

ST. JOSEPH RIVER BASIN COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES
May 28, 2026

The second quarterly meeting of the St. Joseph River Basin Commission (SJRBC) in 2026 was held on May 28th, at the Schrock Pavilion in Goshen. The meeting was also livestreamed on YouTube and made available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LQsqX7vpxKE>

Jewel Wise, 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: Jewel Wise, Kosciusko County

Vice Chair: Randy Sexton, Noble County

Phil Barker, Elkhart County

Daragh Deegan, City of Elkhart

Kieran Fahey, City of South Bend

Martin Franke, LaGrange County

Bill Hartsuff, Elkhart County

Anita Hess, Noble County

Jim Hess, Elkhart County

Chad Jonsson, Town of Syracuse

Manda Kleeberg, Steuben County

Sue McGee, City of Kendallville

Jarod Nisely, LaGrange County

Rick Shipe, Steuben County

Cory Stewart, LaGrange County

OTHERS PRESENT:

Todd Clark, Elkhart Co. SWCD

Sarah Doggett, LSA

Jason Kauffman, City of Goshen

Matthew McLaughlin, ITR

Ryan Miller, City of Goshen

Brea Persing, Elkhart Co. SWCD

Brandie Ecker, Thorne Grodnik

Ashley Matthews, MACOG

Matt Meersman, MACOG

CONSENT AGENDA

Jewel Wise, 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 – March 5, 2025

Jewel asked Commission members if there were any comments or questions about the minutes from March 5. Hearing none, Jewel asked Matt to review the financial statements.

Financial Report

Matt presented the financial report for the third quarter of FY 2026 (01/01/26 – 03/31/26). Financial statements were provided to the members for review in advance of the meeting.

Matt discussed the Statement of Financial Activities. He noted that he included Year End Forecast numbers because he is discussing the budget later in the meeting.

The Statement of Net Assets was then presented. Accounts Payable are for services provided by MACOG from January through March. The total Fund Balance was \$541,983.49.

Matt reviewed the Statement of Cash Flows and reminded everyone that the statement is prepared on a cash basis ending on 03/31/26. Matt noted that all requested appropriations from local government members have been received, except for the second half of the Steuben County appropriation, which is expected this summer. This statement also includes MACOG expenses from last fiscal year because the checks were not issued until this fiscal year.

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 – March 5, 2025

A list of the quarterly claims and associated invoices totaling \$76,791.61 was distributed to the SJRBC members for review prior to the meeting. Claims included accounts payable invoices for MACOG services, as well as the strategic planning project, maintenance for water sensors, legal counsel, and webmap services. Additional claims included in the updated packet for approval are invoices for 2025 macro sample processing, catering for the 2026 Symposium, and AmeriCorps program support for Steuben County.

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

CORY STEWART MOVED TO APPROVE THE CONSENT AGENDA
WITH THE ADDITIONAL CLAIMS. RANDY SEXTON SECONDED.
ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

OLD BUSINESS

Water Monitoring Program

Matt provided an update on SJRBC water monitoring efforts. He explained that the Commission's scope of water monitoring is divided into water quality monitoring, involving biological and chemical sampling, and water quantity monitoring, which focuses on flow and discharge in local streams.

Matt said the water quality program involves biological sampling at 12 sites between Indiana and Michigan to supplement data collected by other programs. He also confirmed support of 2 AmeriCorps members in Steuben County and financial assistance provided to LaGrange County for water chemistry sampling and data analysis. Matt then presented the 2025 biological sampling data from the Midwest Biodiversity Institute (MBI). He noted that sampling devices were not retrieved at the Mill Creek and Nottawa Creek and explained the process for scoring these sites without them. He also highlighted sites with significant improvement or degradation.

Matt provided an overview of water quantity monitoring efforts through USGS gauges and eight SJRBC sponsored sensors throughout the basin. Tritium has been taking field measurements at each of the SJRBC sites in order to develop stage-discharge curves, which allow the estimate of the volume/discharge at each site. He explained the cost share program, which involves the purchasing of the actual sensors and covering future maintenance costs, while the partner pays for the installation costs and the first year's development of the stage discharge curve. Matt said

the plan is to purchase four additional water level sensors as part of a partnership with the City of Goshen before the end of the fiscal year.

Watershed Study

Matt provided an update on the technical strategy and workplan development. He has been working with Intera and Northwater to explore technical studies and planning/management tools. Matt has a meeting with Intera/Northwater to review progress towards the draft on June 4.

Matt also discussed a project developed with the Elkhart County SWCD, the University of Notre Dame, and DJ Case, involving a “Conservation Scorecard”. A tool created as part of this project would allow landowners to track conservation practices like cover crops, with the long-term potential to influence stormwater fee allocations.

25th Annual Symposium

Matt stated the 25th Annual Symposium was held on Friday, May 15, at the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians Community Center. There was near-record attendance, including 31 participants from Michigan. The main topic was riparian law, with questions about regulation governance and shared infrastructure management discussed as part of the roundtable.

NEW BUSINESS

FY 27 Work Plan and Budget Adoption

Matt presented the FY27 work plan, confirming there were no changes from 2026. The plan maintains a structure that separates basic operational needs, which are supported by local government members, from potential projects contingent on state funding.

Matt then proposed a 3% increase for the FY 2027 basic operations budget to address rising costs. The proposal includes an increase in allowable hours by the Director from 24 to 25 hours per week and a small increase in information technology to support the use of AI. Matt explained that the Commission has been spending all of the funds provided by local government members and the increase in net assets is the result of unspent state funding on special projects.

Matt explained that he maintained the additional staff line item despite not having any particular individual or support role in mind. The Commission discussed the difficulty of finding qualified support staff given budgetary constraints. Martin Franke explained how the LaGrange County SWCD has utilized professional consultants, with financial support from the SJRBC, to secure water quality data analysis previously provided by MACOG staff in support of the SJRBC. Martin said they will likely request \$3,500 of financial support again in FY27 for this purpose. Matt suggested moving \$3500 from the “additional staff” line item to “member/partner support” in order to maintain the proposed “member/partner support” amount for other uses and still be able to support the expected request by LaGrange SWCD.

Anita Hess proposed using Health First funding from the State for water testing and discussion followed. It was noted that availability of those funds varies by county.

JIM HESS MOVED TO APPROVE THE FY27 WORK PLAN, APPROPRIATION REQUEST TABLE, AND BUDGET INCLUDING MOVING \$3,500 FROM ADDITIONAL STAFF TO MEMBER/PARTNER SUPPORT. RANDY SEXTON SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. MOTION CARRIED.

Baugo Bay Sedimentation

Matt explained a letter of support drafted in response to a request from a group called “Save Baugo Bay.” They requested support for addressing sedimentation issues and dredging the mouth of Baugo Creek. The letter offers a watershed-level perspective, incorporates existing monitoring data, and offers assistance in connecting the group with relevant state and local contacts. He explained that the letter does not endorse any specific dredging plans or comment on an upcoming Federal Energy Regulatory Commission hydroelectric project relicensing.

Matt said he also received a request for supporting an effort to designate the Indiana Bat as the state mammal. He replied via email acknowledging the merits of the cause, but declined to provide a formal letter of support. He used the two requests to explain his approach to providing letters of support. He said he evaluates requests based on whether they directly connect to the Commission’s statutory mission and whether the SJRBC has direct knowledge, prior involvement, or data that makes the Commission’s voice meaningful and credible in that context.

Other Business/Updates

Cory Stewart announced that he graduated from the Indiana Watershed Leadership Academy and thanked the Commission for the opportunity.

Cory also mentioned a stormwater ordinance proposal for LaGrange County, which led to discussion about the need to determine funding and implementation strategies. Matt suggested that future funding for managing water infrastructure at a watershed scale could come through the creation of a Watershed Development Commission, but a plan including specific projects would need to be supported by each County’s Board of Commissioners.

Jim Hess commended Jason Kauffman and Ryan Miller from the City of Goshen for their stormwater emergency response program.

Matt introduced Sarah Dogget of the Legislative Service Agency, who led the drafting of Senate Bill 224 to consolidate Indiana’s river basin commissions. Senate Bill 224 will take effect on July 1, 2026, and will necessitate updates to budget reference codes. Matt noted that with this Bill, the Commission can no longer exercise statutory authority within nature preserves, and rulemaking authority has shifted to the power to adopt resolutions. He explained that these changes are not considered impactful to the current operations of the Commission. Matt thanked Sarah for her personal interest in using understandable language for the statutes and legal documents.

DIRECTOR’S REPORT

Matt reported on several administrative tasks over the last quarter. He attended a DNR regional water planning input meeting in Fort Wayne on April 7. He mentioned his involvement in a potential two-stage ditch project on Juday Creek, noting it is a significant cold water tributary. The landowner is interested in the enhancement as part of their data center development project.

Matt shared that he has been corresponding with the West Lakes Conservancy District. The goal of establishing this special assessment district is to create a funding mechanism for addressing

local flooding, lake management and water quality issues. Matt said a public hearing regarding the conservancy district was postponed and a new date has not yet been announced.

ITEMS FROM THE FLOOR

Matt thanked all of the Commission members for their participation at meetings and their support of the Commission's work.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Jewel Wise called for a motion to adjourn the meeting.

ANITA HESS MOVED TO ADJOURN THE MEETING. DARAGH DEEGAN
SECONDED. ALL IN FAVOR. THE MOTION CARRIED.

Jewel Wise, SJRBC Chair