



WETLAND PARTNERSHIP MEETING

St Joseph River Watershed

OCTOBER 28, 2010

10:00 AM

Three Rivers Public Library

AGENDA

1. Landscape Level Wetland Function Assessment (LLWFA)
2. Overview of Wetland Project
3. Role of the Partnership
4. Grant Administration and Local Match (agreements/tracking sheets)
5. Next steps
6. Next meeting

WETLAND PARTNERSHIP MEMBERS

- MDNRE Water Resources Division – Chris Bauer
- IDEM Watershed Planning Branch – Angie Brown
- MDNRE Fisheries Division – Brian Gunderman
- Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi Indians – John Rodwan
- Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians – Mark Parrish
- St. Joseph River Basin Commission – Karen Mackowiak
- Southwest Michigan Planning Commission – Marcy Colclough
- Michigan State University Extension, Citizen Planner – Wayne Beyea
- Purdue University Extension, Planning with POWER – Robert McCormick
- St. Joseph County Conservation District, Michigan – Amy DeShon
- LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District – Dona Hunter
- Cass County Conservation District, Michigan – Amy Druskovich
- Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District – Nancy Brown
- Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy – Peter Ter Louw
- ACRES Land Trust – Jason Kissel
- Ducks Unlimited – Michael Sertle

Wetland Partnership Meeting Summary
Thursday, October 28, 2010
Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers, Michigan
Coordinated by Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotSJR)

Matt Meersman, President of FotSJR, welcomed everyone and asked for introductions.

IN ATTENDANCE: Eric Kerney, Nottawaseppi Huron Band of Potawatomi; Rachel Smith, FotSJR; Melanie Stoughton, FotSJR & Calhoun CD; Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Bob McCormick, Planning with Power – Purdue University Extension; Chris Bauer, MDNRE – Water Resource Division; Shane Perfect, ACRES Land Trust; Karen Mackowiak, St. Joseph River Basin Commission; Brian Gunderman, DNRE – Fisheries; Wade Hawes, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi; Dona Hunter, LaGrange Co. SWCD & FotSJR; Matt Meersman, FotSJR; Amy DeShon, St. Joe CD; Leah Cooper, FotSJR; Norm Cox, ACRES Land Trust; Michael Sertle, Ducks Unlimited; Martin Franke, LaGrange Co. SWCD; Daragh Deegan, City of Elkhart; Nancy Brown, Elkhart Co. SWCD; Kathy Worst, Branch CD; James Coury, FotSJR

- Others that were invited, but could not make it, include Pete Ter Louw, Southwest MI Land Conservancy; Angie Brown, IDEM; Amy Druskovich, Cass CD; Neil Ledet, IDNR; Scott Fetters & Rick Ward, US Fish & Wildlife Service

Matt was very pleased to see such a diverse group in attendance. Later in the project it will be important to have all 15 county conservation districts involved. We should continue to identify major stakeholders and expand the list of partners as the project moves forward.

Landscape Level Wetland Function Assessment (LLWFA) - The LLWFA will be the centerpiece of the project. It has already been completed and proven useful in other areas. It provides important information for 3 different types of user groups:

1. Land conservancies, land trusts and other groups who want to protect the most important and special wetlands from a wildlife habitat perspective.
2. Conservation Districts, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and sub-watershed groups who are trying to restore water quality. The LLWFA could be used to direct wetland restoration projects performed under the Wetland Reserve Program. The assessment will identify wetlands that will have the most impact on water quality when restored.
3. County, township, and other local officials could use the LLWFA when updating long range plans or creating zoning ordinances to protect wetlands. The assessment will provide support for more restrictive setbacks in development.

A brochure describing the LLWFA was passed around for everyone to see. It outlines the various functions assessed in the LLWFA.

OVERVIEW OF THE WETLAND PROJECT:

The first step will be contracting with MDNRE to perform the LLWFA for all the wetlands in the watershed both in Michigan and Indiana. This part of the process will take about one year. The dataset will build upon the National Wetland Inventory data adding functional information about each wetland delineated on the map. A new layer of lost wetlands will be created along with what functions they performed. Matt shared an example problem and solution:

- 85% of the wetlands in the South Branch of the Paw Paw River have been lost. All the water in the South Branch drains into Maple Lake in the Village of Paw Paw. A large amount of sediment is collecting in the lake. Dredging the entire lake would bankrupt the Village. The LLWFA will allow the Village to identify lost wetlands with the highest significance for sediment retention. They could spend money to help landowners in these areas restore wetlands to limit the sediment getting into the river.

The second part of the project will include prioritizing wetlands for restoration and protection. This will involve narrowing down the locations to be working in by assigning point values to various functions that have the most impact on the watershed. It would be best to have an overlay of parcel data added to existing GIS layers. Some counties do not have parcel data in GIS, so the polygons would have to be created using plat books. It will be important to have the Wetland Partnership involved in the prioritization process. After the prioritization is complete, maps can be produced for counties, townships and other groups to use.

Nancy Brown cautioned about looking at the number of parcels connected to each landowner. Karen Mackowiak stated that through MACOG there is parcel data for Elkhart and St. Joseph Counties in Indiana that can be printed, but not downloaded. Matt stated that maybe the counties would be willing to share parcel data if it was stripped of ownership information.

Amy DeShon questioned whether Farmland Preservation Boards would be in opposition to this project. She wanted to be sure we work together with those groups. Marcy Colclough stated that most farmland preservation ordinances also have a place for natural resource lands and try to include both when working with landowners. Amy stated that an education component would be a very important part of this process. Matt stated that NRCS has to address similar issues when prioritizing their Farm Bill programs, both production and non-production. Jim Coury stated that in Michigan the Farmland Preservation programs are based on what is set up in the eastern states and

landowners need a conservation plan that addresses existing wetlands as well as the farmland. Norm Cox voiced the concern that some landowners are concerned about the depletion of nutrients by trees planted next to crop fields.

ROLE OF THE WETLAND PARTNERSHIP:

The Wetland Partnership will serve as the Steering Committee for the project. Before the LLWFA is complete the partnership will begin looking at criteria for prioritization. Once the LLWFA and prioritization are complete the information needs to be shared with key groups in the watershed including Conservation Districts and municipalities. Model planning/zoning language also needs to be developed. When all of these components are completed they can be shared at different workshops – possibly one for municipal officials, one for nature lovers, one for those concerned about water quality and maybe one for the general public.

Kathy Worst stated that when the Branch CD was working on the Hodunk-Messenger Watershed Project there was concern with identifying property owners by name. Matt said that it would not be necessary to use specific landowner names. Although parcel data could be used, the goal of the project should be to identify priority wetlands rather than priority parcels.

Mike Sertle said Ducks Unlimited might have useful data he can share with this group.

There are communities in the process of updating their master plans now, so there needs to be some way to get this information to them soon. Maybe the next step for FotSJR is to meet with each county and let them know this project is going on. We could try to get them intrigued and get buy-in from the beginning. One of the key responsibilities of the Wetland Partnership group is to act as ambassadors for the project. There are fewer municipalities to work with in Indiana because planning and zoning occurs at the County level, whereas in Michigan each township may have unique planning and zoning.

Amy DeShon stated that a universal “dog and pony” show needs to be developed to lay the foundation for the project with municipalities. Both township and county planners would be interested in this information. Marcy and Matt will work on a power point presentation for the next meeting.

GRANT ADMINISTRATION & LOCAL MATCH:

Leah Cooper will be contracted for grant administration and outreach related to the project. FotSJR has agreed to provide a significant amount of match, which can be provided by stakeholders other than federal employees. Federal dollars cannot be used to match federal dollars. The total match for the project is over \$40,000 with FotSJR

providing almost half of that amount. Reporting will be on a quarterly basis with the first report due in November or December. Value of time spent on the project should include salary and fringe benefits. The volunteer rate can be charged at \$20.13 an hour, with rates for consultants determined by the fee they normally charge. Marcy will send digital tracking form to all partners, along with the introductory flyer. Guidance for in-kind match criteria may be available online that can be used to determine what is eligible and what is not.

Matt said that a tri-fold flyer exists with a map of the 15 counties. He will make this map available to project partners along with the LLWFA brochure.

Leah Cooper will begin working on a webpage for the project. It was suggested to set up a password protected place on the website to record in-kind match.

Army Corps of Engineers should be included in the Wetland Partnership. The regional contact in South Bend is John Richey

There was some discussion about ideal meeting locations, dates and times. Those present agreed the current time and location were acceptable.

NEXT MEETING is scheduled for January 27, 2011 at 10:00 a.m. in the Three Rivers Public Library