

**ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
December 7, 2023**

The fourth quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) in 2023 was held on December 7th, at the Schrock Pavilion in Goshen. The meeting was also livestreamed on YouTube and made available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kl2pjrl0alA>

Alicia Walsh, SJRBC Chair, called the meeting to order at 10:00 am. Matt Meersman, River Basin Director, introduced himself along with Kate Barrett, Shae Medlen 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 IN PERSON:

Chair: Alicia Walsh, Steuben County

Vice Chair: Adam Bowden, City of Mishawaka

Secretary: Jim Hess, Elkhart County

Bob Barnes, Elkhart County

Daragh Deegan, City of Elkhart

Mark Espich, St. Joseph County

Bill Hartsuff, Elkhart County

Clint Knauer, Steuben County

Jim Moyer, Kosciusko County

Jarod Nisely, LaGrange County

Jon Roberts, Kosciusko County

Steve Schweisberger, Elkhart County

Randy Sexton, Noble County

Jim Slabaugh, Steuben County

Cory Stewart, LaGrange County

Kris Thomas, City of Angola

Jewel Wise, Kosciusko County

OTHERS PRESENT:

Kyle Burchett, LaGrange Co. SWCD

Jason Kauffman, City of Goshen Stormwater

Tyler LaFlash, City of Elkhart Utilities

Charlie Pettibone, Steuben County Planning

Brandie Ecker, Thorne Grodnik

Kate Barrett, MACOG

Ashley Matthews, MACOG

Shae Medlen, MACOG - AmeriCorps

Matt Meersman, MACOG

CONSENT AGENDA

Alicia Walsh, SJRBC Chair, 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 – September 7, 2023

Alicia asked the Commission members if there were any comments or questions about the minutes of the September 7, 2023, meeting. Hearing no comments, Alicia moved on to the next item on the consent agenda.

Financial Report

Matt presented the financial report for the first quarter of FY 2024 (07/01/23 – 09/30/23). Financial statements were provided to the members for review in advance of the meeting.

Matt discussed the Statement of Financial Activities (Profit & Loss). Matt stated he expects the net change in assets to decrease next quarter due to the AmeriCorps program and the Watershed Leadership Academy expenses.

The Statement of Net Assets (Balance Sheet) was then presented. Matt noted the accounts payable was for services provided by MACOG for July, August, and September as well as legal expenses. Total Fund Balance for the FY 24 Q1 was \$364,321.95.

Matt reviewed the Statement of Cash Flows and reminded everyone that the statement is prepared on a cash basis ending on 9/30/23. Matt noted the appropriation for Steuben County is for the last half of FY 23.

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 – December 7, 2023

A list of the quarterly claims and associated invoices totaling \$32,598.44 was distributed to the SJRBC members for review prior to the meeting. Claims included invoices from MACOG for July, August, and September services, and Thorne Grodnik for quarterly legal services. There were also invoices for Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy, the AmeriCorps Service Site fee, and expense reimbursement for Kate Barrett.

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

RANDY SEXTON MOVED TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA.
BOB BARNES SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

OLD BUSINESS

Water Monitoring Program

Kate Barrett provided an update on the third year of 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 that cinder blocks with special plates are deployed at each site in early summer. The plates are colonized by macroinvertebrates and retrieved about six weeks later. The plates are sent to the Midwest Biodiversity Institute to analyze the macroinvertebrates and grade the health of each site. Kate hopes to provide an update on how the streams scored in June of 2024. She will also be able to establish baseline scores of stream health with the three years of sampling data. Kate said AmeriCorps member Shae Medlen will be assisting with the biological water monitoring program this coming summer.

Kate reported that a strategic water quality sampling program was initiated in Steuben County this past summer. Through a cooperative agreement with MACOG, two AmeriCorps members were based out of Trine University to assist with monitoring for the SJRBC and Steuben County programs. An Impact Grant was awarded through the Steuben County Community Foundation to support weekly sampling for 20 consecutive weeks at 10 sites throughout Steuben County. Kate shared preliminary data showing weekly measurements in *E. coli* levels. Several sites exceeded the water quality standard for *E. coli* levels. She said the goal of the monitoring is to use the data with other parameters to determine the source of impairments and take corrective action. Kate explained that site 10, Pigeon Creek at SR 327, is both a SJRBC biological water monitoring site and *E. coli* monitoring site.

Kate stated she is working on a similar water quality sampling program in LaGrange County. She has worked with Martin Franke, Kyle Burchett, and Pat Wilshire on a proposal for another Impact Grant which was recently awarded and will be used for the purchase of a new water quality monitoring instrument. Kate said they also applied for another grant to help supplement the purchase of the device and expects to hear if it was awarded in January.

In addition to water monitoring, Kate highlighted several outreach and education efforts. Shae led a watershed workshop at Riley High School in South Bend, Kate provided Hoosier Riverwatch training, and they co-presented at the Environmental Education Association of Indiana conference in early November. Kate will also be speaking at the upcoming Pay Dirt conference and holding another Hoosier Riverwatch training in Steuben County in April.

Jim Hess discussed the Pay Dirt Conference being held on March 5-7 at the Elkhart County 4-H Fairgrounds. The conference will host several speakers with a different focus each day. Jim also discussed the Purdue University Farm Policy Study Group he attended last Tuesday. The study group talked about the LEAP Project, which would involve piping water from the Lafayette area all the way to Lebanon for an industrial park. He noted that the SJRBC was used as a model for long-term water monitoring during a presentation by Dr. Jane Frankenberger. Bob Barnes added that he attended the Annual Indiana Commissioners Convention where the LEAP Project was also discussed. Matt said the LEAP Project is bringing attention to the need for more data and further study to determine the impact of water withdrawals.

Kate reported that she is working on inventory of water monitoring efforts in the basin. She is hoping to have a draft report next year summarizing water trends and other data. Kate said she was able to get the entire data set for Hoosier Riverwatch dating back to 1996. Kate stated that Shae has been working on an analysis similar to the report card recently completed by the White River Alliance. Shae created a map using different layers such as environmental attributes, socioeconomic indicators, and water quality.

Matt announced that Kate received the 2023 Outstanding AmeriCorps Alum Award at the Serve Indiana Awards for Excellence Ceremony last month. Matt thanked Kate for her continued work to help communities in the St. Joseph River Basin through grant writing, water monitoring, education, and data collection. Kate has also served as the Site Supervisor for all the AmeriCorps members who have served with SJRBC.

Matt stated that Tritium has installed additional water level monitoring devices for three sites in the North Branch of the Elkhart River and one site on the Fawn River. Tritium has been taking field measurements to develop stage-discharge curves for all sites that will be used to calculate the volume and rate of water moving through each site. Matt reported that Steuben County decided to obligate the funds they received from the Monsanto PCB settlement to facilitate additional flow monitoring in their county. He explained that SJRBC will purchase the equipment and Steuben County will pay for installation and the development of the stage-discharge curves. Matt would like to offer the same cost-share opportunity to other communities in the basin. He provided a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) created in consultation with SJRBC counsel. The MOU outlines the expectations of the SJRBC and any local government

that participates in the cost-share opportunity. Matt explained that in addition to Steuben County, the Town of Bristol and the City of Angola were both interested in participating. He requested permission to allow the SJRBC Chair to sign the MOUs. The Commission discussed who should sign the MOUs for the flow monitoring cost-share program on behalf of the SJRBC.

JIM HESS MOVED TO APPROVE MATT MEERSMAN TO SIGN AGREEMENTS FOR FLOW MONITORING COST-SHARE. JEWEL WISE SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

Matt said he looks forward to working with other communities and will keep the Commission updated on expanded flow monitoring.

Watershed Study

Matt said he would still like to conduct a watershed study as discussed in previous meetings. He would like the study to include an analysis of watershed factors, such as soil conditions, vegetation, drainage improvement, and land management practices, and how those factors impact water conditions downstream. Ideally the analysis could be used to develop a methodology or model for predicting the impact of changes in watershed conditions. This information could be used to make informed water management decisions. Matt developed a draft RFP to describe the watershed study project and sent it to SJRBC Counsel for review. He included the reviewed draft in the meeting materials. Matt said he is not ready to take any action on the RFP yet, but would like the Commission to review it and provide feedback. He would also like to review it with the MACOG Executive Director. Matt said he expects the study to be a large and costly undertaking, but believes that it aligns with the SJRBC's purpose. Brandie Ecker noted that, depending on how large the project is and the RFP responses, the study can be broken up into smaller projects and pieced together to make it more manageable. Adam Bowden discussed the RFP process and the need to determine the selection criteria. Alicia suggested that Matt continue working on the RFP as well as determine the scoring process and provide an update at the next meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Election of 2024 Officers

Matt explained the traditional process the Commission has used to create a Slate of Officers for election. Historically, the Vice Chair is nominated for Chair, Secretary for Vice Chair, and Treasurer for Secretary, leaving the Treasurer position to be filled each year. He stated Ray Hoover, who represents the Town of LaGrange, expressed a willingness to serve last year and confirmed again this year. Mark Espich, of St. Joseph County, also said he would be willing to serve if there were no other nominations. Matt stated unless there were any other nominations, there would need to be a motion to approve the slate of officers presented with the addition of Ray Hoover as Treasurer. Alicia Walsh asked if there were any other nominations from the floor. Hearing none, she asked for a motion to approve the slate of officers presented with the addition of Ray Hoover as Treasurer.

JIM SLABAUGH MOVED TO APPROVE THE SLATE OF OFFICERS PRESENTED WITH THE ADDITION OF RAY HOOVER. DARAGH DEEGAN SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

24th Annual Symposium

Matt said the St. Joseph River Basin Symposium is typically held on the second Friday in May. He welcomed suggestions for topics and location, and thoughts on coordinating it with the Annual Watershed Celebration of the Friends of the St. Joe River Association again. Last year, the Symposium was held in the afternoon and the Watershed Celebration was held in the evening with dinner included. After some discussion, Matt said he would move forward with planning in coordination with the Watershed Celebration. He asked Commission members to email him any ideas on topics or speakers.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

Matt reported that he has been working on a number of administrative tasks this past quarter, as well as engagement and advocacy with legislators on the Drainage Task Force. He met with the DNR about the formation of Watershed Development Commissions, and led the selection process for Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy financial support. Matt also stated that he and Kate got the SJRBC registered for the System for Award Management (SAM) so the Commission is eligible for federal grants now. He said he also created maps for a lakes/trees grant proposal in Michigan, helped Indiana DNR with their statewide wildlife action plan, and provided drainage apportionment assistance to LaGrange County. Matt also attended a meeting in Osceola regarding sedimentation in Baugo Bay and the need for dredging.

Matt then announced he will be reducing his hours for the next nine months to focus on his personal goals in canoe racing. He said he will still manage administrative tasks and larger projects, but his time will be more limited and he will not be able to attend all of the community meetings he would like. He welcomed Commission members to contact him directly on his cell phone about any important meetings or issues they would like to discuss.

ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR

Alicia reminded the Commission that the next meeting will be on Thursday, March 14, 2024, instead of the first Thursday in March. Matt will send a calendar invite for all of the 2024 meetings in the next couple of weeks.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Alicia Walsh called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

ALICIA WALSH MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. ADAM BOWDEN SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

Adam Bowden, SJRBC Chair

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