

Wetland Partnership Meeting Summary
Thursday, August 21, 2014
Three Rivers Public Library – Three Rivers, Michigan
Coordinated by Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotSJR)

Matt Meersman, President of the FotSJR welcomed everyone to the meeting. He distributed copies of Jim Coury's notes from the April meeting and thanked him for taking such detailed notes. Matt then asked everyone present to introduce themselves and say what organization they were affiliated with.

IN ATTENDANCE: Bob Jones, LaGrange Co. SWCD; Jeremy Reiman, St. Joseph River Basin Commission; Matt Meersman, FotSJR; Marcy Colclough, SWMPC; Chris Bauer, MDEQ-WRD; Joe Schmees, IDEM; Geoff Cripe, SWMLC; Jim Coury, FotSJR; Kathy Worst, Branch Co. Conservation District; and Dona Hunter, lifetime member of FotSJR.

OVERVIEW OF WETLAND PROJECT: Matt gave a brief overview of the project.

PROJECT DEVELOPMENT AND STATUS UPDATES: The grant ends in October 2014. Marcy will be working on the final report summarizing all activities carried out during the grant period. This will include the number of outreach events held, how many attended each event, and results that have come out of those events. Joe Schmees suggested documenting who is using the data. Marcy stated that EPA is very pleased with the way this project has turned out and the kind of information that is available to be used throughout the watershed in the future. Geoff Cripe reported that two conservation easement projects with landowners and SWMLC will close this year as a direct result of this grant. SWMLC will continue to use this data even after the grant is finished.

Matt and Marcy presented information on the grant project to several organizations including the Association of State Wetland Managers last year talking about the project and how the wetland data can be used for implementation under other programs. Matt will be presenting information on how the wetland data can be used to the Michigan Wetland Association later in August.

LANDOWNER OUTREACH EVENTS –The 7th outreach event was held in June and focused on the Elkhart River. It was held in Ligonier and hosted by the Elkhart Co. SWCD and the ERRRA. Nancy Brown and Daragh Deegan were instrumental in setting the meeting up. There wasn't a huge crowd there, but there were several attendees that expressed an interest in the project. There was representation from the Wood-Land-Lakes RC&D in attendance. Two district conservationists with NRCS were present. One requested the data for her office and another one was impressed with the data that had been developed. This was the last official landowner outreach event that will be done during the grant period, but other events can be scheduled as requested or as the need arises. Matt is willing to assist with those.

Geoff reported that they have three neighbor meetings scheduled with adjoining landowners to talk more about projects and the potential for wetland protection.

Bob Jones reported on a field day that was held as a result of a stewardship cluster that has been formed with Steuben and LaGrange Counties. Rich Dunbar with DNR led the meeting which was held at Pine Knob in LaGrange County with a tour taken of the Pine Knob property, along with the Lime Lake area and a bog in Steuben County. DNR and Blue Heron Ministries are working in these areas. Two more workshops/field days are planned for later this fall and next spring focusing on invasive species, but with wetland protection and development also a priority.

MUNICIPAL OUTREACH STRATEGY – Marcy has been the go to person with the municipal outreach portion of the grant and is scheduling at least one more event in Michigan before the grant ends on September 30 in the Benton Harbor area. She would like to schedule one more event in the eastern part of the watershed, but it won't be until after the grant ends. Marcy is working on a location. Several possible locations were mentioned including the tribal community center near Athens, library at Colon, Coldwater Lake State Park. Jim Coury recommended contacting Steve Allen to assist with a location. Kathy Worst will work with Marcy on location, including a wetland restoration site.

Matt and Marcy have made presentations to the county plan commissions in Indiana and township planning commissions in Michigan. They still need to get in contact with Larry Gilbert to set something up for Steuben County and something needs to be set up with Noble County. It was suggested contacting Russell Baker, NRCS DC in Noble County and ask for his assistance.

DATA DELIVERY –Matt is still working on trying to locate organizations that will be willing to host the wetland data on their websites. He has talked with MACOG, but this may be data for the Indiana portion only. He is also working with MDEQ to host the data be able to generate reports showing the ranking of the wetlands, along with wetland functions. Geoff mentioned a document Matt created for Fabius Township on wetland functions that he thought was very beneficial when promoting the importance of wetlands and their functions. They will try to locate that document and include it as a part of the final report.

Jim Coury suggested that everyone needs to continue thinking about the next steps and how to use this data. This is one of the few projects linking broad landscapes in an effort to protect open space. This is an excellent legacy for the Friends of the St. Joe and what has been accomplished with this project. This data will be given to all of the counties that signed the partnership agreements.

Jeremy Reiman and Joe Schmees think that the IN GIS Council would be interested in working with this data. They will get Matt contact information.

A workshop needs to be planned for all the counties and various agencies in the watershed – IDEM, DNR, Ducks Unlimited, etc. – sharing the information and how to use it.

NEXT MEETING – The final wrap-up meeting will be held on Thursday, November 20 at 10:15 a.m. at the Three Rivers Public Library in Three Rivers, Michigan.