

Friends of the St. Joseph River Board Meeting

October 27, 2022

Meeting location: in person in the “brown barn”
at St. Patrick’s County Park near South Bend, Indiana

Attendees

1. Matt Meersman, FotSJR President
2. Jeff Reece, FotSJR VP
3. Kim Sinclair, FotSJR Treasurer
4. Chris Temple, FotSJR Board
5. Jan McGowan, St. Joseph County (Indiana) Parks Department
6. Daragh Deeghan, FotSJR Board
7. Jim Hess, Elkhart County SWCD
8. Annie Klehfoth, FotSJR Board
9. Justin Paltke, Pokagon Band DNR
10. Grant Poole, FotSJR Board
11. Brett Peters, Notre Dame LEEF Program
12. Abagael Pruitt, Notre Dame graduate student

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Minutes

Meeting was Called to Order by Matt Meersman at 1:07 PM.

A. Introductions

Matt Meersman thanked Jan McGowan and the St. Joseph County (Indiana) Parks Department for inviting the Friends to use the brown barn for this meeting. Matt then invited everyone to introduce themselves. He then introduced two guests from the University of Notre Dame for their presentation.

B. ND LEEF Presentation

ND LEEF is Notre Dame’s Linked Experimental Ecosystem Facility located at St. Patrick’s County Park near South Bend, Indiana. Details about the facility can be found online at <https://environmentalchange.nd.edu/resources/nd-leef/> . The University of Notre Dame leases approximately 32 acres from the St. Joseph County (IN) Parks Department for ND-LEEF. Brett Peters is the Assistant Director of ND LEEF, and Abagael Pruitt is a third year PhD student in biology at Notre Dame. Brett and Abagael gave an interesting presentation about the facility and the scientific work that is conducted at the site. Brett spoke about ND-LEEF’s interconnected systems of ponds, streams, and wetlands that provide a very useful infrastructure for controlled experiments. One of the unique characteristics of ND-LEEF is that it provides scientists with an outdoor laboratory that is linked hydrologically. Abagael spoke about her recent research concerning the cicada X, its 17-year life cycle, and the impact of these insects on ecosystems. At the end of the presentation, Brett particularly mentioned a new member of the ND LEEF team named Mohamed Aboelnour. Dr. Aboelnour is a new postdoctoral research associate who works on groundwater-surface water interaction at the rural-urban interface. Brett showed a very interesting “change in sediment” diagram of the St. Joseph River

watershed and suggested that Friends members might want to contact Dr. Mohamed Aboelnour at mabeolno@nd.edu if they are interested in learning more.

C. Minutes from the August and September Meetings

There had not been enough Friends Board members at the last meeting to form a quorum so this meeting afforded an opportunity to discuss the minutes from these previous meetings. Jeff Reece moved that the minutes be accepted, and Kim Sinclair seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent.

D. Treasurer's Report

Kim Sinclair presented the Treasurer's Report. She summarized such activities as the income from the River Race, the expense of liability insurance for the event, and the expense of sponsoring a program on WNIT. Matt Meersman commented that the "Wild Apricot" software platform has been slowly becoming more expensive each year. The platform is used both to manage the Friends website and to automate Friends membership registration each year. The growing cost of Apricot has become slightly greater than the income from Friends membership renewals each year. Matt and Jeff Reece are very grateful for the service and convenience that software provides, and Kim commented that the increased expense has not become too burdensome at this point. The general consensus was that the investment was worthwhile. Jeff Reece moved that the Treasurer's Report be accepted, and Daragh Deegan seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent.

E. Old Business

1. There was no Board action taken via email since the last meeting.
2. 19th Annual St. Joseph River Races – Matt Meersman reported that the event was a big success. It was a beautiful day, there was a solid turnout, and the net profit for Friends was approximately \$320.

F. New Business

1. Invasive Species Grant Support

Carolyn Grace has been working on a Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) grant proposal to expand a survey of the St. Joseph River watershed to include an additional 178 miles of tributaries. The purpose of the survey is to assess water quality and the pervasiveness of invasive species. Carolyn had asked Matt Meersman if the Friends would be willing to provide a letter of support for the grant. Matt read a copy of the letter to the group. Kim Sinclair moved that the letter of support be issued, and Daragh Deegan seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent.

2. Upcoming meeting schedule

The group discussed the pros and cons of Friends meetings that are virtual versus in-person. Matt suggested that the in-person meetings are more fun, more personal, and more amenable to having a presentation such as the ND-LEEF talk at this meeting. Jeff Reece agreed but also reminded the group that virtual meetings are more convenient and tend to have a better attendance. Matt summarized the group's discussion by suggesting that perhaps the meeting

schedule in the coming year could be a combination of three in-person meetings and approximately seven virtual meetings. The group discussed the need to ensure that in-person meetings are held at a range of sites – both in Michigan and in Indiana. A lot of different locations were mentioned as attractive options. Kim Sinclair suggested that it might be a good idea to reduce or skip the November and December Friends meetings. As a compromise, Matt asked what the group thought about a single virtual meeting in early December and suggested the date of December 8. Kim Sinclair moved that this date and this future meeting policy be accepted. Jeff Reece seconded the motion. The motion passed with a unanimous voice assent.

3. Other

There was no other “new business.”

G. Items from the floor

Daragh Deegan asked the group what they thought about bringing back the practice of having an annual in-person event that might include a formal presentation or program, a dinner, an auction, and then post-event socializing. A lot of different ideas were discussed. Matt Meersman liked the idea and remarked that he enjoyed such events. Kim Sinclair and Jeff Reece agreed. Matt said these events basically stopped with the covid pandemic. The group liked the potential synergy of bringing together various groups with common themes such as the Friends, the Michiana Watershed, the St. Joseph River Basin Commission, and others for a combined event. An event like this takes a lot of work and planning. Daragh asked if Matt would be willing to serve on an ad hoc committee to think about this proposal, and Daragh volunteered to be on the committee. Matt agreed to do this, and he invited everyone in attendance to let him or Daragh know if they would like to participate in the discussions. Annie Klehfoth volunteered to serve on the committee as well.

Matt announced that four applications had been received for the Watershed Leadership Academy scholarships. He thanked Annie Klehfoth and Chris Temple for volunteering to help review applications. After the application deadline, Matt said he would coordinate reviewing the applications with Annie and Chris as needed.

Grant Poole gave the group an update on the re-meandering project of the Dowagiac River that would be changing approximately 0.6 miles into 1.2 miles. Phase I is mostly complete and included planting a lot of trees. Phase II will begin in the Spring.

Kim Sinclair gave everyone an update regarding work near Pine Creek and Mill Creek. She described the successful partnership that has been developing with a farmer in the area. Work has been progressing that addresses concerns related to CAFO's (Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations). Professor Jennifer Tank from the Biology Department at Notre Dame has been a great collaborator. Kim described the first and second phases of the project that will include the installation of water flow sensors and water chemistry monitoring.

Matt adjourned the meeting at 2:58 PM.