

**Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, May 28, 2015—1:00 PM**  
**Three Rivers Public Library—Three Rivers, MI**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

- **Directors:** Matt Meersman, Melanie Stoughton, Bob Jones, Ron Niezgodski, Jim Coury, Ray Leising, John Law
- **Watershed Council:** Carolyn Grace, St. Joe (MI) Conservation District; Bill Courliss, Union Lake Association; Dennis Bradley, Fabius Township; Brian Campbell, WLL RC&D

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:02 pm, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions.

**Minutes** of the April 23, 2015 were reviewed by the board. A motion to approve and place the minutes on file was made by John Law, and seconded by Ron Niezgodski. Motion carried.

**Treasurer's Report** was presented by Matt Meersman for Treasurer Danielle Meersman. A written report was provided and summarized. A motion made to accept the treasurer's report as presented was made by Ray Leising, and seconded by Jim Coury. Motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Annual Meeting Wrap-up:** Matt reported that all completed surveys from Annual Meeting attendees were reviewed prior to the May board meeting. Overall, comments regarding the agenda and keynote speaker were very positive. Matt noted that there were a couple of negative comments regarding the move from a Monday to a Friday evening for the event. Discussion on whether to reconsider what day of the week future annual meetings are scheduled for ensued, with the overall consensus that Friday meetings are best suited for the type of program FotSJR would like to offer to their members. A brief discussion on the start time of the evening was also debated, and it was decided that more consideration would be given to all feedback from the event going forward for the 2016 meeting next March.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Project Update**—Matt Meersman gave a brief report for Marcy Colclough, who was unable to be at the May meeting. Matt announced that 20% of the total funding was required to be allocated to technical assistance—a percentage that had failed to be factored into the original project proposal by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development and USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service. The bi-state project will be implemented differently by Indiana and Michigan. Indiana NRCS intends to use staff already available and/or moving other employees into the watershed to complete the workload, while

Michigan NRCS intends to develop an agreement with MDARD similar to the Conservation Technical Assistance Initiative (CTAI) program that has been in place since late 2007. An announcement to Conservation Districts in Michigan was made via email from Jack Knorek earlier in May stating that the three technicians will be placed in Van Buren, Cass and St. Joseph Counties, with the position in St. Joseph County handling engineering work in addition to conservation planning. Jack Knorek, who was included in the grant writing for the project, will be the program manager for the grant. In a May 4<sup>th</sup> meeting between Michigan NRCS, MDARD, Michigan Conservation District Managers, and MAEAP Specialists, information regarding program execution was generally summarized, noting that the Crop\*A\*Syst tool through MAEAP would be a key requirement for landowners interested in applying for RCPP funds. Carolyn Grace, District Manager from the St. Joseph County CD (Michigan), and recipient of a Technical Assistance grant through RCPP stated that the structure of the grant shows the two technician grants in Van Buren and Cass Counties set at \$50,000 annually, and the grant at the STJCCD set at \$65,000 annually—with a 10% administration cut taken off the top to cover costs of a new employee. Jim Coury noted that he attended the official signing of the RCPP grant in Lansing, where he learned that Michigan was the top state in regards to the quality of the grants submitted, as well as the only state to have a project that crosses into another state.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**1. Healing our Waters Coalition**—Matt Meersman reported on correspondence between FotSJR and the Healing our Waters Coalition, stating that there are occasional requests for our association to sign on to letters to legislators on issues/causes that align with the FotSJR Mission Statement. Matt noted that the requests as of late have been coming in frequently enough that he would like approval to reply on behalf of the association when necessary. Due to the quick turn-around time between receiving a request and the deadline to respond, Matt asked to be given permission to follow up as he sees fit—without individual votes at monthly board meetings A motion to allow Matt Meersman to respond to the HOW coalition on behalf of FotSJR when issues are in line with the FotSJR mission statement, was made by John Law, and seconded by Bob Jones. Motion carried.

**2. June FotSJR Meeting**—Matt reminded everyone that the June board meeting will be held at Pine Knob Park on Thursday, June 25<sup>th</sup> at 1 pm. After meeting activities are currently being planned, and more information will be provided in the meeting reminder that everyone will receive on June 18<sup>th</sup>.

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**John Law**—announced that he had attended a meeting for a filter strip committee in Indiana that include seven northern Indiana counties. Working with SWCDs and County Surveyors to

discuss their goal of increasing buffers by offering tax incentives for those landowners along county drains that agree to install filter strips—per Indiana law. Matt noted that spatial data obtained during the Wetland Partnership Project could be used to target landowners in those seven counties for outreach and education. John Law agreed that this information would be extremely beneficial, and asked Matt to speak with Jeremy Reiman. Matt noted that there are similar ideas being discussed in Van Buren County (MI) that he hopes will build onto a project similar to the ideas discussed in Indiana.

**Carolyn Grace**—announced that the STJCCD was not awarded funding to remove the Parkville Dam on their first attempt. Carolyn noted that the CD intends to resubmit the proposal for the next funding cycle, and after speaking with the DNR, feels that the project will be at the top of the list for this year's funding. Carolyn stated that one of the comments given by the DNR was in regards to letters of support that did not provide any dollar amount for in-kind match, and that the agency would like to see some figures from those groups supporting the project in any future letters of support. Carolyn noted that in previous projects, FotSJR had roughly estimated in-kind match to be \$500, and asked if the board would agree to a similar commitment. Matt asked Carolyn other than removal of the dam, what project goals are included in the proposal that FotSJR could provide educational assistance, or program outreach and promotion. Carolyn replied that she hopes to strategize while attending the MACD summer conference in June. Jim Coury added that a similar project was completed on Rice Creek in Calhoun County, and that grant writer Gregg Strand would be a good person to get advice from. Denny Bradley noted that Stark Excavating, a local company, may be willing to provide equipment towards the project, which could also be considered as in-kind match. A motion to draft a letter of support for the Parkville Dam project for in-kind match up to \$500 for services that would benefit the project was made by Bob Jones and seconded by Ron Niezgodski. Motion carried.

**Dennis Bradley**—A program on Shoreline Landscaping will be held at the Fabius Township Hall on June 27<sup>th</sup>. Speakers will include Jane Herbert, MSUE, Anna K. from the Kalamazoo Nature Center, and Derek Haroldson from the Kalamazoo District DEQ. The event is free. A flyer promoting the event was distributed to the group. Dennis also announced that a large portion of land in St. Joseph County was donated to the Southwest MI Land Conservancy.

**Brian Campbell**—announced that Wood-Land-Lakes recently received an anonymous donation of appreciated stock, and urged other organizations or Conservation Districts to look into opportunities they may have to educate the public on charitable giving in the form of land donation, as well as the opportunities CDs may have with local community foundations.

**Jim Coury**—announced that the Branch CD has extended the closing date to 6/5/15 for a Farm Bill Biologist position that will cover the headwaters of the St. Joseph River, focusing on wildlife habitat and restoration practices identified in the RCPP. Jim Cory also advised local CDs to make an effort to speak with their local legislators and partnering agencies at least on a biannual basis just to touch base and stay in “good standing” with those agencies that could provide future funding opportunities on projects.

**Bill Courliss**—announced that Progressive AE has began their work on the Union Lake Management Plan

**Ray Leising**—announced that the National Scenic Trail North Country Trail goes through Hillsdale County and along the St. Joseph River. A portion of the trail in Jonesville will be completed in the next two months. Ray also noted that the Barton Family won the annual Jonesville Riverfest canoe races.

**Melanie Stoughton**—announced that the nine county group of CDs (Berrien, Cass, St. Joseph, Branch, Hillsdale, Jackson, Van Buren, Kalamazoo and Calhoun), is moving forward with resubmitting a project proposal for the DNR Invasive Species Grant. The project would focus on developing a Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area (CISMA) for a region that currently has no coverage from any organization or agency. Melanie summarized a conference call between Kathy Worst and MDNR that covered comments towards the initial proposal, noting that some adjustments would be made to the budget structure and project partners sections of the proposal. Melanie requested that FotSJR revise their letter of support from to reflect the current RFP. A motion was made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by John Law to revise the original letter of support to reflect the change in date. Motion carried. Melanie also announced that the MAEAP Specialist position covering Calhoun and Jackson counties remains open, and that anyone interested in more information should contact Tracy Bronson at the Calhoun CD.

**Matt Meersman**—announced the Wetland Partnership event being held in Berrien County on Thursday, June 18<sup>th</sup>. The walking tour will be from 4 pm to 5 pm, with the workshop following the walk from 5:30 pm to 9 pm. Registration details and event agenda can be found at [www.swmpc.org](http://www.swmpc.org), or by contacting Marcy Colclough. Matt also announced, on behalf of Daragh Deegan, that the Elkhart River Restoration Association has an upcoming event scheduled for Friday, June 5<sup>th</sup> at 6 pm. The event will include a rain barrel auction, with barrels painted by local artists. It will be held in downtown Goshen, with 50% of the profits from the auction going back to the association.

**Bob Jones**—announced that The Stewardship Network will be holding a workshop from 10 am to 2 pm on Thursday, June 4<sup>th</sup> at Douglas Woods. Bob noted that the area focused on for this event is not part of the St. Joe River Watershed.

## **NEXT MEETING**

Next meeting scheduled for June 25, 2015 at 1:00 p.m. at Pine Knob Park, in Indiana.