

ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION

MINUTES September 9, 2014

The third quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission was held on September 9, 2014, in the Elkhart County Administration Building, in Goshen, Indiana. Daragh Deegan, Chairman, 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: Daragh Deegan
Bill Hartsuff
Jon Roberts
Alfredo Garcia
Tom Miller
Bill Forbes
Ron Niezgodski
Karl Kopec
Kris Thomas
Craig Williams

OTHERS PRESENT: Joseph Zakas, Legal Representative, Thorne Grodnik LLP
Ryan Cummings, Elcona Country Club, Elkhart, IN

Others in attendance are listed on the Attendance Sheet and made a part of these minutes.

MINUTES OF JUNE 3, 2014

There were no corrections or additions to the minutes of the June 3, 2014. The following action was taken.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE MINUTES OF THE JUNE 3,
2014 MEETING WAS MADE BY KARL KOPEC AND
SECONDED BY RON NIEZGODSKI. THE MOTION CARRIED.

INTRODUCTION OF NEW STAFF

James Turnwald introduced himself as the new Executive Director of MACOG as of August 4, 2014. He went on to explain that Zach Dripps took over as the Principal Planner for MACOG, and there are 3 new planners. Jeremy Reiman is the new Environmental Planner, and Erin Roznik and Caitlin Stevens are new Regional Planners. Lori Ratliff and Debbie Gardner, who were present at the meeting, introduced themselves as part of the Financial Department, and Shirley Czerna stated she is the Assistant Office Manager for MACOG.

Daragh Deegan said he was saddened that Sandi and Karen moved on, but he expressed excitement for the new vision and energy that James and Jeremy plan to bring to the Commission.

FINANCIALS

Budget Transfer

Lori Ratliff explained that in review of the fourth quarter statement of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission, there was a shortfall in line item Printing/Reproduction due to the printing of the *Improving Water Quality Through Buffered Streambanks* brochure and the *Basin Bites* newsletter. To avoid a negative balance, it was recommended that \$1,400.00 be transferred from the Contractual line item to the Printing/Reproduction line item.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE \$1,400.00 TRANSFER OF FUNDS FROM "CONTRACTUAL" INTO "PRINTING/REP" WAS MADE BY RON NIEZGODSKI AND SECONDED BY CRAIG WILLIAMS. THE MOTION CARRIED.

Financial Report

Lori reviewed the SJRBC Financial Report for the period ending June 30, 2014 and then asked for any questions. There being none, Lori asked for the Commission's approval of the June 30, 2014 Financial Report.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE FINANCIAL REPORT AS PRESENTED WAS MADE BY JON ROBERTS AND SECONDED BY CRAIG WILLIAMS. 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 Commission members for their review. Once approved, Ron Niezgodski, SJRBC Second Signatory Treasurer, signed the checks.

MOTION TO APPROVE THE SJRBC CLAIMS FOR THE APRIL, MAY AND JUNE 2014 MACOG REIMBURSEMENTS AND FOR THE SEPTEMBER ATTORNEY FEE WAS MADE BY BILL FORBES AND SECONDED BY KARL KOPEC. THE MOTION CARRIED.

OLD BUSINESS

Basin Updates

Daragh Deegan reported the City of Elkhart received a \$25,000 grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service fish passage program to study Christiana Creek. Six barriers in the creek stop fish from swimming upstream. An engineering hydrology study and feasibility study has been done to determine if the structures could be removed or improved upon, to allow fish to swim upstream. There were some hurdles that were encountered along the way that made the project more challenging, nevertheless, the project is currently in the completion phase.

Craig Williams informed the Commission that the Pigeon Creek Watershed Management Plan was approved in June 2014, and the Plan would be made available on the IDEM website. Also, the

Steuben County SWCD, in cooperation with LaGrange County, has forwarded a draft of the Fawn River Watershed Management Plan to IDEM for approval.

Daragh announced a unique, cooperative LARE grant project between the City of Elkhart and Elkhart County. The project involves restoring portions of Yellow Creek in front of the Concord Mall. It will entail the creation of a two-stage ditch, which will improve water storage and water quality.

Water Quality Testing Program

Jeremy Reiman referred to the handouts that were distributed to the SJRBC members, which gave an update of the Water Quality Testing Program sites and results from the first 5 months of testing in Noble County. He noted there were some high levels of E. coli, nitrites, and nitrates. However, it was too early to draw any conclusions. This coming winter, Dave Arrington and Jeremy will choose 10 additional sites, probably within the Elkhart River Watershed, with testing to begin in the spring of 2015. The whole goal of the program is to build a good foundation of water quality data in the St. Joseph River Basin. Once the SJRBC's new website is up and running, the data collected would be available for the public to view.

Ron Niezgodski asked, if a column could be added to future reports that would display the *average range* of each chemical, for comparison. Jeremy agreed. Joe Zakas asked if the high E. coli counts were due to wet weather in the spring. Jeremy acknowledged the fact that water runoff, water swelling, and sediment runoff could cause high E. coli levels. Joe further asked, when excessive runoff is found in a particular area, would filter strips be recommended for buffer. Jeremy said most definitely. The whole idea regarding the water quality testing program is to help solve water quality problems. Bill Forbes asked if any of the initial 10 sites were downstream from a wastewater treatment facility. Jeremy said he would check into the matter and get back with the Commission via e-mail or at the next meeting.

Ontwa Township Wastewater Treatment Facility

Jeremy noted there was little to report concerning the Ontwa Township Wastewater Treatment Facility since the last SJRBC meeting update. Currently, the wastewater treatment plant permit application and supplemental documents have not been posted on the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) website. Furthermore, there has been no word as to when the next public hearing would be held.

Bill Forbes said he heard on the news the Ontwa Township Board voted to proceed with the treatment plant. Joe Zakas said he heard that Ontwa Township has neglected to pay the City of Elkhart roughly \$60,000 in fines. Daragh explained the fines are due to the fact that based on Elkhart's monitoring results, Ontwa Township's hydrogen sulfite issue has not been corrected. Daragh also reported that on August 19, 2014 the City of Elkhart sent a letter to Mike Bitondo, with MDEQ, condemning the wastewater treatment plant and listed several reasons why it was a bad idea. Joe Zakas asked if the Commission could get a copy of that letter. Daragh said he would send a copy of the letter to Jeremy, who in return would e-mail it to the Commission. Karl Kopec asked if the SJRBC is listed as a potentially affected party, in order to get the draft permit for comment. Jeremy said he would look into the issue and make sure the SJRBC is on the list. Furthermore, as soon as a comment period is scheduled, he would e-mail the information to the Commission.

NEW BUSINESS

New SJRBC Website

James informed the Commission regarding the development of a new SJRBC Website. MACOG's goal is to streamline *SJRBC.com* by the end of October, to make it more accessible and informative for the public to view. The new site will consist of more mapping information, more general base data, and a breakdown of the subwatersheds containing fact sheets, mapping and other information. There are also plans to include all of the watershed management plans for the basin. In October, a link will be sent to the SJRBC to test the new site and to provide feedback. In December, after the site has been up for a while, the Commission will have a second opportunity to review it.

Daragh asked if MACOG has plans to collaborate with the Friends of the St. Joe. James said he has scheduled a meeting with Matt Meersman, Friends of the St. Joe, to discuss the housing of the wetland partnership data, since their wetland partnership grant is expiring and are looking for a permanent area to host the information. Ron requested he and Daragh be notified of the date for the scheduled meeting with Matt. James said he would.

Subwatershed Fact Sheets

Jeremy distributed a draft copy of a Subwatershed Fact Sheet to the Commission. Jeremy explained he started to comprise fact sheets for the over 20 subwatersheds that exist in the St. Joseph River Basin. The goal is to provide quick snippets of information and make it readily available to the public on the SJRBC website. Jeremy asked the Commission to give feedback on what significant information should be address on the fact sheets. Daragh ask where the data collection is coming from. Jeremy said directly from the watershed management plans. Daragh asked if it would be possible to fill the voids, like Cobus Creek, that are not in a plan. Jeremy said he is also exploring areas that do not have data by utilizing the National Hydrology Dataset.

National Rivers and Streams Assessment 2013-2014 in St. Joseph River and Elkhart River

Jeremy reported that the EPA conducted a nationwide survey of the nation's rivers and streams that included the St. Joseph and Elkhart Rivers. The main focus of the assessment is to provide regional and national estimates of the condition of rivers and streams that could be used to track changes in condition over time. The results of the survey will be available in 2016. Further information can be found at www.epa.gov/aquaticsurveys.

Karl Kopec asked if the two St. Joseph River samples were taken in St. Joseph or Elkhart County. Daragh said one sample was taken in St. Joseph County, downstream of the South Bend dam in the Keller Park area. The other sample was taken in Elkhart County, upstream of the Johnson Street dam.

PRESENTATION

Audubon Golf Course Certification in the St. Joseph River Basin – Ryan Cummings, Golf Course Superintendent, Elcona Country Club, Elkhart, IN

Ryan Cummings, who is currently the Golf Course Superintendent for the Elcona Country Club in Elkhart, explained that in 1991, Superintendent, Tom Zimmerman enrolled Elcona in the Audubon's

Golf Course Sanctuary Program. The certification program promotes environmentally sensitive golf course management, including wildlife conservation, water conservation, water quality protection, and chemical use reduction and safety. After much effort, Elcona was designated a Certified Golf Course Sanctuary in 2012, becoming only 1 of 8 Certified Golf Course Sanctuaries in Indiana.

Elcona County Club features 98 acres of natural grassland, 30 acres of wildlife habitat and 40 acres of farmland. Of the 355-acre property, only 180 acres are mowed dedicating the rest to nature. Furthermore, the club has increased wildlife corridors, installed bird and bat houses, left “wild” areas next to ponds, educated their members, and increased the precision of chemical applications. They also rely on a weather station and the latest Smartphone technology to make sure they are watering just the right amount for their needs. These efforts have helped their environmental impact as well as their bottom line, as they have reduced overhead for mowing, watering, and other practices.

Elcona Country Club has also demonstrated a commitment to stewardship. In 2012, Elcona had a unique situation and approached the SWCD to help with a rain garden. The SWCD, along with Indiana Master Naturalist volunteers, helped the club install a rain garden that took runoff from an area where they regularly wash off their mower decks. An additional area that is a large piece of the Audubon efforts is the 10 kilometers of trails to explore that are east of the clubhouse. They are available for family hiking, biking, and cross country skiing in the winter. All-in-all, the club displays a commitment to environmentally friendly maintenance practices and protection of its native wildlife. Audubon plans for the future include nesting boxes, a vegetable garden, prairie restoration, and a variety of member events.

Ryan Cummings entertained questions from the SJRBC members and was thanked for his presentation.

ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR

James informed the Commission that Jeremy, and possibly another person from MACOG, will apply for the Purdue Watershed Academy in order to become more rounded in watershed planning. Most of the training will be done on-line, with only 3 sets of dates being in person. Any Commission members that are interested in applying may do so on-line, until November 3rd.

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 RON NIEZGODSKI.
THE MEETING WAS ADJOURED.



Daragh Deegan, Chairman

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