contracts, which are available for anyone who would like to see them. Matt also reported that a newsletter went out and Leah is working on a winter one. Leah is planning on attending the next meeting.

ANNUAL MEETING PLANNING: "Marsh Madness" is the theme for the Annual Watershed Council Meeting scheduled for March 26 at Sturges Young Auditorium. Tom Springer will be the keynote speaker. It was suggested having a cash bar and social time beginning at 5:00 p.m. with the meeting starting at 6:00. Staff with Sturges Young will operate the bar, with no liability for the Friends.

For the last two years the cost of the dinner has been \$20 per person. This year we will be paying Tom Springer an honorarium and the meal cost has increased some. Dona Hunter made a motion to increase the cost to \$25 per person, have a cash bar open at 5:00 and to pay Tom Springer \$150 for speaking. Ron Niezgodski seconded the motion; motion carried.

Several suggestions were made to contact for donations for the silent auction. Sports items from local teams are always popular items. Anyone having a donation should contact Leah. It was also suggested having some of Tom Springer's books for both the auction and for sale. It was also suggested targeting a couple of groups and asking them to take 5 minutes during the meeting to talk about their successes with projects in the watershed. Another suggestion was to have a summary page for groups to provide outlining success stories. Geoff Cripe will work on contacting groups to provide information on projects completed or ongoing in the watershed. Becky Shank mentioned the Save the Frogs program focusing on banning the use of Atrazine and suggested having them as an exhibitor. Leah will prepare a news release.

Matt asked for input on an award to be presented at each annual meeting to a deserving individual in the watershed – something like an "Al and Margaret Smith Watershed Passion Award". A committee was established to write criteria for this award. The committee is made up of Brian Musser, Rachel Smith, and Matt Meersman.

Rutty Adams passed out the possible menus for dinner. He wanted some input on what to order. He will check with the auditorium and confirm the type of meal we can order for the \$20.00 agreed upon. The board will look at the menu during the next board meeting.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS NOMINATING COMMITTEE REPORT: Geoff Cripe has been in contact with the 5 directors whose terms are expiring and 4 of the 5 are interested in remaining on the board for another term. Dona Hunter is retiring from her position as coordinator with the SWCD and would also like to step down from serving on the board of the Friends. Rachel Smith is a potential candidate to replace her. Melanie Stoughton has volunteered to serve as the new secretary, if she is needed. If you are interested in becoming an officer, contact Geoff.

The board development chart that was put together to recruit new and additional supervisors was discussed. It was developed to track board experience and background. We need to consider other individuals to invite to the annual meeting that might make good board members and watershed council members who would provide additional expertise for the board to draw on. Rutty Adams asked about the need for a lawyer. In the past a lawyer that serves on the board of the Two Rivers Coalition has been consulted to provide advice on contracts and so far that has been sufficient. He has been willing to provide guidance at least for now. Geoff will send a copy of this information to all of the current board members.

EARTH DAY CELEBRATION: Korie Bachleda with the Earth Day Planning Committee handed out a flyer for the program scheduled for May 19 at Lawless Park. She invited us to both attend and set up a display on that day. She is also doing nature mapping every Monday evening at the park in conjunction with the Cass County Parks Board.

OTHER EARTH DAY PROGRAMS – There will be an Earth Day Program on April 22 at the Rush Memorial Museum in Bristol in conjunction with the Elkhart County Parks Department and Environmental Center. Daragh Deegan and Tim Cataldo will be involved with this program. Matt was asked to attend on behalf

of the Friends and he is planning to go. There is also a program on April 21 in St. Joe County at the Centerville Fairgrounds. Korie will be there and would be glad to pass out flyers for the Friends at the Solid Waste Booth.

ST. JOE RIVER PUBLIC ACCESS ISSUES – The Township and the Village of Berrien Springs have prohibited the launching of canoes/kayaks at 2 or 3 public parks along river at Berrien Springs. There was a misunderstanding between the township and the DNR about what was allowed. The boat ramp will remain closed at the Fishermen’s Haven access site, but they will be required to allow the launching of “carry in” watercraft like canoes and kayaks. Matt thought they were trying to direct people to the boat launch at Shamrock Park where they have to pay.

OTHER BOARD MEMBER BUSINESS:

- Brian Musser reported that they have received notification that 2 grants will be funded through IDEM/EPA. The one is for more work in the Pigeon Creek Watershed and is through 319. The second is for the development of a watershed management plan for Fawn River in conjunction with LaGrange Co. SWCD. This will be a 205j grant, requiring no match.
- Jim Coury reported on the new road and bicycle trail guide/map that has been completed. Trail development is exploding in Michigan – they are #1 in the country in the development of coastal heritage travel. There are two large funds that are available for park and trail development. SWMPC will be hosting two workshops: one on March 3 for Landscaping and Water Quality and the second on March 14 for Low Impact Development.

WATERSHED COUNCIL BUSINESS:

- Chris Bauer reported there will be a Hickory Creek Watershed Meeting on Tuesday, January 30. Hickory Creek is located in the west end of the watershed.
- Becky Shank announced that Dave Brouer is the new in-residence wildlife biologist for Crane Pond and will be available for private consultation in the area. He and Ken Kessen, MDNR, will be at the Branch Co. Expo on February 11.
- Matt and Geoff will be doing a wetland presentation at the Branch Co. Expo on February 11.
- Jim Coury announced the Quiet Water Symposium on March 3 in Lansing.

NEXT MEETING is scheduled for Thursday, February 23 at 1:00 p.m. There will be a Wetland Partnership Meeting in the morning of the same day beginning at 10:15 a.m.

Meeting adjourned on a motion made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Dona Hunter.