

FRIENDS of the St. Joseph River (Fot SJR)  
WETLAND PARTNERSHIP MEETING SUMMARY  
THURSDAY APRIL 24, 2014 10:15 AM  
THREE RIVERS PUBLIC LIBRARY, THREE RIVERS, MI.  
MINUTES

1. INTRODUCTIONS

MATT MEERSMAN, President of the Fot SJR welcomed everyone to the APRIL 24, 2014 QUARTERLY meeting. The meeting began with introductions of those in attendance.

2. OVERVIEW of WETLAND PROJECT

MATT MEERSMAN (PRESIDENT) GAVE A SHORT SUMMARY of what the WETLAND PARTNERSHIP PROJECT has been ABOUT, AS HAS BEEN CUSTOMARY AT THE START of each of these meetings

3. PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS AND STATUS UPDATES

SINCE the last meeting (DEC. 2013) the Wetland Partnership has focused on out reach to municipalities, going to 4 Indiana Counties (LAGRANGE, ELKHART, ST. JOSEPH COUNTIES AMONG THEM), focusing on Wetland Functional Analysis and its uses. At these meetings - Marcy Colclough (SWMP) focused on how to use the Wetland Functional Analysis especially for planning and zoning. Fot SJR APPRECIATES the time and dedication and skill that Marcy demonstrates in doing these presentations of this valuable Natural Resources Tool.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENTS AND STATUS (CONTINUED)

Elkhart County presentation - Updated project status, discussed restricting buildings on hydric soils (Porter Co. Ind. does this as well as Counties in Northern Michigan). The Planning Commission here had a lot of questions on how to use the WFA on its local APPLICATION.

LA Grange County presentation - The folks here were very interested in Wetland Functional Analysis (WFA), the County Surveyor attended and asked questions. Marcy met with the GIS specialist for the County on IUPA APPLICATION. The County is doing some wetland protection through Park Acquisition - they picked up another 90-100 ac. for parks just recently. LA Grange County Community Foundation has helped with money to purchase parkland (i.e. near Pine Knob Creek Park).

SW Michigan Area Marcy has also done WFA presentations to MPO's, looking for opportunities for Road Projects and wetland protection. AN Twp. was developing a more protective buffer ordinance within 50 ft. of wetlands, streams, rivers

Marcy will look for more opportunities to meet with Steuben and Noble Counties in IND. in the near future on WFA AND 2 more presentations in SW Michigan shortly (one at Harbor Shores).

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PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND STATUS (CONTINUED)

Mr. Joe Schmeege of the Indiana Dept of Natural Resources (INDNR) was going to be at this meeting today but could not come. Matt reported from Mr. Schmeege that Indiana is developing an overall Wetland Plan STRATEGY for the State, outlining their goals for wetland protection and restoration. There has already been one major presentation on this in Indiana, it was widely attended. They used Turning Point Software to help the attending public to vote on their choices, using WFA as a tool. Matt will share our WFA GIS and other tools used in our process with the State of Indiana. Michigan, through our INDNR, is now doing the WFA process in other watersheds as well (i.e. Grand, Kalamazoo).

4. Landowner Outreach Events

"Wetland's do the Dirty Work" Presentation done at the Huron Potawatomi Tribe Headquarters in ATHENS Mich. with residents and tribal members invited from the area (Calhoun Co. - Nottawa Creek, Pine Creek, Tetonsha, Athens, Portage Creek). Focused on key landowners, especially in mailings, looking for priority protection and restoration of wetland areas. ERIC HEARNEY (FOTSTR BOARD & TRIBE) did the presentation.

Wetland Partnership Meeting (FOTSTR)  
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Landowner Outreach Events (CONTINUED)

Geoff Cripe of the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy (SWMLC) has also done presentations on the WFA process. SWMLC and Geoff especially have been huge supporters and proponents of the WFA process.

At the Potawatomi Tribal Event (Eric Kearney) there were 25 people attended with 15 area landowners. Rob Zurebik came to help with presentations and questions (MDNR specialist on WFA). Matt Meerman also attended and assisted.

The Tribe itself (Huron Potawatomi Atrens Mi) has done a 75Ac. Wetland Restoration through the federal USDA-NRCS Wetland Restoration Program (WRP). Also 2 attendees at the meeting had done conservation easements with included wetlands through the SWMLC (land conservancy).

Matt noted that the USDA-NRCS (federal) wetland protection program (WRP) is changing its title to WRE. It has been one of the key programs in the United States in planning and implementing wetland restorations.

Matt Meerman also did other WFA presentations at Coldwater, MI Rotary, Montessori Schools, Lions Clubs. MARCY also did one in Benton Harbor recently.

5. MUNICIPAL Outreach - Next Events

It is to be noted that Landowners and municipal outreach for this WFA project has been extensive and successful. The WFA process is becoming firmly embedded in our region, helping to identify and select critical wetlands for protection and restoration. Many thanks to Matt, Marcy, Geoff and so many others for their dedication and time spent talking and presenting on WFA.

Next Big Event Being Planned - Elkhart River Event.  
where to have it ??? Ligonere? - at Police Dept. (bigger space), COMMUNITY CENTER (?), When (?). Focus will be on wetland restoration and WFA. 85% of invitations will go to landowners and farmers. Look at early to mid June 2014. Will be similar to other WFA presentations done in Ind. (i.e. The Howe, Indiana presentations - sent out 500 invitations to that one, 50 people came, good attendance).

6. Data Delivery and Documentation

Key Question - who will use and control the WFA process (our project), once the project is complete. Who will store, oversee, and manage the data.

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Matt Meersman is only one of three local (area) people really knowledgeable about using and applying the WFA process (also includes Marcy Colclough and Geoff Cruke).

MECOG is one of the organizations that could do this, also the SWMLC, as well as the STATE MDNR.

MECOG's Zack Trapp is knowledgeable.

Kosciusko Co., St. Joseph Co., and Elkhart Co. - all in Indiana are represented by MECOG, which is developing GIS for this. With the relationship that MECOG has with the St. Joseph River Basin Commission, MECOG might be a good organization to house and oversee the WFA information and process, and help share it with others. We don't want this very important WFA program to wither and die.

FOT/SJR (Matt) also met with the State of Michigan, Center for Geographic Information (CGI) on this subject - they house the Michigan Wetland Map Viewer. Rob Zumbach of the MDNR is working on a bid for FOT/SJR on WFA expansion. The problem is getting the specialists as well as municipalities and landowners to understand what our data and the process does. Matt had a 3hr. meeting with them. There is extra money in our WFA grant for this and good support at MDNR (Rob Z.) for expansion of our program. But MDNR can't do this by Oct. 2014 when our grant ends.

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Data Delivery and Documentation (continued)

Alternatives - We could pay MDNR (Rob Z.) to help develop this tool or pay CGI to do this.

Chad Fizzle - MDNR Michigan Wetlands (who works w/ Rob Z.) noted that MDNR/MDEQ could use their own State funding to do this because it's been such a successful program (WFA).

Can we (FOTSTR) get an extension for our grant to continue this very successful demonstration program (WFA) - The FOTSTR Wetland Grant.

Matt M noted that our key staff knows how to use this data (Matt, Marcie, Geoff, some others) and we have parcel data over good parts of the whole watershed. We also have Meta Data on our process and Matt is working on a final report for the Project which will be downloadable. This is good data for Watershed Management Plans (319 Grants) which will have wetland requirements.

Indiana has a huge GIS program for wetlands protection/restoration, Michigan has great data on wetlands because of the experience of the FOTSTR Wetland Grant and our work here as well as MDNR (Rob Z.). We must extend, expand, and protect this WFA program for essential Wetland Protection and Restoration.

Next meeting - Aug. 21, 2014  
 Meeting Adjourned about 11:50 AM