

**Summary of 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting – St. Joseph River Watershed Council**  
**Friends of the St. Joe Association**  
**March 15, 2010 – 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.**  
**Sturges-Young Auditorium, Sturgis, Michigan**

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Meeting of the St. Joseph River Watershed Council was attended by 55 individuals interested in the St. Joseph River and the efforts of the Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotSJR) to protect the watershed and the river. President Matt Meersman opened the meeting at 6:00 p.m. by welcoming everyone and giving an Annual Report from the FotSJR Association covering fiscal year 2009 (April 2009 – March 2010). Before presenting the annual report, Matt read a resolution adopted by the Board of Directors making Al and Margaret Smith, founding members of Friends of the St. Joe River Association, honorary lifetime members of the Board of Directors. The resolution was adopted at the March 2010 Board meeting held before the Watershed Council Meeting.

- The #1 goal in the St. Joseph River Watershed Management Plan (WMP) and the first priority of the FotSJR Board of Directors was to establish the organizational capacity necessary to implement the WMP. Matt introduced the Board members and talked briefly about each one. The Board is made up a diverse group of individuals from across the watershed. Together they have donated over \$2,000 of their own money to support the efforts of the FotSJR this year.
- Goal #4 in the WMP is to increase cooperation, coordination, and collaboration among stakeholders. The Watershed Council includes representatives from many important stakeholder groups in the watershed. These individuals work with agencies and organizations implementing the projects on the ground. Attention was given to several partners: 1) Soil and Water Conservation Districts working with NRCS; 2) State Agencies, including Indiana Department of Environmental Management and Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment; 3) Municipal officials/public administrators from county, city and village government; 4) Sub-watershed groups and lake associations, many of which are grass roots organizations led by concerned citizens. A few individuals were also recognized for their contribution to FotSJR over the years. They include: 1) Barry Visel and Jeff Reese of AEP/Indiana Michigan Power and 2) Marcy Colclough of the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission.
- At last year's Watershed Council Meeting the FotSJR was hire to hire someone to help with education and outreach. Leah Cooper was hired as the Outreach Coordinator in September of 2009. Leah is responsible for the newsletter, website and other marketing materials. She helped organize tonight's event and will be assisting in planning future workshops and events.
- The FotSJR Strategic Plan states that FotSJR should serve as an education and outreach resource addressing important issues throughout the watershed. Progress has been made including:
  - Website and Online Resource Center – The new website contains important information, which can be used by individuals and other groups interested in the watershed. The website includes upcoming events and workshops related to the watershed. The new site was launched this month and already has received many compliments and inquiries. Matt encouraged everyone to visit the website at [www.fotsjr.org](http://www.fotsjr.org).
  - River Currents Newsletter – The first issue of the quarterly newsletter – River Currents was distributed in February both by email and regular mail, with the second issue due out in April. People with ideas for the newsletter or website are encouraged contact Leah.

- Over the next year several workshops will be hosted by the FotSJR on landscaping for water quality, wetlands and road stream crossing impairments, etc. These workshops will be open to the general public and event information will be posted on the website.
- Action Alerts will be distributed through the website, newsletter and occasionally by direct announcements made to the email database.
- All of these things will allow us to provide networking and information sharing opportunities to our members, partners, and stakeholders.
- The size of the St. Joe River Watershed requires that we depend on partners at the local level to implement important restoration and protection projects on the ground. The FotSJR is providing technical assistance and support to watershed partners on several projects including:
  - Wetland Prioritization Project awarded from EPA to complete an inventory and prioritization of all current and historical wetlands in the SJRW. The final product of this study will be a tool that helps partners secure funding for their County or sub-watershed.
  - Fish Migration Barrier Inventory – The FotSJR partnered with Potawatomi RC&D on a USFWS grant to study barriers to fish migration throughout the entire SJRW. The FotSJR will be contracted to host a workshop related to the project. This project highlights issues related to large migration barriers, like dams, as well as smaller barriers like road/stream crossings, which usually include water quality related problems in addition to habitat fragmentation.
  - AWEPP Ranking Criteria – The FotSJR was a partner in a proposal to bring funds from the Agricultural Water Enhancement Program to the SJRW. Funds from this grant will offset costs of adopting practices that protect water quality on agricultural land. The FotSJR lead the ranking criteria committee, which helped incorporate information from the WMP into the ranking process for fund allocation.
  - Several pending projects include: Gourdneck Creek Watershed Conservation Initiative; Targeted efforts for repairing SE Lake Michigan health; BMP implementation in the St. Joseph River Watershed; Hodunk-Messenger Chain of Lakes Watershed Implementation Project; and Prairie River Watershed Management Planning Project.
- The future focus of FotSJR will be projects that protect or restore natural hydrology throughout the watershed. By reducing the “flashiness” of our St. Joe River system, we can reduce the amount of polluted runoff that reaches the river and we can reduce the amount of erosion that occurs within the river channel. This may be the major focus, but it cannot be done without the support of our members and partners. Each of the projects mentioned earlier involve one or more of our partners doing “on-the-ground” work. The FotSJR will not be able to continue to commit local match for these projects without the financial support of our membership.

After the presentation of Matt’s report, a delicious buffet dinner was enjoyed by everyone. The dinner was prepared by the staff at the Sturges-Young Auditorium. Dinner was followed by an excellent presentation by Rob Zbiciak, Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment. Rob’s presentation covered the importance of wetlands; extent of loss/fragmentation in the watershed both Michigan and Indiana; maximizing limited resources to prioritize wetland areas; need for targeting financial/technical resources; and the options/tools available for prioritizing restoration/protection efforts. His presentation outlined the procedures that will be used to inventory and prioritize wetlands under the EPA grant awarded to FotSJR.

Matt thanked everyone for their attendance and continued support of the FotSJR. He encourage everyone to follow the example of the Board of Directors who have donated over \$2,000 of their own money this year.