

**Friends of the St. Joe River Association Board Meeting Minutes**  
**Thursday, September 25, 2014—1:00 PM**  
**Three Rivers Public Library—Three Rivers, MI**

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

- **Directors:** Matt Meersman, Melanie Stoughton, Bob Jones, Zac Martin, Jim Coury, Ron Niezgodski, Danielle Meersman, Ray Leising, John Law, Eric Kerney
- **Watershed Council:** Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Jeff Wenzel, St. Joseph Co. Drain Commissioner; Jeremy Reiman, MACOG/SJRBC; Carolyn Grace, St. Joe (MI) Conservation District; Grant Poole, Pokagon Band
- **Visitors:** Jack Knorek, Michigan Dept. of Agriculture and Rural Development; John Harsh, Save Cobus Creek; Lyndon Kelley, MSUE/Purdue Extension

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

**Minutes** of the August 2014 board meeting were approved with addition of Kyle Burchette's last name to the attendance list for August. A motion made to approve the minutes with corrections was made by Ron Neizgodski, and seconded by Jim Coury. Motion carried.

**Treasurer's Report** was presented by Danielle Meersman. A motion made to accept the treasurer's report as presented was made by Melanie Stoughton and seconded by Bob Jones. Motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS**

**Wetland Partnership Project** Matt Meersman reported that the project is officially wrapped up, with the grant ending August 30 (not September 30 as previously thought). Matt briefly summarized the project for those attendees to the meeting that were new to the group. Marcy noted that October 15<sup>th</sup> there will be a meeting with the Noble County Plan Commission, with hopes to meet with Stueben County's planning staff in November. Jim Coury continued to thank those involved. Grant Poole asked if there were CD's available with the report information yet. Matt noted that there are no plans for producing multiple copies of a CD as an end result to the overall project, but arrangements are being made to be able to provide the data online with MACOG ultimately being one of the places to house data for future use between Michigan and Indiana. Eric Kerney asked about future funding to expand on some projects that have come about through the data generated. Matt said that there are no grants that are currently being sought after. Marcy noted that if anyone knew of grants that may fit with the project to let Matt know.

**Clean Water Campaign** — Matt reported that there has not been any new activity on this campaign.

**Open Board Seat:** Matt Meersman announced that there is still an opening on the board for the remainder of Rachel Smith's term. Matt reported to the group that Jeff Wenzel expressed interest in filling the remainder of Rachel's term, which will end in March 2015. Ray Leising made a motion to nominate Jeff Wenzel, with Danielle Meersman seconding. Motion carried.

**St. Joseph River Races:** Matt announced that the 11<sup>th</sup> Annual St. Joe River Races would be held in South Bend, IN on Saturday, September 27th. The cost to participate is \$20. Matt summarized the schedule of events that will go on during the day. Bob Jones volunteered to assist on the day of the event.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

**Calhoun County Request for Letter of Support:** Matt summarized a request submitted by Tracy Bronson of the Calhoun County Conservation District for in kind match on a Clean Michigan Initiative water quality grant for the Upper and Middle Kalamazoo and St. Joseph River Watersheds. Jim Coury offered to attend meetings for the project as a representative of FotSJR, and requested that Matt ask Tracy if she would like him as a representative. Ron Niezgodski made a motion to approve \$2,000 of in-kind support for meeting attendance and reporting assistance, with Danielle Meersman seconding the motion. Motion carried.

**Regional Conservation Partnership Project:** Matt summarized the project and the opportunities that would be made available if the proposal submitted by the Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development is accepted through the USDA-Natural Resource Conservation Service. Marcy Colclough discussed the estimates that she put together for FotSJR "Partner Contribution" regarding meetings over the five year period of the grant, and approximated four quarterly meetings per year, which would total about 40 hours of time to meetings, 40 hours per year in mapping, ending with \$6,000. Matt noted that he would be able to help with the mapping services, and could also attend meetings. Jim Coury stated that he would also like to participate in the meetings, and any other areas that he can assist in over the five years. Marcy noted that the financial part of the assistance will more than likely come out of funds like 319 programs that would pay producers to adopt best management practices. Matt clarified the terms on some of the wetland restoration projects, and discussed other particulars of the Farm Bill programs. Melanie Stoughton agreed to participate in any discussions on ranking development for future cost share programs made available through the RCPP. Discussion on estimating the dollar amount of in kind match ensued. Ron Niezgodski made a motion to support the RCPP in the St. Joe River Watershed in the amount of \$10,000

for in kind match for meeting attendance, education and outreach, and future GIS Mapping services. Jim Coury seconded the motion. Motion carried.

## **OTHER ITEMS**

- **Matt Meersman**—introduced John Harsh of Save Cobus Creek who spoke regarding the watershed of Cobus Creek, noting endangered species, and other important hydrological and biological features in the watershed. This area is being considered for a wastewater treatment plant, with much opposition to the project being heard. John gave background on the Ontowa Township waste water treatment plant proposal, noting some concerns raised by residents in the area on discharging warm waters into a designated cold water stream (in Indiana, not in Michigan). John spoke to the group on some of the legalities related to the project, announcing that a Public Meeting will be held at Edwardsburg High School on October 13<sup>th</sup>, with hopes of all those opposing the project to attend and support the Save Cobus Creek group. Matt noted that FotSJR has provided documentation, as well as a letter opposing the current proposed method of treatment to DEQ, and hopes that all alternatives are taken into consideration at the October 13<sup>th</sup> Public Meeting. Discussion regarding current and past failures of Ontwa Township’s wastewater management ensued, with a consensus that other alternatives need to be looked into regarding the project. Matt thanked John for his time and information on the project to date, reporting that the letter to MDEQ will be sent out within the week, and will also send John information on the wetland functional analysis data on the watershed with the letter as well.
- **Marcy Colcough**—Marcy announced to the group that the SWMLC is putting together a grant proposal that is due October 17<sup>th</sup>, and wasn’t sure if the group was accepting letters of support for the project, but asked FotSJR to consider sending one. Geoff Cripe was unable to attend the meeting so Marcy spoke regarding the project. The area would be focusing on Ox Creek and green infrastructure. Matt asked if a letter of support was being requested. John Law made a motion to draft a letter of support if needed with Ron Niezgodski seconding. Motion Carried.
- **John Law**-asked about the removal of the Pucker Street dam. Marcy Colclough reported that they received another grant, and that work has started. Estimates on alternatives were given, with the highest being bridge removal. John noted that an Engineer recommended jet grouting for the lower cost alternative. The bridge is not on the “Critical Bridge List” meaning it will not be eligible for any funds under that specific category. No word on what the City had decided, and they continue to work on grants.
- **Marcy Colclough** also reported on the Water Resource Council Meeting with Lyndon Kelley, and announced that another meeting will be held in Centreville on September 26<sup>th</sup>. The main topic of discussion will be on the RCPP progress updates. Marcy spoke about a new campaign titled “Love Lake Michigan” and distributed program propaganda to the group. Marcy also announced that a Michigan water trails.org

website is currently being created, with places where you can access the lake, and now working on the inland rivers. If anyone has information on access sites, or pictures please send to her.

- **Lyndon Kelley**—announced that St. Joseph County recently appropriated funds for river trails. The commissioners are looking for sites for kayak and canoe put-ins.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be held on **Thursday, October 23rd, at 1:00pm** in Three Rivers at the Public Library.

Jeff Wenzel moved to adjourn the meeting, with Ron Niezgodski seconding. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 2:00 pm.