

**ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES  
September 5, 2024**

The third quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) in 2024 was held on September 5<sup>th</sup>, at the Schrock Pavilion in Goshen. The meeting was also livestreamed on YouTube and made available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IzSD0JDAKSU>

Jim Hess, SJRBC Vice Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Matt Meersman, River Basin Director, introduced himself along with Ashley Matthews and Kate Barrett from the Michiana Area Council of Governments (MACOG). He briefly reviewed instructions for participation and discussed the purpose and makeup of the SJRBC. Roll call was taken, and it was noted a quorum was present with the following members in attendance:

**VOTING MEMBERS PRESENT:**

*Vice Chair:* Jim Hess, Elkhart County  
*Secretary:* Jewel Wise, Kosciusko County  
Daragh Deegan, City of Elkhart  
Kieran Fahey, City of South Bend  
Martin Franke, LaGrange County  
Bill Hartsuff, Elkhart County  
Matt Horsley, Indiana DNR  
Chad Jonsson, Town of Syracuse  
Clint Knauer, Steuben County

Sarah Longenecker, St. Joseph County  
Jarod Nisely, LaGrange County  
Jon Roberts, Kosciusko County  
Randy Sexton, Noble County  
Jim Slabaugh, Steuben County  
Cory Stewart, LaGrange County  
Kris Thomas, City of Angola  
Alicia Walsh, Steuben County

**OTHERS PRESENT:**

Donny Aleo, Elkhart Co. Parks  
Natasha Anderson, Indiana DNR  
Todd Clark, Elkhart Co. SWCD  
Joe Foy, City of Elkhart  
Vincent Gresham, Elkhart Co. Parks  
Jason Kauffman, City of Goshen Stormwater  
Tyler LaFlash, City of Elkhart

Ryan Miller, City of Goshen Stormwater  
Michael Novotney, Wessler Engineering  
Charlie Pettibone, Steuben Co. Planning  
Michael Trippel, Thorne Grodnik  
Kate Barrett, MACOG  
Ashley Matthews, MACOG  
Matt Meersman, MACOG

**CONSENT AGENDA**

Jim Hess, SJRBC Vice Chair, asked Matt Meersman to move through the consent agenda. Matt reminded members that they can request to have any item removed from the consent agenda if they believe it warrants its own separate vote.

**Minutes – May 30, 2024**

Matt asked the Commission members if there were any comments or questions about the minutes of the May 30, 2024, meeting. Kris Thomas said page three needs to be corrected from 18 sites to 10 sites when Kate discusses the 2024 Stueben County water monitoring. Hearing no further comments, Matt moved on to the next item on the consent agenda.

**Financial Report**

Matt presented the financial report for the final quarter of FY 2024 (04/01/24 – 06/30/24). Financial statements were provided to the members for review in advance of the meeting.

Matt discussed the Statement of Financial Activities (Profit & Loss). He explained the Special Project income from Steuben County, Angola, and the Town of Bristol for the water monitoring cost-share program. Matt also noted there was \$3,000 budgeted for an audit that was not initiated in FY 24. The audit is expected in FY 25 and is included in the FY 25 budget. Matt also said there was not any expenses related to planning or resource development under special projects.

The Statement of Net Assets (Balance Sheet) was then presented. Matt noted the accounts payable was for services provided by MACOG for April, May, and June as well as legal expenses. Total Fund Balance and register balance for FY24 Q4 was \$432,631.91.

Matt reviewed the Statement of Cash Flows and reminded everyone that the statement is prepared on a cash basis ending on 06/30/24. Matt noted that the Special Project Revenue is from Steuben County, Angola, and the Town of Bristol for the flow monitoring cost-share program. The local government appropriation from Steuben County includes the second half of CY 23 and the first half of CY 24. Invoices for the 2024 appropriations have been paid by all members. The City of South Bend and the Town of Syracuse included extra funds in their appropriations.

Matt asked if there were any questions on the financial report. Hearing no questions, he moved on to the next item on the consent agenda.

#### **Claims – September 5, 2024**

A list of the quarterly claims and associated invoices totaling \$35,850.92 was distributed to the SJRBC members for review prior to the meeting. Claims included the accounts payable as well as invoices related to mileage reimbursement, webmap development, water monitoring and legal counsel for the LaGrange Wastewater Treatment Plant Agreement.

Matt asked if there were any questions about the claims, or other items from the consent agenda. Hearing no questions or comments, Jim called for a motion to approve the consent agenda.

CORY STEWART MOVED TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA  
WITH CORRECTION TO THE MINUTES. ALICIA WALSH SECONDED.  
ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

##### **Water Monitoring Program**

Kate Barrett provided an update on the SJRBC Water Monitoring Program. There are 12 biological monitoring locations which are meant to complement existing efforts by various partners throughout the basin. She explained how sampling devices are deployed and colonized by macroinvertebrates for about a month. The devices are then collected and sent to Midwest Biodiversity Institute to be analyzed. The analysis results in a health score for each site. Kate presented the 2023 data from Midwest Biodiversity Institute (MBI). The scores range from 0-60, with 60 being the highest level of stream quality. Kate said the 2023 data shows an increasing or stable trend in overall stream health. She noted the condition of the Prairie River which was 26 in 2021, jumped to 44 in 2022, and climbed to 46 in 2023. Kate noted that it is possible some changes could be due to slight changes in sampling locations or sampling errors. Kate said the 2024 samples were sent to MBI for analysis and results are expected in May 2025.

Kate discussed her support of a strategic water quality sampling program in Steuben County. Through a cooperative agreement with MACOG, two AmeriCorps members based out of Trine University assisted with the sampling for the program. Kate thanked the Community Foundation of Steuben County for two grants that supported the water monitoring efforts.

Kate stated she has also been helping with a similar water quality sampling program in LaGrange County. She is currently working with partners in LaGrange County to sample 13 sites for 20 consecutive weeks. Kate said the program is being funded by a Community Foundation Impact Grant and REMC EnviroWatts Grant. She thanked Eric Fisher and Pat Wilshire for their involvement in the program along with Martin Franke and Kyle Burchett from the LaGrange County Soil and Water Conservation District.

In addition to water monitoring, Kate highlighted several outreach and education efforts she has been involved in. She discussed the Bowman Creek Watershed Study being conducted in collaboration with the Notre Dame Tech Ethics Lab and Lucy Civic Innovation Lab. The goal is to develop a pilot hydrologic model to characterize water quality. Kate will also be co-leading Hoosier River Watch trainings on September 21, September 27, and October 11.

Kate and Matt encouraged the Commission to visit the interactive web map. The web map can be used to compare water quality variables over time and will eventually have the option to select subwatersheds, sites, and rivers. Matt asked the Commission to think of questions that come up that the water quality data might be able to answer.

Daragh Deegan asked if any sampling was being done in the Little Elkhart River Watershed as part of the LaGrange County program. Martin Franke responded that at least 3 of the sites are located in that watershed. Daragh explained that samples taken downstream by the Elkhart County Health Department found very high levels of E. coli. Matt stated that the LaGrange County Surveyor's Office has been trying to enforce an ordinance restricting livestock access to regulated drains, which could help address at least one of the potential sources of E. coli.

Matt said in addition to the SJRBC's support of the USGS gauge on Waldron Lake and the sensors on Phillips Ditch, there are now real-time water level monitoring devices at three sites in the North Branch of the Elkhart River watershed, one site on the Fawn River, and one site on the Little Elkhart River. Tritium has been taking field measurements at each of those sites in order to develop stage-discharge curves, which allows the estimate of the volume/discharge at each site. He said there is opportunity to place more water level monitoring devices in other locations and would like input from partners who are participating in the cost-share program.

Joe Foy, City of Elhart, encouraged the Commission to continue collecting water quantity data to prepare for the future. He said there may be an abundance of water in our basin, but it is not limitless and the information is needed as new water intensive development moves into the area. Randy Sexton mentioned a proposed bottling plant facility near the Pisgah Marsh. Matt said the site is just outside of the St. Joseph River Basin but reminded the Commission that groundwater and surface water do not always follow the same divide. The Commission discussed economic development and the usefulness of water quantity data. Matt is encouraged by officials at the executive level who do not want to just assume there is enough water without knowing. He said the Indiana Finance Authority (IFA) is sponsoring regional groundwater studies and he would like the Commission to be a conduit for bringing the IFA's resources to our area.

### **Watershed Study**

Matt said he is still working on developing an approach to studying watershed factors such as land cover, management practices, soil conditions and drainage improvement. Ideally these factors could be used to develop a model for predicting the impact of changes in watershed conditions and making informed water management decisions. Prioritizing land for water storage or conservation practices, and apportioning water infrastructure maintenance fees in ways that promote conservation by private landowners are two potential uses. Since the last meeting, Matt had discussions with Intera and Northwater about how to approach the study. They sent a strategic planning proposal, but he still needs to review it. Matt said there is money in the budget for planning/resource development which could be used for the study. Matt will provide an update to the Commission after he reviews the proposal. Daragh asked if the watershed study would include a groundwater or water availability component as well. Matt said the strategic planning effort should address both components along with water monitoring recommendations.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **2024 Meeting Schedule**

Matt presented the 2025 SJRBC meeting schedule with some slight changes to the usual first Thursday in March, June, September and December. Due to scheduling conflicts, Matt proposed moving the March meeting to February 27 and the June meeting to May 29. Therefore, the meeting schedule for 2025 would be February 27, May 29, September 4, and December 4.

DARAGH DEEGAN MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2025 MEETING SCHEDULE.  
JIM SLABAUGH SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

#### **Watershed Leadership Academy**

Matt stated the SJRBC budgeted funds to provide financial support for two individuals from the basin to attend the Watershed Leadership Academy hosted by Purdue University. There is an application for individuals interested who either work or volunteer within the St. Joseph River Basin. The Friends of the St. Joe River Association usually provides support for an additional two individuals to attend and will discuss at their next meeting later this month. Matt said the price has increased to \$950 this year for non-profit organizations. Matt will email an announcement next week with more information and a link to the application.

ALICIA WALSH MOVED TO APPROVE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR TWO  
INDIVIDUALS TO ATTEND THE WATERSHED LEADERSHIP ACADEMY.  
JEWEL WISE SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

#### **Other Business/Updates**

Martin Franke said the Indiana Grazing School will have an interactive training and field day September 27-28 at the Pargil Natural Resources Learning Center in LaGrange, IN. Martin also said the 2024 Forestry Field Day will be held on October 19 at the William Thomas Farm.

Jim Hess thanked Matt for speaking at the Indiana Association of Soil & Water Conservation Districts regional events in Columbia City and Winimac. He said his presentations on Watershed Development Commissions were very well received.

Daragh Deegan reported that several communities in southwest Elkhart County were finally going to be connected to the regional sewer district. Many homes in the area were known to have failing septic systems, or even discharge directly to streams. Matt said the Health Department's efforts to conduct regular water sampling and assist homeowners with septic repairs are really encouraging. He explained how these efforts are supported by the County's stormwater fee.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Matt reported on several administrative tasks and said he was able to secure another exemption from the reserve the State places on its biennial budget allocations. Matt also assisted the LaGrange County Surveyor's Office with drain apportionment and the Indiana Toll Road with a project for watershed signs. He also said he was interviewed by ABC57 regarding wetlands and WNIT regarding combined sewer overflows (CSOs).

Matt reminded the Commission about unique data that is available for wetlands in the basin. The Friends of the St. Joe River Association performed a functional assessment of all the current and historic wetlands in the basin and assigned functional significance values to each of them. He said he was recently able to use the data to assist The Nature Conservancy, who is working with the City of South Bend on a wetland project. Matt explained how the data can be used to justify the protection or restoration of critical wetlands in the basin.

### **ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR**

Bill Hartsuff asked if Dr. Jack Wittman of Intera was working on mapping the aquifers in Indiana to see what the capacity was. Matt said Dr. Wittman has mapped aquifers in some regions already and he has been advocating for the Indiana Finance Authority (IFA) to fund similar studies in other regions.

Bill also asked Matt if he was aware of the public meetings held regarding the future of the Elkhart and Mottville dams. Matt said he was aware and he attended one of the meetings held by AEP. He explained that he does not believe AEP is interested in removing either of the two dams because they are still generating power, but they must explore the removal option as part of the relicensing process with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

Donny Aleo announced that the Elkhart River Challenge will be held on September 7, starting at Rogers Park in Goshen and ending in Elkhart. He thanked Matt for his help with the event.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business, Jim Hess called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

MARTIN FRANKE MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. RANDY SEXTON SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

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Adam Bowden, SJRBC Chair