



## **WETLAND PARTNERSHIP MEETING**

*St Joseph River Watershed*

**JANUARY 27, 2011**

**10:00 AM**

**Three Rivers Public Library**

### **AGENDA**

1. Introductions
2. Overview of Wetland Project
3. Project Developments and Status Updates
4. Landscape Level Wetland Functional Assessment (LLWFA)
5. Non-Functional Prioritization Criteria
6. Grant Administration and Local Match (agreements/tracking sheets)
7. Next steps
8. 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/Eric Kerney
- Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians – Mark Parrish/Wade Hawes
- 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/Martin Franke
- Cass County Conservation District, Michigan – Amy Druskovich
- Elkhart County Soil & Water Conservation District – Nancy Brown
- Branch County Conservation District – Kathy Worst
- Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy – Peter Ter Louw/Geoff Cripe
- ACRES Land Trust – Jason Kissel/Shane Perfect/Norm Cox
- Ducks Unlimited – Michael Sertle

**Wetland Partnership Meeting Summary**  
**Thursday, January 27, 2011**  
**Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers, Michigan**  
**Coordinated by Friends of the St. Joseph River Association (FotSJR)**

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

**IN ATTENDANCE:** Leah Cooper, FotSJR Outreach Coordinator; Karen Mackowiak, St. Joseph River Basin Commission; Maria Schaefer, St. Joseph Co. Dept. of Public Works; Amy Druskovich, Cass County Conservation District; Michael Sertle, Ducks Unlimited; Derek Thompson, USDA-NRCS; Scott Fetters, US Fish & Wildlife Service; Chris Bauer, DNRE-WRD; Brian Gunderman, DNRE – Fisheries; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band; Wade Hawes, Pokagon Band; Chad Fizzell, DNRE; Bruce Snook, River Country Journal, Amy DeShon, St. Joseph County Conservation District; Melanie Stoughton, FotSJR; Jim Cury, FotSJR; Rob Zbiciak, MDEQ-WRD (Wetlands Program, Water Resources Division); Jeremy Jones, MDNRE; Eric Kerney, Huron Potawatomi; Kathy Worst, Branch County Conservation District; Peter Ter Louw, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy; Geoff Cripe, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy & FotSJR; Matt Meersman, FotSJR; Danielle Meersman, FotSJR; Marcy Colclough, Southwest Michigan Planning Commission & FotSJR; Dona Hunter, LaGrange County Soil & Water Conservation District & FotSJR

**OVERVIEW OF WETLAND PROJECT:** Matt presented a very brief overview of the project for those who were new to the project and had not been to the last steering committee meeting. The end product will include a complete data set of all wetlands in the St. Joseph River Watershed both in Michigan and Indiana. A variety of tools will be developed for education and outreach, including flyers, videos, power point presentations, etc.

**PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND STATUS UPDATES:** The wetland partnership agreements with the State of Michigan for the wetland assessment and with Leah Cooper for grant administration and outreach have been signed and will be posted on the website. Updates will be posted on the website on a regular basis. Matt has made presentations on the project to MEANDRS and the St. Joseph River Basin Commission. He is scheduled to present at the Steuben County Soil and Water Conservation District Annual Meeting on March 1, Branch County Conservation Expo on March 19 and the Buchanan Lions Club on May 26.

**LANDSCAPE LEVEL WETLAND FUNCTIONAL ASSESSMENT (LLWFA) –** Rob Zbiciak, MDEQ – Water Resources Division, provided some background on the project. LLWFA was developed by Ralph Trine, USF&W biologists to use on the east coast. The DEQ GIS staff was trained in order to learn the methodology. Michigan

biologists have modified the system to fit Michigan conditions. The LLWFA expresses wetland loss in terms of functional loss. Usually wetland loss is expressed in terms of acres. Michigan has pre-European settlement land cover data, plus hydric soil maps from USDA-NRCS and National Wetland Inventory (NWI) maps (1978, updated in 2005 by Ducks Unlimited). Indiana has the hydric soils maps and the NWI maps, but no historical land cover data. Indiana has lost 72% or 202,000 acres of wetlands, with only 28% remaining. Michigan has lost 40% or 154,000 acres lost, with 60% remaining.

Rob asked the question – Is there a goal for wetland restoration? Michigan set a short term goal of restoring 50,000 acres in 12 years and a long term goal of 500,000 acres by 2079.

There are 54,800 individual existing wetlands to protect, and 100s of 1000s of restoration possibilities. Where to start? What should be the priorities?

A passive strategy: 1) takes whatever opportunities come along; 2) waits for interested landowners to come in the door; and 3) waits for federal programs to supply funding. A pro-active strategy: 1) uses technology and available information to set priorities and select sites; 2) makes contacts with landowners; 3) sells the concept and the program; and 4) encourages the use of technology by watershed groups and conservation districts.

With the LLWFA every wetland will be evaluated (54,829 polygons) for its functional use. Every historic area will be identified and areas that are gone will be evaluated for their functional loss.

Jeremy Jones, MDNRE, gave a status update of the project. The middle region of the watershed in Michigan is completed. There is always room for error, but it is pretty thorough. NWI maps show how many, sizes, types, and classes. LLWFA will add where, how much, and how many. They will evaluate all 13 wetland functions with a detailed functional comparison for all 13. A definition of each function with a map for each function will be provided.

**NON-FUNCTIONAL PRIORITIZATION CRITERIA** – A model will be developed using ArcReader version that everyone can use. You will be able to zoom into specific sub-watersheds using this tool. It will have the capability of creating maps for community planning. This is strictly a planning tool, not a regulatory tool, so caution needs to be followed in how the information is used.

The Wetland Partnership will utilize non-functional data (proximity to roads, waterbodies, protected lands, etc.) to further refine priority areas. It will be important to have parcel data from all the counties to identify multiple landowners. FotSJR should be able to assist in getting parcel data from the various counties in the watershed. Some of the counties want to charge for this data and that could be very expensive.

**GRANT ADMINISTRATION** – The first quarterly report is due next week. Matt will send an electronic tracking sheet for in-kind local match, to everyone who has attended the steering committee meetings in October and January. Everyone needs to remember to keep track of hours, mileage, and anything else being done for the grant.

**NEXT STEPS** – After talking with Chad, Jeremy and Rob, it sounds like they need a good soil scientist in the Indiana portion of the watershed to help supply historic wetland information. Derek Thompson said Indiana soils information can be obtained through the NRCS State Office or maybe through Scott Haley, Area Soil Scientist, who covers the Indiana counties in the watershed.

The data collection will be ongoing. Contacts need to be made with the different counties and governmental entities to try and obtain parcel data, even if it is stripped of ownership information. We need to find out what type of GIS information is available in each county and if the counties are willing to share it. Ducks Unlimited has CARL data set, which can be used. There is an Indiana Water Atlas with an Indiana map set through IDEM.

A pdf of Rob Zbiciak's presentation will be posted on the web site.

When the LLWFA is completed the MDNRE will supply a disc with data and Arc Reader to anyone who is interested in having it.

Presentations about the project need to be made both before and after the project completion to government entities to peak their interest and keep them interested until the project is done.

**NEXT MEETING** is scheduled for Thursday, April 28, 2011 beginning at 10:15 a.m. at the Public Library in Three Rivers, Michigan.

Notes by Dona Hunter, FotSJR Secretary.