

Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Thursday, January 22, 2015—1:00 PM
Three Rivers Public Library—Three Rivers, MI

IN ATTENDANCE:

- **Directors:** Matt Meersman, Melanie Stoughton, Bob Jones, Zac Martin, Jim Coury, Danielle Meersman, Ray Leising, John Law, Eric Kerney, Jeff Wenzel
- **Watershed Council:** Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Jeremy Reiman, MACOG/SJRBC; Carolyn Grace, St. Joe (MI) Conservation District; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band; Jeff Reece, IMP; Chris Bauer, MDEQ; Bill Courliss, Union Lake Association; Dave Foerster, Two Rivers Coalition
- **Visitors:** Kyle Alexander, MDEQ; Patty Hoch-Melluish, Kieser & Associates; Nathan Hahaj, City of Elkart; Rich Walag, IMP;

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:05 pm, welcomed everyone to the meeting and called for introductions.

Minutes of the December 2014 board meeting were reviewed. A motion made to accept the minutes were made by Bob Jones, seconded by Jim Coury. Motion Carried.

Treasurer's Report was presented by Danielle Meersman. Danielle noted that there had been an increase of \$1200 income for the month, with a generous donation of \$1000 from Indiana Michigan Power. A motion made to accept the treasurer's report as presented was made by Jeff Wenzel and seconded by Daragh Deegan. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS

Annual Meeting Planning— Matt summarized progress to date on the Annual Meeting in March at the Sturges-Young Auditorium in Sturgis, MI. Discussions on the keynote talk title for promotional purposes. Jim Coury suggested having the event theme title, "Hold Your Water", with the presentation titled, "From Grey to Green—Bringing Infrastructure to Life". Marcy Colclough stated Jim Patchett may already have a title for his presentation. John Law will contact fishing guides about donating a guided fishing trip, and he will be providing a print for the silent auction. Steuben County will be donating an unpainted rain barrel. Matt Meersman has contacted Kathleen Petitjean regarding another rain barrel. Dona Hunter will be contacted regarding an auction donation, as she has donating in the past. All items should be submitted by mid-February in order for the auction sheets to be ready for the meeting. Bob Jones brought gift certificates for a canoe trip and will bring a nice canoe paddle donated by John Senecal of The Trading Post in Mongo, IN. Matt Meersman noted that he will contact Ruddy Adams and the auditorium regarding dinner menu choices.

Board Nominations— Bob Jones and Daragh Deegan, nominating committee, contacted all board members up for re-election, with all stating, with the exception of Rudy Kappe, that they will run again. Rudy Kappe noted that while he would run again, he would like to see someone serving who can attend meetings year round, as he is currently out of state from January to April each year.

Watershed Stewardship Award Nominations—Matt announced that there have been four nominations since the December meeting for the award. Nominations will be emailed to all board members for voting, and final votes must be cast by the February meeting. Matt requested responses via email for those able to do so.

NEW BUSINESS

Indiana Michigan Power Invasive Species Projects— Jeff Reece of Indiana Michigan Power presented information drafted by John---Jeff reported about re-licensing a Constantine project beginning in 2017. Jeff reported about the annual surveys for Eurasian Watermilfoil and Purple Loosestrife. Studies have been conducted since 1998, showing some populations have remained stable since 1999 and some have even decreased. Mottville has been increasing since about 2005. Constantine is the problem site with increasing infestations and agencies recommending biological control methods (Varicella Beetle). IMP met with corporate attorney, regarding bidding out specific projects. Jeff passed around a final report from Great Lakes Environmental Center in Traverse City. Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Eradication and Control Program showing Constantine at the most concerning site. Pilot project release in 2015 on Constantine project upper reaches of the project, near Three Rivers along the St. Joseph River, in June/July 2015. Several small plots in upper reach will be monitored in Sept/Oct.

A discussion with the state agencies will be held in the first quarter, as well as with FERC. Plans will be to develop more comprehensive plan if pilot project is successful, for the Constantine project in 2016. Jeff reported that there will be Eurasian Watermilfoil DNA testing done to determine if weevils will be an option, as they only work on one specific DNA sequence. Minnesota, Wisconsin, Two Rivers, and Au Sable River have proven to have successful results. Jeff requested comments from the watershed council and board members on the project, noting that in 2016, there may be more opportunity to provide outreach and education as well as volunteering in the future with FotSJR.

Matt Meersman requested clarification on the two invasive species control methods. Currently, IMP is waiting response from state agencies on the timeline for the DNA testing of Eurasian Watermilfoil. Chris Frieberger, DNR, will be providing assistance on the project. Bill Courliss raised some questions regarding different sub-species/families of the Eurasian Watermilfoil. Patty Hoch-Melluish of Keiser & Associates stated that Eagle Lake in Paw Paw has used DNA testing for the milfoil. Jeff Reece noted that the state has mandated zero chemical use for eradication on their projects. Patty mentioned that Ryan Thune at GVSU for DNA

testing as a possible point of contact, and will send Jeff his contact information. John Law asked about what treatment would be the next course of action if chemical treatment is not allowed. Jeff stated that they continue to research successful mechanical treatment strategies. Jim Coury asked if any matching regarding the specific weevils has proven more successful results than a release of standard weevils to milfoil. Patty noted issues regarding treatment of watermilfoil, with breakage of plant material forming new individual plants, and costly chemical treatment.

Regional Conservation Partnership Project— Marcy Colcough provided an update on the project submitted by MDARD. \$6.8 million was approved (out of the \$7 million requested). The next step will be to develop a partnership agreement between MDARD and Michigan NRCS. Marcy noted that as we wait, movement has started between MDARD, MDEQ and MDNR, Michigan Council of Foundations on funding for an outreach campaign that would be consistent between each district, and funding for a coordinator position over the next five years. Marcy explained that she is interested in seeking a strong partnership with seed companies or large producers to try and address some of the issues with irrigation management and water use. Marcy said there are three things that need to be addressed initially with regards to the project: 1) An outreach campaign needs to be developed and initiated, 2) critical areas need to be identified, and 3) ranking system needs to be developed to rank applicant proposals. Marcy encouraged strong partnership assistance with these initial tasks. Responding to Dave Foerster's question about how in-kind match will be tracked, Marcy indicated she doesn't have a framework for that process but imagines it will be something managed by the grant coordinator. Marcy said she envisions the coordinator as being someone that will be able to coordinate collaboration among partners to maximize in-kind contributions. Jim Coury asked about the NRCS programs the funds would come from and the practices that would be implemented. Marcy listed numerous practices including cover crops, no-till, and irrigation management.

OTHER ITEMS

- Matt received a request from Daragh for a support letter for a grant. He, along with Jeremy Reiman and some others are working on a Lake and River Enhancement (LARE) grant application to complete a diagnostic study on Cobus Creek. Daragh said that several partner groups have pledged support already and the St. Joseph River Basin Commission would be the applicant. He also mentioned that the LARE funds could not be used to cover activities in the Michigan portion of the Cobus Creek Watershed and that they would have to seek additional funding sources to include the Michigan side in the study. John Law made a motion to provide a letter of support to the SJRBC for the grant application with a second by Jeff Wenzel.
- Marcy made some addition comments about the RCPP project. She suggested that since the FotSJR has already played a major role in this project, it would make sense for the organization to continue in a leadership role as the project moves forward. Jim Coury said that he liked the idea particularly because the federal government can often work more efficiently with non-profits as opposed to state agencies. He said that the FotSJRs relationship with conservation districts is also another reason

- to have the organization work as a lead partner. Matt mentioned that there has also been some conversations between he and Jeremy Reiman about the SJRBC potentially playing an administrative and coordination role in the project.
- Matt announced a public meeting to be held on February 24th at 3:00pm in South Bend to discuss the CSO Long Term Control Plan (LTCP). He said the meeting would be about clarifying the costs of the LTCP and on incorporating green infrastructure.
 - Eric Kerney announced that the Nottawaseppi Huron Band of the Potawatomi are currently in the process of obtaining a new status that would make the tribe eligible to receive relatively small amounts of 319 funding directly from the federal government to implement projects. Grant Poole confirmed that the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi were also going through the same process.
 - John Law sadly announced that Joe Mitchell, long time stream conservationist and owner of River Tenders, had passed away. Several in the group acknowledged Joe's influence on our watershed. John said that services for Joe will be held at St. Pius Parish on Friday January 30th from 10am to noon.
 - Matt Meersman provided some information to the group that he received from Melanie Stoughton: Branch County will be holding their annual Conservation Expo on March 14th at the Branch Area Career Center. Melanie also wanted to remind the group of the invasive species management grant that is being spearheaded by Kathy Worst from Branch County.
 - Jim Coury announced a Great Lakes Conference occurring at MSU on February 15th
 - Marcy Colclough announced the Michigan Natural Shoreline Partnership will be holding a Shoreline and Shallows Conference on March 11 at MSU. She also announced the Michigan Seafood Summit will take place the following day at MSU.
 - Bill Courliss made several announcements of activities that are occurring at Union Lake in Union City: The Union City electric utility is in the process of going through an electronic upgrade of their billing system and plan to start including an option for bill payers to donate funds towards FotSJR Clean Water Campaign. Bill indicated that this project would have to receive official approval by Union City officials. Matt and Marcy both indicated the desire to provide support to Bill and others during conversations with Union City officials. Bill also informed the group of recent river related activities that are occurring in Union City. He indicated that a bridge in Union City is impacting flow in the St. Joseph River and causing sedimentation issues. Bill also described some overflow issues and algae blooms in Union City.
 - Marcy announced that a meeting is going to be held on March 10th in Niles for the Pucker Street Dam. She said that the meeting is open to the public and will take place from 5 to 7pm at the Nile Fire Department.

The next meeting will be Thursday, February 26, 2015, at 1:00pm in Three Rivers at the Public Library.

Meeting adjourned at 2:45pm