

**ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION**  
**MINUTES**  
**March 2, 2017**

The first quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission was held on March 2, 2017, in the Elkhart County Public Services Building, in Goshen, Indiana. Jon Roberts, President, called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Roll call was taken and it was noted a quorum was present with the following members in attendance:

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Jon Roberts – Kosciusko County  
Dona Hunter – Governor’s Appointee  
Suzanne Weirick – Elkhart County  
Bill Hartsuff – Elkhart County  
Daragh Deegan – City of Elkhart  
Robert Weaver – Kosciusko County  
Jeff Moore – Town of LaGrange  
Roger Nawrot – St. Joseph County  
Tara Lee – Steuben County  
Kris Thomas – Steuben County  
Kieran Fahey – City of South Bend  
Craig Williams – City of Angola  
Jeremy Price – Dept. of Natural Resources

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Joseph Zakas – Legal Representative, Thorne Grodnik LLP  
Jason Kauffman – City of Goshen Stormwater  
Ryan Clussman – Greater Elkhart County Stormwater Partnership  
Grant Poole – Pokagon Band of Potawatomi  
Jeff Reece – Friends of the St. Joe River  
Lowell Hunter – Citizen  
James Turnwald – MACOG  
Matt Meersman – MACOG  
Lori Ratliff – MACOG  
Shirley Czerna – MACOG

**INTRODUCTION BEFORE ROLL CALL**

Matt Meersman provided basic background information on the SJRBC, particularly addressing new members of the Commission and the attending audience. He explained the purpose for creating the SJRBC, the area of land the basin covers, current and future activities, and member selection.

**MINUTES OF DECEMBER 6, 2016**

There were no corrections or additions to the minutes of the December 6, 2016 meetings. The following action was taken.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE DECEMBER 6, 2016 MEETING WAS MADE BY ROGER NAWROT AND SECONDED BY DONA HUNTER. THE MOTION CARRIED.

## **FINANCIALS**

### **Financial Report**

Matt Meersman reviewed the SJRBC Financial Report for the period ending December 31, 2016 and then asked for any questions. There being none, Matt asked for the Basin Commission's approval of the Financial Reports.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE FINANCIAL REPORTS AS PRESENTED WAS MADE BY CRAIG WILLIAMS AND SECONDED BY JEFF MOORE. THE MOTION CARRIED.

### **Approval of Claims**

A list of the quarterly SJRBC claims and a description of the bills paid by MACOG were distributed to the SJRBC members for their review. Lori Ratliff asked for the Commission's approval of the Claims.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE SJRBC CLAIMS FOR THE OCTOBER, NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2016 MACOG REIMBURSEMENTS AND FOR THE MARCH 2017 ATTORNEY FEE WAS MADE BY DARAGH DEEGAN AND SECONDED BY DONA HUNTER. THE MOTION CARRIED.

## **OLD BUSINESS**

### **Basin Updates – Basin Commission Members**

There were no Basin Updates.

### **St. Joseph River Basin Filter Strip Initiative**

The SJRBC has developed an education outreach initiative to encourage landowners to install filter strips on their property. The steering committee updated the existing Filter Strip brochure and plan to distribute it digitally to local SWCD's, NRCS, FSA and local Farm Bureau offices. Due to the significant cost of printing the brochure, (7,500 brochures would cost \$1,111) a decision was made to hold off on printing, until after a budget discussion.

### **Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy Scholarship**

Alicia Czarnecki, Bowman Creek Educational Ecosystem, was awarded the Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy Scholarship. The first session began in January. Following completion of the program, Alicia will be invited to give the SJRBC a short presentation on her experience at the academy. It can be discussed at a later date to determine if it would be beneficial for the Basin Commission to continue the scholarship program next year.

### **Cobus Creek Watershed Diagnostic Study**

The Cobus Creek Watershed Diagnostic Study draft has been completed and will be released for public comment March 9 – 24, 2017. It can be read and reviewed online at [www.sjrbc.com/Cobus Creek](http://www.sjrbc.com/CobusCreek) or at the St. Joseph River Basin Commission offices in South Bend, IN. Approval of the final document will follow. The study is the culmination of two years of data collection and analysis to assess current conditions and make recommendation for future work to improve and protect the creek. This study will help partners access grant funding that requires a management plan to be in place before funds can be allocated for restoration/protection projects.

### **Water Monitoring Program Update**

Phase 3 of the Water Monitoring Program began in April 2016, with 20 sites selected in the southwest portion of the St. Joseph River basin. At the end of the third quarter of monitoring, the results look good with all of the sites meeting target values. There will be one more quarter of sampling, followed by a narrative report.

The 3-year contract with SNRT ends in March 2017. It will be necessary to form a committee to discuss the future of the program. Primarily, the Water Quality Monitoring Program was established to evaluate the current condition of water bodies and provide baseline data to demonstrate change in the future.

### **Elkhart River Watershed Conservation Initiative**

The Elkhart River Conservation Initiative is a collaborative effort to implement sustainable projects in the Elkhart River watershed. The steering committee identified potential projects that would benefit the watershed as a whole and provide multiple environmental benefits to the residents in the watershed. Potential projects have been prioritized for implementation. Next steps include discussions on the type of funding alternatives that would be most effective for each project chosen and who would be responsible for completing each project.

Daragh asked who would be the driver behind implementing the initiative. Matt said he would serve as a facilitator when the steering committee meets to further discuss funding alternatives and project leaders, but the implementation of projects could be initiated by local government and groups in Elkhart and Noble County.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Meeting Schedule Amendment for 2017**

The SJRBC was presented with a revised meeting schedule for calendar year 2017.

March 2, 2017  
June 1, 2017  
September 7, 2017  
December 7, 2017

All meetings will be located at the Elkhart County Public Services Building and will be held on the first Thursday of the quarterly meeting.

A discussion of alternative meeting dates for the 2018 meeting schedule was introduced. It was noted the Elkhart County Public Services meeting room would be available on the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Thursday of the month. The Commission gave no other recommendations for meeting dates. The 2018 meeting schedule will be discussed further at a later date.

### **MACOG Agreement Planning**

The SJRBC was presented with a proposed draft agreement between MACOG and the SJRBC for the provision of general services. Historically, staff working on SJRBC have been salaried MACOG employees, which means they have fringe and indirect expenses associated with their time. However, Matt, now being the primary staff for the SJRBC, is working part-time as an hourly employee. To address this change and improve budget forecasting, a new agreement was drafted that eliminates indirect and itemizes the primary services MACOG provides for the SJRBC. Each line item for services provided was broken down to a per month cost, based on a typical 5-year average. The new agreement would help the SJRBC make more realistic projections of revenue and expenses. In addition, the new agreement designates Matt to serve in the capacity of Director of the SJRBC, outlines the powers and responsibilities of this position and provides the SJRBC with oversight if a replacement is necessary. The designation of a SJRBC Director would alleviate the need for the MACOG Director to serve as the official representative of the SJRBC, which has occurred in the past. A final draft of the new agreement will be presented at the June 2017 SJRBC meeting for the Commission's consideration.

### **FY2018 Budget Planning**

For the past few years there has been an increased use of the "rainy-day" fund when budgeting, which has depleted this fund to the point where there is only enough money left to cover one year of basic operations. Matt has worked with the MACOG Director to figure out a way to move forward without the use of "rainy-day" funds. The proposed budget layout separates the operating budget from the programming budget. The operating budget includes items such as the SJRBC Director's wages, office expenses, accounting services, and postage. The programming budget includes items such as scholarships, water sampling, events and newsletters. In order to significantly decrease expenses, Matt suggested that programming expenses should not exceed revenue remaining after basic operating expenses are covered. This would eliminate the planned use of "rainy-day" funds for balancing the budget and require significant reductions to programming expenses. Ultimately, the goal is to get the SJRBC operating budget to a point where it is covered entirely by local government contributions and state funds can be used for programming. It will be critical for the SJRBC to build credibility and demonstrate value to the communities it serves in order to justify larger contribution requests from local governments.

A breakdown of the approved FY2017 budget using the new format, a budget forecast for FY2017 and a proposed budget for FY2018 was distributed. In order to balance the budget, several projects and programs have been removed or reduced in the proposed FY2018 programming budget, including watershed planning, water quality sampling, IWLA scholarship, newsletter, and Filter Strip Incentive Program. The new budget will be presented for approval at the June meeting.

### **GLPF Conservation Incentive Project**

The Great Lakes Protection Fund (GLPF) is an endowment fund set up by the governors of the states surrounding the Great Lakes. The GLPF uses the investment income to support innovative projects

in the Great Lakes Basin. The SJRBC has the opportunity to enter into a subcontract with Kieser & Associates for \$30,000 over 3-years to help with a GLPF funded project testing new methods for calculating drain taxes that create incentives for better agricultural land management. The project largely involves testing the new apportionment methods in Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin. The goal of the project is to assess the feasibility of calculating drain taxes in a way that rewards farmers who implement land management practices that improve soil and water quality.

If the SJRBC enters into the agreement, it would be responsible for finding at least one county in the Indiana portion of the river basin that would agree to try the new method. The SJRBC would work with the county Surveyor and the local Soil & Water Conservation District to utilize GIS watershed analysis tools for soil erosion and sedimentation modeling. The SJRBC would also be responsible for supporting the efforts of the drain official and Conservation District in Van Buren County, MI. The new assessment method could help provide a foundation that would guide future drain assessment practices, reduce long-term maintenance costs, and increase the protection of waterways throughout the St. Joseph River basin.

Matt asked for the approval from the Basin Commission to enter into a subcontract with Kieser & Associates to pursue the GLPF Conservation Incentive Project.

MOTION TO ENTER INTO A SUBCONTRACT WITH KIESER & ASSOCIATES TO PURSUE THE GLPF CONSERVATION INCENTIVE PROJECT WAS MADE BY DONA HUNTER AND SECONDED BY DARAGH DEEGAN. THE MOTION CARRIED.

### **Great Lakes Day – Washington, DC**

The annual Great Lakes Day event in Washington, D.C. will take place on March 15 & 16, 2017. Matt has been involved with the event for the past couple of years and would be interested in representing the SJRBC regarding potential water related projects and funding issues this year. The Healing Our Waters Coalition awarded Matt a scholarship to cover most travel expenses. Friends of the St. Joe River Association agreed to cover the remaining travel expenses. The event will provide participants with the opportunity to meet with legislators to explain the importance of efforts to protect and restore clean water in the St. Joseph River and the Great Lakes Basin.

### **17<sup>th</sup> Annual SJRB Symposium**

The 17<sup>th</sup> Annual IN-MI St. Joseph River Basin Symposium is tentatively scheduled for Friday, May 12<sup>th</sup>. In the past, the event has been held at Fernwood, in Buchanan, MI and includes a full meal. However, due to an attempt to reduce costs, provide a more centralized location, and increase attendance, Matt suggested a change in location and possibly eliminating or reducing food costs. When hosting the event at Fernwood and providing lunch, it costs approximately \$3,000, the venue is limited to 80 people, and it is not conveniently located for many of the Indiana attendees. Therefore, in order to cut costs, provide a more centralized location and include up to 120 people, Matt suggested hosting this year's Symposium at the Blue Gate Inn, in Shipshewana. The cost to rent the room would be \$200. If a meal was still included, it would be less than what Fernwood charges.

Matt asked the Basin Commission to consider the options for hosting this year's symposium, including the location, invitees, meal fee, and possible sponsorship. Based on the discussion that

ensued, a variety of ideas were proposed. Eventually, it was decided that Matt use his best judgement moving forward with the arrangements, while staying within the \$2,500 budget.

### **ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR**

There were no comments.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Basin Commission, the following action was taken.

MOTION TO ADJOURN WAS MADE BY CRAIG  
WILLIAMS AND SECONDED BY ROGER NAWROT.  
THE MEETING WAS ADJOURNED.

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Jon Roberts, President