

## **ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION**

### **MINUTES December 1, 2015**

The forth quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission was held on December 1, 2015, in the Elkhart County Public Services 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 not present with the following members in attendance:

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Daragh Deegan – City of Elkhart  
Bill Hartsuff – Elkhart County  
Jon Roberts – Kosciusko County  
Jerrod Nisley – LaGrange County  
Jeff Moore – Town of LaGrange  
Ron Niezgodski – St Joseph County  
Paula Reinhold – St. Joseph County  
Kieran Fahey – City of South Bend

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Joseph Zakas, Legal Representative, Thorne Grodnik LLP  
Neil Ledet – Department of Natural Resources  
Roger Nawrot – City of South Bend  
James Turnwald – MACOG  
Jeremy Reiman – MACOG  
Shirley Czerna – MACOG

### **MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 1, 2015**

There was no action taken on the minutes of the September 1, 2015 meeting, due to the fact that there was not a quorum present at the meeting.

### **FINANCIALS**

#### **Financial Report**

There was no action taken on the Quarterly Financial Report, as of September 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015, due to the fact that there was not a quorum present at the meeting.

#### **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. There was no action taken on the SJRBC Claims submitted, due to the fact that there was not a quorum present at the meeting.

### **OLD BUSINESS**

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

There were no basin updates from the Basin Commission members.

### **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. An application process has been developed for landowners to apply, through each specific county, for the filter strip initiative program. Currently, Jeremy and the steering committee are in the process of updating the existing filter strip brochure to further promote the use of filter strips. In addition, there has been discussion that Jeremy and other steering committee members would have the opportunity to speak at various events in 2016, addressing farmers and producers on the subject.

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

The SJRBC agreed to sponsor a professional in the St. Joseph River Watershed to complete the 2016 Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy, which focuses on efforts to improve water quality. There were three applicants. Randy Sexton, a Noble County surveyor, farmer, and producer, was awarded the scholarship and is in the process of enrolling. Following completion of the program in May, Randy will be invited to give the SJRBC a short presentation on what he learned and the project he developed.

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

In July, the LARE grant request was accepted to fund a watershed diagnostic study for Cobus Creek Watershed. Shortly thereafter, an RFP went out for consultant service, and the bid was awarded to Arion Consultants, in Warsaw. However, the watershed is separated by the State Line, and LARE funding cannot be used in Michigan. Therefore, it would be necessary to raise an additional \$3,600 in cash to do study work in Michigan. James and Jeremy will be contacting Michigan organizations to sponsor field sampling in Michigan, in order to produce a full study.

### **Noble County Lake Gauges**

The Basin Commission learned that funding has been provided for the Sylvan Lake Gauge, in Noble County. A partnership between IDNR, Noble County, and the Rome City Conservancy District raised \$4,000 needed to fund a lake gauge for one year. Jeremy plans to continue working with Mick Newton, Noble County EMA, to find a more sustainable way to fund the lake gauge each year, since there has been an increased amount of federal funds removed from local communities.

### **Water Monitoring Program Update**

An Updated report of the 20 sampling sites selected for Phase II of the water monitoring program was distributed to the Basin Commission. In the third quarter of monitoring, the data results look very good, compared to Phase I. However, it is premature to form any conclusions. Dave Arrington, with SNRT will provide an in-depth analysis of Phase II at the end of sampling, in March 2016. Early next year, Dave and Jeremy will choose the next 20 sites, with testing to begin in the spring of 2016. Jeremy invited the Commission to assist in the selection of the next 20 sites.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Meeting Schedule for 2016**

Daragh Deegan presented the following meeting schedule for calendar year 2016.

March 1, 2016  
June 7, 2016  
September 6, 2016  
December 6, 2016

All meetings will be located at the Elkhart County Public Services Building.

### **Election of 2016 Officers**

The Election of 2016 Officers did not take place, due to the fact that there was not a quorum present at the meeting. Nevertheless, it was noted that the following Commission members have agreed to run as officers for calendar year 2016:

President: Jon Roberts  
Vice-President: Paula Reinhold  
Secretary-Treasurer: Martin Franke

At the time of elections, the floor would be opened for other members to express interest in holding an officer's position. It was noted, until new officers are elected, the current officers would be considered officers in 2016.

In order to resolve current business, the possibility of holding a special meeting in January was discussed. With the telecommute option, it would be necessary to have only 30% or 6 members present at the meeting, while other members could attend electronically. It was decided the option would be considered.

### **Elkhart River Conservation Initiative**

The Elkhart River Conservation Initiative originated from local groups in Rome City and Noble County, in search of better ways to manage their drainage issues and environmental concerns. As a result, the SJRBC has taken on the role of facilitator, moving forward to improve conservation in the Elkhart River watershed. Initially, the idea was to mobilize current projects listed in current plans and studies and actually implement those projects. Since then a Steering Committee of approximately 25 individuals was formed. At the first meeting, on November 4<sup>th</sup>, the focus was directed to four main environmental concerns in the watershed, which included natural lands restoration and protection, water quantity management, agricultural BMPs, and urban BMPs. From these large environmental concerns, focus groups would be formed to look specifically at these projects.

### **Christiana Creek Fish Passage Project – Daragh Deegan, Aquatic Biologist, City of Elkhart**

Daragh Deegan, Aquatic Biologist for the City of Elkhart, reported two years ago the City of Elkhart received a grant from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to prepare a detailed feasibility report to increase fish passage and spawning on Christiana Creek. There are 6 barriers, located in Elkhart, that significantly alter the character of the water system and have also played a central role in the decline of migratory aquatic species. The barriers effectively obstruct some 20 native fish species, including the state endangered Greater Redhorse and the highly prized Walleye.

Various alternatives to increased fish passage were studied, before coming up with a specific plan. The one that proved to be most effective was complete removal of the dam. It cost the least, it is best for fish passage, it improves safety, it improves water quality, and it restores habitat on the stream. Fish ladders are only good for passing a few larger fish, such as steelhead and salmon. The rock ramp approach is good, but expensive. The last alternative studied was to create a by-pass channel around the dam, which requires a lot of land, making it less feasible. Through the study, a fish passage barrier removal plan has been developed by using the criteria to prioritize future fish-passage inventories, dam removals, and improve fish passage through structure modifications.

The Christiana Creek fish passage project has raised a few concerns in community. First, it would affect the white water stream for the paddling community. Second, it would hinder the community swimming hole. Lastly, the Wellfield Botanic Gardens would lose some of its waterfall feature. However, when the stakeholders are shown the new concepts that would be put in place, the project would become more appealing to the entire community. In addition, the restoration project would enable the passage of aquatic species to far reaching areas above the dams, improve the aquatic habitat for endangered and threatened fish and mussel species, and stabilize the stream bank and naturalize sediment transport.

The next step is to have the project vetted by the IDNR-Division of Water and other stakeholders. Once approved, the overall cost to modify or remove the six barriers would be approximately \$1½ million, which would come from federal grants and other sources.

Daragh entertained several questions from the Commission members.

## **ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR**

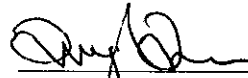
Ron Niezgodski asked why Indiana depleted all but \$90,000 in grant money the first year of the three year Regional Conservation Partnership Program, while the Michigan funds are flourishing. Daragh explained that the NRCS agency functions differently on either side of the states of Indiana and Michigan. In Indiana, farmers were finally able to fund projects that were lined up for years, through the conservation program. Michigan spends money differently.

Daragh thanked James for writing a letter to our government representatives expressing the fact that the SJRBC does not support Section 428 of Senate Bill 1645 that incorporates language expressly prohibiting combined sewer overflow discharges from treatment facilities that discharge to the Great Lakes. In addition, James discussed the matter with the National Association of Regional Council (NARC), who then partnered with several other organizations. As a result, a letter was written to Congress and corporate committees stating the language in the bill is negligible and irresponsible to tax payers and municipalities. The response was great.

Jeremy announced that Commission members would soon be receiving the Representative/Proxy Designation form in the mail. Please have the form completed and returned to the MACOG office as soon as possible.

**ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business to come before the Commission, the Commission adjourned.



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Daragh Deegan, Chairman