

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, September 27, 2012 – 1:00pm
Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, MI

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Directors: Rachel Smith, Ray Leising, Ron Niezgodski, Rudy Kappe, Maria Mast, Matt Meersman, Danielle Meersman, Daragh Deegan, Eldred Adams, Geoff Cripe, Jim Coury
- Watershed Council: Chris Bauer, MDEQ; Bill Courliss, Union Lake Com. Assoc.; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph County DC; Karen Mackowiak, St. Joseph River Basin Commission; Don Sporleder, Michiana Watershed; Jeff Reece, IMP
- Visitors: Alex Bozymowski, Cass County NRCS; Lucas Gabbard, Hillsdale Conservation District; Rick Carey, Michiana Watershed

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:00pm, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions. Matt explained the format of the Friends organization and the difference between board members and watershed organization members. Matt also passed out meeting agendas with membership statistics presented on the reverse side.

Minutes of the August board meeting were approved as submitted with a motion by Rudy Kappe and seconded by Ron Niezgodski.

Treasurers Report was presented by Treasurer Danielle Meersman detailing a profit and loss comparison of August and September 2012 and the organizations Balance Sheet as of September 27, 2012. The treasurers report was approved on a motion by Ray Leising seconded by Maria Mast.

Old Business

Wetland Partnership Project – Matt provided some updates on the project: Geoff Cripe, Marcy Colclough, and Matt are planning the next outreach event. They will be targeting the Pigeon and Fawn River watersheds that encompass several counties in Indiana and Michigan. Matt suggested that Howe Military Academy would be a good place for the event based on its central location within the two watersheds.

Matt announced that the majority of the GIS work has been completed for this project, with work remaining for only a few counties in the watershed. He praised Melanie Stoughton, Brian Musser, and Rachel Smith for their hard work with the GIS mapping. Matt reported that he planned on submitting the next due quarterly report on September 28, 2012 and he estimated that over 50% of the entire wetland partnership project has been completed.

Membership Development and Fundraising – Matt opened up a discussion on membership development and fundraising with the notion that the Friends organization has been spending a lot more money than it has been taking in within the past several years. Matt noted that he and Lucas Gabbard had shared some fundraising ideas lately and suggested that working with sub-watershed organizations might be a good approach. Several ideas were presented by Geoff Cripe including organization promotion through the Wetland Partnership Project and by initiating a Clean Water Campaign which could be coordinated with sub-watershed groups. Jim Coury suggested doing a year end appeal to Friend's members and sub-watershed groups. He described a plan in which partnership

organizations could share their mailing lists to the Friends and split revenues generated from the appeal. Following a long discussion on the matter it was decided that the Membership/Fundraising Committee of Geoff Cripe, Brian Musser, Jim Coury and Dave Foerster should get together and develop some plans. Geoff stated that in the meantime he would send out ideas to the board via email to acquire feedback.

New Business

Outreach Coordinator Contract Renewal – Matt provided several handouts to the group including a breakdown of Friends' income and expenses in the past 3 years, a summary of the Outreach Coordinators contract in 2011 and 2012, an outline to facilitate discussion on the Outreach Coordinator contract renewal, and a proposal outlining a new potential contract with the Outreach Coordinator. Matt stated that Leah has been under contract as the Outreach Coordinator for 3 years. He said that the position was developed initially on an experimental basis with the idea that it could become self-sustaining. He said he recognizes the importance of the position, and the products that have been created as a result of the position, but he is very concerned about the loss of funds from the Friends financial assets as a result of the position. As presented in the material he passed out, Matt suggested that significant changes are necessary if the board wishes to preserve the Friends' assets. The proposal summarizing the new contract that Matt developed would reduce the financial burden on the Friends and bring contract costs to \$4,000 annually, which is more in line with the annual income generated by the Friends.

Ron also stated that the Outreach Coordinator position was developed on an experimental basis and along with several others in attendance expressed concern about the position not being able to sustain itself. He has observed that Leah's general presence with the Friends seems to have diminished within the last year and is likely the result of her working in a full time position for a private company. Ron suggested that speaking with Leah as soon as possible would be a good idea as it may help in shaping the new Outreach Coordinator contract. Geoff Cripe stated that he sees the Quarterly Newsletter as being one of Leah's most important tasks. Matt agreed, but noted that much of the content of the newsletter could be generated by board and watershed council members, while Leah's expertise could be used in shaping and formatting that content into the final product, thus significantly reducing her responsibility on that task. Of the tasks handled by Leah, Matt suggested that the annual meeting is probably the most valuable, and that Leah's participation has made the event stronger and requires less effort than it used to. He also noted that annual meeting was a good source of revenue for the Friends which justified having the Outreach Coordinator manage the event. Danielle reminded the board that the annual meetings in the past few years has been heavily subsidized by Indian Michigan Power through sponsorship which may not be the case at future meetings. Some discussion followed regarding amount of time needed to complete tasks and whether Leah's compensation for tasks has accurately reflected her effort. Geoff said that for tasks like managing an event, perhaps the Outreach Coordinator should be paid on effort with a not to exceed amount as opposed to just a lump sum payment as we have been doing. Bill Courliss suggested that maybe the Friends could be assisted by partnership organizations in the upkeep of the Friends website to reduce Outreach Coordinator fees for that task. Maria Mast suggested that before anything is done it might be a good idea to get board members to step up and commit to performing some tasks that were being completed by the Outreach Coordinator. Ron and Rachel Smith suggested that the issue should be handled in committee with the intention to present a recommendation at the next meeting. A committee of Matt, Rachel, Ron, Rudy, Ray Leising and Maria was formed.

Other Items

Matt stated that he, Karen Mackowiak, and Gene Lightner performed a presentation for graduate students at the Merry Lea Environmental Learning Center in Wolf Lake, IN.

Matt stated that he and Danielle did a presentation for the St. Joseph River Homeowners Association (SJRHOA). The SJRHOA represents individuals living on the river between the Twin Branch Dam in Mishawaka and the Johnson Street Dam in Elkhart.

Matt stated that he was contacted by someone that had some concerns about logs being removed from the St. Joseph River at County Road 17 in Elkhart. He noted that a newspaper article referenced a company named Ron's Pier Service to be removing the logs from the River. He also stated that based on recently passed legislation in Indiana, removal of logs without permits from the Indiana DNR is actually permitted despite the negative consequences to aquatic organisms. Matt suggested that if the logs are being removed to reduce boating accidents that perhaps the marker buoy approach used by the SJRHOA might be a more financially feasible and ecologically friendly approach. Jeff Reece stated that this isn't the first time that log removal has been an issue on the St. Joe River in Elkhart and that the river association in Elkhart had done it several years ago. Jeff noted that even though permits through the Indiana DNR might not be necessary for removing logs, permission through Indiana Michigan Power must be sought on the St. Joseph River due to their licensing requirements with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Daragh Deegan stated that the City of Elkhart is applying to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife service for a fish passage grant to study whether fish passage alternatives are possible on 5 fish migration barriers in Christiana Creek. Daragh said that he and Matt had some conversations about the project and Matt indicated that the Friends could support the project and event provide some in-kind match towards the grant through participation in project meetings and publicity of the project through the Friends website and newsletter. Matt suggested an in-kind match amount of \$600 and agreed to provide a letter of support to Daragh. These actions were approved in a motion by Ron which was seconded by Rudy.

Don Sporleder announced that the City of South Bend has revamped a turbine at the South Bend Dam in the vicinity of Howard Park which is now generating electricity for some of the amenities within its proximity. He also mentioned that the turbine is providing energy back to the electrical grid.

Chris Bauer distributed a booklet that was recently updated by the Van Buren Conservation District about landscaping for water quality. She passed out copies of the booklet to those in attendance and noted that it might be helpful to those that live along lakes and waterways.

Next Meeting

Thursday Oct. 25th at 1:00pm at the Three Rivers Public Library

Meeting adjourned at 3:10pm