

**Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes
Par Gil Natural Resources Learning Center – LaGrange, Indiana
Thursday, June 23, 2011 – 1:00 p.m.**

The Friends of the St. Joe River met at Par Gil Natural Resources Learning Center near LaGrange in Indiana for their June meeting. Before the meeting several members met to have a carry in lunch and after the meeting a short tour was taken of the Par Gil property, owned by the LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation District and LaGrange County Commissioners. The SWCD is always happy to show off the education facility that was donated to the district by two retired school teachers.

IN ATTENDANCE:

- **DIRECTORS:** Eldred Adams, Matt Meersman, Brian Musser, Dona Hunter, Rudy Kappe, Danielle Meersman, Maria Schaefer, Ron Niezgodski, Melanie Stoughton, Ray Leising
- **WATERSHED COUNCIL MEMBERS:** Karen Mackowiac, SJRBC; Bruce Campbell, Cass County WRC; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band; Martin Franke, LaGrange Co. SWCD; Jeffery Wenzel, St. Joe County Drain Commissioner
- **VISITORS & GUESTS:** Rex Pranger, LaGrange Co. Surveyor; Paul Gilman, former owner of Par Gil property; Dan Wilson, Michiana Emergency Responders & INSERV; Rachel Smith, Branch Co. Conservation District; Ed Micklatcher, Potawatomi RC&D; Bev Thelen, St. Joe County Deputy Drain Commissioner

After calling the meeting to order at 1:00 p.m. and asking for introductions, President Matt Meersman explained the structure of the board and the watershed council.

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

Treasurer's Report was handed out by Danielle Meersman. The balance sheet showed a balance of \$51,002.18 with there being a net loss of income for the month. A portion of that will be reimbursed for Leah Cooper's salary through the Wetland Partnership grant. The CD was renewed in June. The report was approved on a motion made by Ron Niezgodski and seconded by Rudy Kappe.

Outreach Coordinator Report – Due to Leah taking a full time job as a marketing coordinator with a South Bend realtor, she will be unable to attend monthly board meetings, but she will still be able to fulfill the duties of her contract as outreach coordinator. The latest edition of the newsletter was sent out with the focus on flooding. The summer edition will focus on fisheries. A press release was placed on the website about the memorial for Al and Margaret Smith. We are excited about Leah's new position, but also glad she will be able to continue her contract with the Friends.

Wetland Partnership Project – Matt provided a brief overview of the progress being made with the wetland functional assessment project. A more detailed report will be presented at the quarterly steering committee meeting scheduled for August. The work on the project is progressing with 50-60% completed. It has been challenging coming up with the same information from both Indiana and Michigan due to different data availability in the two states. If anyone is working on a project that would benefit from the wetland functional information in this project, we may be able to make that project area a higher priority for completion.

Fish Migration Barrier Workshop – As part of the grant from the US Fish & Wildlife Service to Potawatomi RC&D, the FotSJR will host a workshop to share information that was developed during the grant project. The first step was to identify dams in the watershed, including prioritizing the barriers and whether owners would

consider removal and the feasibility of cost for removal. The second step was identifying places where streams crossed the roads and culverts. There are thousands of road stream crossings in the St. Joe Watershed. The FotSJR's role was to serve on the steering committee and host the workshop. The plan is to conduct one workshop with a break-out session to cover the differences in the two states, including legal considerations in Indiana and Michigan. This would be an all day workshop with a tour after lunch. The workshop is being planned for late September some place in Elkhart County. Christiana Creek Country Club might be a possibility.

Prairie River Watershed Planning Project Update – Rachel Smith is working for the Branch County CD as a watershed coordinator for the Prairie River project. The Friends have committed \$2,400 in kind match toward the project. Rachel has been on board with the project since May and is working on organizing in order to move the project forward. This is a bi-state project with Steuben County in Indiana, along with St. Joe and Branch Counties in Michigan. This is a two year project just for the development of the watershed management plan.

Michiana Emergency Responders – Dan Wilson is working in a 7 county area to come up with an emergency management plan in response to spills at all terminals and pipelines in the watershed. Right now there is no game plan for addressing spills in the area. They are trying to find out who has done what in the watershed and determine what is needed. Dan, working with INSERV, is assisting the group in getting organized. They will be meeting on a quarterly basis to develop a plan. EPA mandates all pipelines and terminals have a plan. There are six pipelines that cross the state line north of South Bend into Berrien County that handle 8 million gallon of crude oil a day. Right now it takes from 6 – 8 hours for someone to arrive on site to address a problem. This group is trying to put together an Emergency Response Plan with the goal of a 30 - 60 minute response time. They have no money and are just a group of local volunteers trying to be a plan put together.

Matt stated that it is hard to find good maps with locations of pipelines and their depths. GIS computer mapping would help along with information on where there are access sites and equipment to address problems. There was a lot of excellent discussion about the problems everyone is facing concerning this issue. Rex Pranger recommended accessing the Beacon website, which would have parcel data for DeKalb, LaGrange, Noble and Steuben Counties. Rex has access to old paper maps, but not GIS maps of pipelines. Bruce Campbell also has maps, but not on a GIS layer. Friends of the St. Joe are willing to assist in any way they can and will share any information they acquire that will be beneficial to the MER.

Other Items of Business:

- Matt reported that a certificate in honor of Al Smith's work on the river was issued from the State of Michigan and signed by state senators, representatives and the governor of Michigan and presented to Margaret and the family. Ruty Adams asked about having a scanned copy on file before giving it to Margaret. Danielle will take care of it.
- Ruty Adams thanked everyone who was involved in acquiring the stone and worked on the memorial project. He said everyone did a super job and it was a wonderful thing to have happened. The camaraderie of the three working together – Ron, Matt & Ruty – was great. Margaret's reaction was priceless!
- Rachel Smith distributed cards with the Michigan Water Stewardship Program information. There is a tremendous amount of information on their website that can be customized for your county and your event.

Meeting adjourned at 2:20 p.m. with a reminder that there will not be a July meeting. The next meeting will be on August 25, with a Wetland Partnership Meeting held in the morning at the Three Rivers Library.

Minutes recorded by Dona Hunter, secretary.