

Wetland Partnership Meeting Summary
Thursday, August 27, 2012
Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers, Michigan
Coordinated by Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotSJR)

Matt Meersman, President of FotSJR, welcomed everyone to the August quarterly meeting – the 8th quarterly meeting for the Wetland Partnership Grant and asked for everyone present for introductions.

IN ATTENDANCE: James Coury, FotSJR; Brian Musser, Steuben Co. SWCD; Geoffrey Cripe, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy; Joe Schmees, IDEM; Brian Gunderman, MDNR – Fisheries Division; Dave Foerster, Two Rivers Coalition; Julie Pioch, MSU Extension; Eric Kurtz, Elkhart Co. SWCD; Matt Meersman, FotSJR; Maria Mast, FotSJR & St. Joseph Co. Indiana MS4; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians; Eric Kerney, Huron Potawatomi Tribe; Chris Bauer, MDEQ – Water Resource Division; Dona Hunter, LaGrange Co. SWCD.

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT: Matt and Marcy Colclough met with Julie Pioch to bring her up-to-date on the project. She will be working under the grant to develop a plan to aid with outreach to government officials about the ways they can use the information being developed through this wetland partnership grant.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS & STATUS UPDATES: “Wet and Wild at the Well Field” was a great event held last week in the Christiana Creek Watershed. 100 letters were sent out to key individuals owning wetlands classified as being good for water quality. Five of the people who received letters attended the event, with 3 of them being some of the top 10 landowners in their respective watersheds. At least one of them requested that someone follow-up and provide more information about the wetlands on their property. Geoff discussed the potential for entering wetlands in the conservation easement program through the Land Conservancy. Matt had developed a couple of maps used as hand-outs. One showed the “Top Ten Wetland Areas” in the Christiana Creek Watershed and one was an outline of the outreach area in primarily the Christiana Creek Watershed. Another hand-out shared at the event was “Growing Greener – Planning for Green Infrastructure”, developed by Marcy Colclough.

The parcel data is over 50% complete for the entire watershed. Matt, Eric, Brian, Melanie and Rachel are merging the parcel data by county.

Another upcoming event will focus on the Elkhart River watershed with a focus on restoration. 80% of the wetlands in this watershed have been lost. An attempt will be made to find landowners who have enrolled land in WRP through NRCS to provide a testimonial at this event. Geoff will provide information about the tax incentives available through the Land Conservancy.

Julie Pioch is in charge of the citizen planner program with MSU Extension. Matt is working with her to develop an agreement/contract between MSUE and FotSJR.

Matt reported that a large payment has been made to MDEQ for work completed on the wetland project. One thing that still needs to be provided is the CD Roms with the wetland functional data on them.

Jim Coury asked how the Citizen Planner Program would move forward to assist with the wetland project. Julie stated that after a contract is completed and signed, she will begin developing a strategy to work with units of local government to show how the wetland information can be used in planning. This should take about 2 months. They will be including an add-on course focusing on wetlands to the MSU 7-week Citizen Planner Course. Julie is gathering information on what to include in the course. Once the lesson is developed the information can be taken to local officials. It will be a challenge to get Indiana planners involved since there is such a huge difference in local government structures from Michigan. Purdue had a Planning for Power program and they were involved at the beginning of the grant, but the individual in charge of the program has retired. Joe Schmees said he has some names in Indiana who have developed an Indiana Planners' workshop that he will share with Matt.

Matt said he was surprised to learn how many wetlands are not protected by state or federal laws. Questions that need to be addressed and answered concern where local government has jurisdiction over federal or state. Finding model ordinances and finding out whether they have been effective or not is another thing to research.

February 2013 is the target date for the add-on course to Citizen Planner for local government. This might be set up as a web cast at multiple sites and moderators.

Public officials were invited to the Christiana Creek event and at least one event in the future will be held specifically targeting local government officials.

OUTREACH: Outreach strategies can be piggy-backed with other events, but there will be several more events specifically targeting the wetland project. Geoff and Matt will be doing 15 minute presentations at some of these other events. One of the next events will be in the Steuben/LaGrange area of the Pigeon River/Fawn River Watersheds. Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy has agreed to help with 6 events with 3 in Indiana and 3 in Michigan – 2 focusing on protection and 1 with restoration. The other event in Indiana will most likely be the Elkhart River Watershed.

Geoff stated that there is so much information to share that it is a struggle to figure out how to make the presentations really effective. It may be important to send a survey to those who attend these events to get feedback about the information shared. What will have the biggest impact on landowners? Definite examples of how these wetland functional assessments have been used and who have used this information will be a key to the success of these events.

NEXT STEP: An event will be scheduled in LaGrange or Steuben County sometime this fall, probably in November.

NEXT MEETING: Scheduled for November 15, 2013 at 10:15 a.m. at Three Rivers Public Library, Three Rivers, Michigan.