

**Friends of the St. Joe River Association, Inc.**  
**Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Three Rivers Public Library - Three Rivers, MI**  
**Thursday, December 16, 2010**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

- Directors – Eldred Adams, Geoff Cripe, Daragh Deegan, Dona Hunter, Rudy Kappe, Matt Meersman, Ron Niezgodski
- Outreach Coordinator – Leah Cooper
- Watershed Council Members – Don Sporleder, Michiana Watershed; Chris Bauer, MDNRE; Jeffery Reece, AEP/ I&M; Amy Druskovich, Cass Co. CD; Dave Foerster, Two Rivers Coalition; Martin Franke, LaGrange Co. SWCD & SJRBC
- Visitors – Maria Schaefer, St. Joseph Co. (IN) Dept. of Public Works; Chuck Hanje, Citizens for a Quiet Countryside; Heather Harwood, Wawasee Area Conservancy Foundation; John Richardson, JF New; Gene Lightner, Elkhart River Restoration Alliance

President Matt Meersman called the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and welcomed everyone in attendance, asking for introductions.

**Minutes of the November Board Meeting** were approved on a motion made by Rudy Kappe and seconded by Ron Niezgodski.

**Treasurer's Report** was distributed by Leah Cooper in Danielle Meersman's absence.

**Outreach Coordinator Report** – Leah Cooper reported that the newsletter has been completed and everyone should be receiving it soon. There were 125 extra printed at no cost that can be distributed.

**Commemorative Bench/Stone** – Matt had talked with Bruce and Roxanne Barton and they may have a stone from one of their farms that they would be willing to donate. Rachel Smith is checking into some costs for purchasing, moving and engraving a stone. Matt will ask Rachel to check on the price of just moving a stone if one was donated. Rudy Kappe asked if FotSJR is set up to receive funds for donations for the stone and Matt said yes.

**Project Tracking Sheet/Webpage** – Geoff Cripe and Matt Meersman are continuing to update the spreadsheet to track all of the projects and working toward getting it on the website. No changes have been made since the last meeting.

**Wetland Partnership Project** – Matt reviewed the wetland assessment and prioritization project of all the wetlands in the watershed. Every wetland polygon will be scored and the data can be used to prioritize both current and historical wetlands. He had a conference call with MDNRE on the assessment which will probably take about 1-1/2 years of the project. They have the center of the Michigan portion of the existing wetlands complete and should complete the remainder of the existing ones in the next

six months. They will then begin working on the historical assessment. For the historic portion they will look at landscape position, plants in the area, hydric soils data, etc. On January 14, Matt, Marcy Colclough and Erin Fuller will be going to Lansing for training and to see the prioritization techniques used by MDNRE in other watersheds.

Matt did a presentation on the project at the St. Joseph River Basin Commission meeting in December that went very well.

Leah, Matt and Marcy have completed setting up the project webpage on the FotSJR website and it is available for viewing. They will continue to update it as needed. Don Sporleder suggested putting a link on the website for the IN/MI River Valley Trail. He said Marcy should have the information.

Dona Hunter stated that Rex Pranger, LaGrange County Survey, was at the St. Joseph River Basin Commission Meeting because he was interested in this wetland project and will be interested in seeing the results. It was suggested that maybe expanding the FotSJR watershed council to include surveyors in Indiana and drain commissioners in Indiana would be a good thing to do. This might enlist their assistance with this and other projects.

**Annual Meeting Plans** – The meeting has been scheduled for Monday, March 14 with Kevin Kincare, USGS, as the feature speaker. Eldred checked with Sturges-Young Auditorium and it is available that evening. Cost of the meal will increase about \$.50 and it would cost \$75 an hour to rent the large auditorium room itself. It had been suggested setting up the dinner in one room and then having the speaker in the auditorium. Eldred will find out a lead time for the use of the auditorium and also a final cost on the meal.

**Bi-State Watershed Projects** – Matt reported on two projects in the SJRW that will cross state lines. A Prairie River project has been funded with the main portion in Branch County, Michigan and a small portion in Indiana. The Steuben County SWCD will be working with Kathy Worst of Branch County CD on this project.

The second project is just in discussion at this time, but involves Christiana Creek in Cass County Michigan and Elkhart County Indiana. Most of the watershed is in Michigan, but Indiana receives the water. It is an important watershed to the St. Joseph River with a lot of lake type issues. This may be politically difficult due to use of Michigan funds in Indiana or vice versa. Dona stated that the Pigeon River Watershed Project the LaGrange Co. SWCD has funded now has a small portion of the watershed in Michigan and IDEM does not have a problem with the funds crossing the state line. There is also some discussion about completing a Fawn River Watershed Project which will include both Indiana and Michigan. This might be something to apply for through the GLCI.

**Other Items from Board Members:**

- Rudy Kappe shared a picture of the FotSJR and Optimists Soccer League picture. He gave it to Leah to put on the website.

- Eldred Adams talked about having the FotSJR displays updated by the annual meeting in March.
- Geoff Cripe talked about the acquisition of property near Marcellus in the Rocky River Watershed. It includes 124 acres of diverse habitat with about 50% of it as wetlands. It is located approximately 1 mile north of Corey Lake. Grant funds were used to buy the property, but an endowment is being created to fund signs, trails and public access improvement. It will become a stewardship endowment eventually. There is a \$5,000 challenge grant, which they are trying to match before the end of the year.
- Matt Meersman reported there is a watershed partnership for Hickory Creek forming. There will be more information on the SWMPC website.

**Items from Watershed Council Members:**

- Don Sporleder stated that Michiana Watershed is working on a new addition of the paddlers guide, including historical hi-lights of the watershed. It should be out shortly. They are trying to include crossings and fords during Indian times and have talked with Bob Owen and Rick Carry.
- Don reported that Rick Carry is working on a major grant to update the East Race Whitewater Park in South Bend. They will be using a \$10,000 grant to tie in with Paddlefest, hi-lighting the historic portage through downtown South Bend.
- Last evening Don participated in a community exchange at the Downtown Center with Notre Dame and the College of Science. The discussion last night focused on why you should care about Asian Carp.
- Michiana Watershed is involved in the IN/MI River Valley Trail Task Force with trail development along the St. Joseph River and they are updating their website as well, so please visit.
- Chris Bauer reported that MDNRE withdrew two MS4 permits as a result of an administrative case. This included a 2003 permit, not 2008 requirements. The lawsuit originated in Southeast Michigan.
- John Richardson introduced himself, Heather Harwood and Gene Lightner and described their involvement in Noble, Kosciusko and Elkhart Counties' watershed projects. They have focused on Turkey Creek in the Lake Wawasee Watershed (50,000 acres) and the WMP. There are a number of projects that need to be completed. They have found it is important to run the grants through the SWCDs for GLRI. They also are looking at the north branch of the Elkhart River following a report completed by volunteers with the Silver Jackets. As the projects move forward, they will be asking for support from the FotSJR.
- Chuck Hanje is a member of "Citizens for a Quiet Countryside" and lives directly downstream from Porter Township sewer plant.

The next meeting is scheduled for January 27, 2011 in the library at 1:00 p.m. There will be a Wetland Partnership meeting held in the morning before the Board Meeting.

Matt made a motion to adjourn; seconded by Rudy Kappe; motion carried.

Minutes recorded by Dona Hunter, Secretary.