

ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
September 4, 2025

The third quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) in 2025 was held on September 4th, at the Schrock Pavilion in Goshen. The meeting was also livestreamed on YouTube and made available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rMf4i48mCo>

Jim Hess, SJRBC Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Matt Meersman, River Basin Director, introduced himself and Ashley Matthews 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:

Chair: Jim Hess, Elkhart County
Phil Barker, Elkhart County
Daragh Deegan, City of Elkhart
Mark Espich, St. Joseph County
Kieran Fahey, City of South Bend
Martin Franke, LaGrange County
Bill Hartsuff, Elkhart County
Anita Hess, Noble County
Matt Horsley, Indiana DNR
Chad Jonsson, Town of Syracuse
John Law, St. Joseph County

Sue McGee, City of Kendallville
Janel Meyer, Steuben County
Jim Moyer, Kosciusko County
Jarrod Nisley, LaGrange County
Jon Roberts, Kosciusko County
Randy Sexton, Noble County
Rick Shipe, Steuben 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
Todd Clark, Elkhart Co. SWCD
Bella Foster, Indiana DNR
Trevor Hampshire, City of Kendallville
Jason Kauffman, City of Goshen
Dan Lash, Noble County
Tony Manns, LaGrange County
Ryan Miller, City of Goshen

Randy Mull, West Lakes Assoc.
Brea Persing, Elkhart Co. SWCD
Amy Renkenberger, LaGrange SWCD
Steve Schweisberger, Elkhart County
Brandie Ecker, Thorne Grodnik
Ashley Matthews, MACOG
Matt Meersman, MACOG

CONSENT AGENDA

Jim Hess, SJRBC Chair, introduced the consent agenda and reminded members that they can request to have any item removed if they believe it warrants its own separate vote.

Minutes – May 29, 2025

Jim asked Commission members if there were any comments or questions about the minutes from May 29th. Hearing none, Jim asked Matt to review the next item on the consent agenda.

Financial Report

Matt presented the financial report for the final quarter of FY 2025 (04/01/25 – 06/30/25). Financial statements were provided to the members for review in advance of the meeting.

Matt discussed the Statement of Financial Activities. He explained there was no revenue from the water monitoring cost-share program this year. Matt noted the State Board of Accounts Compliance Engagement cost was less than expected, and staff costs were lower due to the resignation of Dr. Kate Barrett. He also said that extra costs from changes in the biological monitoring program will not be incurred until next year.

The Statement of Net Assets was then presented. Accounts Payable are for services provided by MACOG from January through June. The total Fund Balance was \$491,961.16.

Matt reviewed the Statement of Cash Flows and reminded everyone that the statement is prepared on a cash basis ending on 06/30/25. Matt noted that requested local government appropriations were received from all members and there was income from the Symposium.

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 4, 2025

A list of the quarterly claims and associated invoices totaling \$28,991.77 was distributed to the SJRBC members for review prior to the meeting. Claims included accounts payable as well as invoices for the Annual Symposium, webmap development, water monitoring, and legal counsel.

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.

RICK SHIPE MOVED TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA.

ANITA HESS SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

OLD BUSINESS

Water Monitoring Program

Matt provided an update on the SJRBC Water Monitoring Program and reviewed the 2024 data from Midwest Biodiversity Institute (MBI). He reminded the Commission that the cost of MBI services increased this year due to MBI conducting the field work and macro processing. Matt said the 2025 data from MBI should be ready next spring.

Matt then discussed the strategic water quality sampling programs in Steuben and LaGrange Counties. He explained that these efforts were impacted by the loss of the AmeriCorps program, which had supported seasonal water monitoring help for both counties. The Steuben County Health Department and Steuben County Lakes Council, with support from SJRBC, hired interns to continue their sampling efforts. Alicia Walsh noted that pharmaceutical testing was included along with their regular water chemistry testing. Martin Franke said LaGrange County proceeded with district staff and volunteers to complete 24 weeks of water quality sampling.

Matt discussed the ongoing need for someone to interpret collected data and create narratives from it, similar to the previous role held by Dr. Barrett. He expressed hope in finding another individual who could provide a similar skillset on a part-time basis.

In addition to the SJRBC's support of water quality monitoring efforts, Matt said they are also monitoring water quantity through USGS gauges and 8 real-time water level monitoring devices throughout the basin. Tritium has been taking field measurements at each of those sites in order to develop stage-discharge curves, which allow the estimate of the volume/discharge at each site. Matt said the budget allows for the installation of additional water level monitoring devices, with an area of interest being upstream of the City of Goshen for flood mitigation. He emphasized the importance of understanding the long-term annual costs of the sites for planning purposes and to ensure fiscal responsibility.

Watershed Study

Matt discussed the development of the watershed study to investigate potential modeling efforts, additional monitoring sites, water demand/availability analysis, and early warning systems. He explained that he originally envisioned the watershed study as a "grand model" that incorporated a comprehensive green infrastructure inventory. Matt noted that stakeholders were also interested in water availability due to large water withdrawals by data centers, and a "state of the basin" scoring mechanism. He introduced Theresa Landewe from Intera and Jeff Boeckler from Spheros Environmental. Both companies are working to help the Commission develop a strategic work plan for long-term management goals.

Theresa highlighted Indiana Governor's Executive Order 25-63, which mandates an inventory of state waters and regional studies by the end of next year, with the northeast region slated for a water demand and availability study. The state-funded initiative suggests that the commission can remove a similar item from its work plan, although additional localized refinement may be desired. The executive order also aims to develop statewide and regional planning frameworks and optimize water resource management.

Jeff presented survey results indicating gaps in current water monitoring, with candidate sites recommended for expansion. He explained that the strategic work plan focuses on infrastructure mapping, a state-of-the-basin assessment, and early warning/forecasting systems, serving as a guiding document for securing funding and communicating objectives. After further discussion, continued input on the survey was encouraged to help finalize the plan. The presentation can be viewed at minute 34:00 of <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0rMf4i48mCo>.

NEW BUSINESS

2026 Meeting Schedule

Matt presented a 2026 SJRBC meeting schedule with a slight change to the usual first Thursday of each quarter. He proposed moving the June meeting to May 28 due to a scheduling conflict at the Schrock Pavilion. Therefore, the meeting schedule for 2026 would be March 5, May 28, September 3, and December 3. Matt requested a motion to approve the proposed schedule.

MARTIN FRANKE MOVED TO APPROVE THE 2026 MEETING SCHEDULE.
RANDY SEXTON 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 at a reduced tuition rate of \$950 each. The Friends of the St. Joe River Association will provide support for an

additional two individuals to attend. There is an application for individuals who either work or volunteer within the basin. Matt also requested volunteers to help review applications with him.

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

Alicia Walsh, Martin Franke, and Jim Hess volunteered to assist Matt in reviewing applications.

Other Business/Updates

There were no announcements from Commission members.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Matt reported on several administrative tasks over the last quarter. He had meetings with the Legal Services Agency (LSA) regarding River Basin Commissions and Watershed Development Commissions. Matt noted that LSA is interested in understanding the Commission's operations as new bills related to watershed development commissions and regional planning emerge, and he aims to ensure the SJRBC's broad and diverse representation remains intact.

Matt said he and Kieran Fahey will be presenting on South Bend's smart sewers and the Commission's work at the Great Lakes Legislative Caucus Meeting on September 15. Matt has also worked with Jim Hess to organize a drain financing roundtable following today's meeting.

Matt then discussed House Enrolled Act 1509, which mandates the disclosure of appointing authorities for certain board members, including their terms, on all agendas and meeting announcements. He will work with Commission members who may need to update their proxy forms to be compliant.

ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR

Donny Aleo announced that the Elkhart River Challenge will be held this Saturday, September 6.

Matt addressed an inquiry from Casey Malcom regarding mute swan management on the St. Joe River near the Twin Branch Dam. He will provide her with the contact information from the DNR and the St. Joseph River Homeowners Association for a mute swan harvesting permit.

ADJOURNMENT

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

DARAGH DEEGAN MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. RICK SHIPE SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

Jim Hess, SJRBC Chair

**ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
DRAIN FINANCING ROUNDTABLE NOTES
September 4, 2025**

A roundtable discussion concerning drain project financing was held immediately following the St. Joseph River Basin Commission meeting on September 4, 2025, at the Schrock Pavilion.

PRESENT:

Phil Barker, Elkhart County Surveyor
Zach Holsinger, LaGrange County Surveyor
Jim Moyer, Kosciusko County Surveyor
Randy Sexton, Noble County Surveyor
Jim Slabaugh, Steuben County Surveyor

Rick Shipe, Steuben Co. Drainage Board
Ben Taylor, LaGrange Co. Drainage Board
Zach Young, LaGrange Co. Drainage Board

John Law, St. Joseph Co. Surveyor's Office
Steve Schweisberger, Elkhart Co. Surveyor's Office
Cory Stewart, LaGrange County Surveyor's Office

Tony Manns, LaGrange County
Drainage Board Attorney

Todd Clark, Elkhart County SWCD
Jim Hess, Elkhart County SWCD
Brea Persing, Elkhart County SWCD

Ashley Matthews, MACOG
Matt Meersman, MACOG

Jim Hess opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees and emphasizing the importance of inter-county collaboration in addressing stormwater and drainage infrastructure challenges within the St. Joseph River Basin. Each county representative introduced themselves and outlined their role in local stormwater management.

Each county shared a summary of current funding and maintenance issues they face with drainage and stormwater challenges. All six counties currently finance the maintenance of regulated drains following Indiana Drainage Law, but use different methodologies for calculating assessments and prioritizing maintenance. LaGrange County reported ongoing challenges in maintaining regulated drains due to limited funding and staffing capacity. Existing assessments and local revenues do not fully cover the costs of equipment, materials, and contracted services needed to sustain long-term infrastructure performance. LaGrange County expressed interest in exploring a cumulative drain fund to reduce administrative burdens and increase efficiency.

Steve Schweisberger discussed Elkhart County's utilization of a cumulative drain fund to support maintenance of county-regulated drains, consolidating funding and reducing administrative burdens. He noted that a potential con to the method would be that a landowner may pay into the cumulative fund without having a county-regulated drain directly benefiting their property. Steve's response to that concern is that all landowners benefit indirectly since stormwater from every property ultimately drains through county systems and maintained drains support roadway infrastructure, local businesses, and communities county-wide. An overview of Elkhart County's approach and comparison of the watershed assessment vs. cumulative funding methods was distributed by Steve Schweisberger to roundtable attendees (attached on following page).

Assessment vs Cumulative Funding

Cumulative Benefits

1. Surveyor's office doesn't need to define, re-define or dispute watershed boundaries.
2. No required Public Hearings for Maintenance Assessment rate changes or establishing Reconstruction Assessments.
3. Auditor's office doesn't have to collect or balance multiple watershed accounts.
4. Eliminates watershed assessment cost break down on individual Tax statements.
5. Large project costs don't adversely impact landowners on small watersheds.
6. You don't have to limit the scope of required work because of insufficient available maintenance funds in a drain account.

One Con

A landowner could have taxes collected by the Cumulative method and not have any land directly benefited by a County Regulated Drain on their property.

Response: Their water drains somewhere, and they do benefit as they travel throughout the County by the funds being used to maintain the CRD's that provide drainage needs of the roadways they travel, local business and communities etc.

For Both Methods The project design and review process are the same.

1. Project benefits must outweigh the cost.
2. Landowners are sent notifications of the proposed project scope.
3. Public Hearing and Advertisement for Bids are required based on cost levels of project.

Elkhart County Cumulative collection is currently at \$0.01 per \$100.00 of assessed valuation. In the past 2 years we have adopted a method to appropriate funds into 3 categories.

1. Obstruction Removal
2. Maintenance of Drains
3. Major Reconstruction projects – which are designating funds for a specific system.

Previously the County would appropriate funds annually towards specific projects on drains for the year and on large systems that had historic annual maintenance needs. This method still involved managing several accounts.