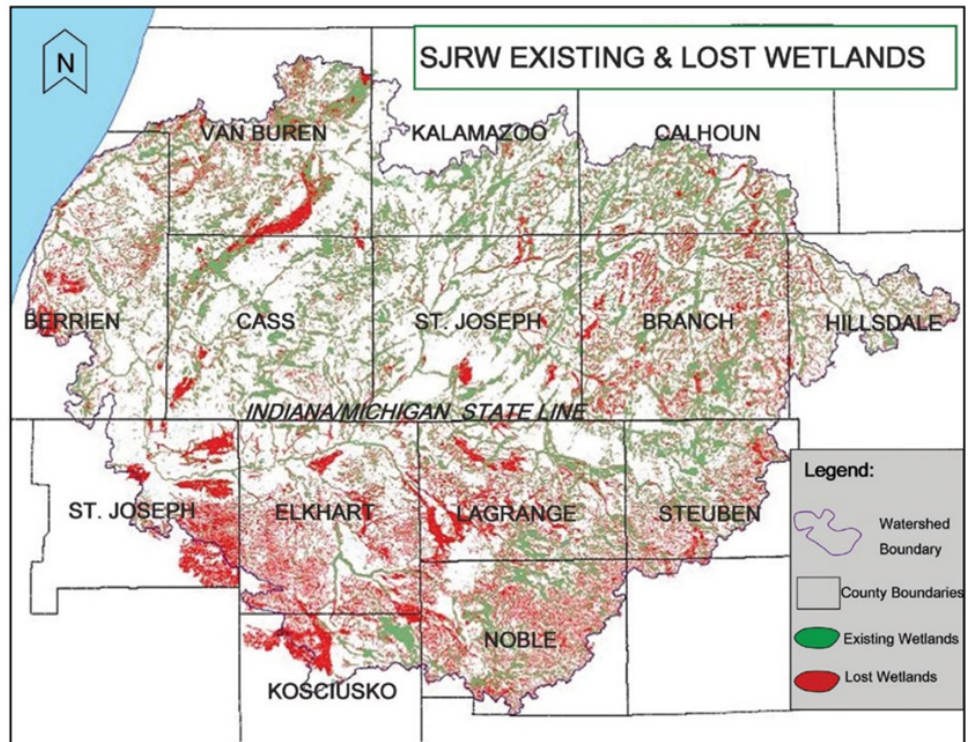




The Quarterly

SWMPC
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A Wetland Partnership for the St. Joseph River Watershed



St. Joseph River Watershed Map on Existing and Lost Wetlands (courtesy of FotSJR)

A partnership was born in 2011, when the Friends of the St. Joe River Association (FotSJR) received funding from the U.S. EPA to advance wetland protection and restoration efforts. The greater purpose of this project is to protect Great Lakes water quality. The St Joseph River Watershed (SJRW) is the third largest contributor of water to Lake Michigan and has lost more than 50% of its wetlands since this region was settled (see map). Historically, wetlands were viewed as obstacles that needed to be eliminated. Wetland loss has increased flash flooding and degraded streams, rivers and lakes. Today we understand the importance of wetlands and the need for their protection and restoration.

As a result of this project, we now have an even greater understanding of wetlands. An assessment of water quality and habitat functions was completed for every existing and historical wetland in the 4,685 square-mile St. Joseph River Watershed (SJRW). Perhaps not surprisingly, the assessment revealed that not all wetlands are created equal. Certain wetlands have a greater capacity to filter soil and pollution or to break down nutrients that cause harmful algal blooms. With this new data, land trusts, conservation districts, drain commissioners, municipal planners and local officials are better equipped to safeguard wetlands and the functions they serve.

Partners utilized the wetland function data to identify high priority wetlands for restoration and protection and to target education efforts to specific landowners and local

governments. During the 3 year project, partners reached out to over 2,000 people to inform them of financial incentives available for protecting and restoring wetlands on their property. FotSJR and SWMPC staff also attended several municipal meetings informing over 200 local officials of the new data and how it can be used to protect and restore wetlands in their communities.

Everyone benefits from wetlands. They:

- Keep our water clean
- Provide wildlife habitat
- Protect houses, businesses and roads from flooding
- Guard against erosion of streambanks and lakeshores
- Make great outdoor classrooms

The Southwest Michigan Planning Commission (SWMPC) continues to work closely with the FotSJR, the Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy and several watershed groups to reverse the trend of wetland loss and to increase awareness of financial incentives for landowners to protect and restore wetlands. As a direct result of this project's outreach, over 1,000 acres of wetland and adjacent uplands were protected through conservation easements and 50 acres of wetland were restored. With this grant, FotSJR has provided conservation partners with a powerful tool to target wetland protection and restoration efforts resulting in improved water quality and wildlife habitat in the St. Joseph River Watershed. For more information visit: www.fotsjr.org/WetlandPartnership

Amtrak Celebrates 30 years on the Pere Marquette Line



Photos from the 30th anniversary celebration at the St. Joseph depot.

Amtrak's Pere Marquette passenger rail service connecting St. Joseph to Chicago and Grand Rapids marked its 30th Anniversary on the 16th of September 2014 in the City of St. Joseph. The Westrain coalition, Amtrak officials and the folks from the Michigan Department of Transportation helped coordinate this event. There was a great turn out of local municipal officials and members of the public!

The Westrain coalition saved the train route from being discontinued years ago. Westrain Coalition members include the Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, Macatawa Area Coordinating Council, the City of Bangor, Cornerstone Chamber of Commerce, and the Southwest Michigan Planning Commission, and are supported by the Michigan Association of Railroad Passengers. To learn more, visit: www.swmpc.org/regionalrail.asp

Tips for Road Salt and Ways to Help Water Quality

When snow and ice melts, the salt goes with it, washing into our lakes, streams, wetlands, and groundwater. It takes only one teaspoon of road salt to permanently pollute 5 gallons of water. Once in the water, there is no way to remove the chloride, and at high concentrations, chloride can harm fish and plant life. Less is more when it comes to applying road salt.



Here are four tips for keeping salt use down:

- 1) **Shovel first.** The more snow and ice you remove manually, the less salt you will have to use and the more effective it can be. Then, break up ice with an ice scraper and decide if application of a de-icer or sand is even necessary to maintain traction.
- 2) **Slow down.** Drive for winter conditions, and be courteous to slow-moving plows. The slower they drive, the more salt will stay on the road where it's needed.
- 3) **Use sparingly.** More salt does not mean more melting. Use less than four pounds of salt per 1,000 square feet (an average parking space is about 150 square feet). One pound of salt is approximately a heaping 12-ounce coffee mug. And be patient: salt takes time to work. Applying more will lead to unnecessary contamination.
- 4) **Wait for warm weather.** Most salts stop doing their job when the temperature is below 15 degrees. Instead, use sand for traction in frigid conditions. Sweep up extra salt. If salt or sand is visible on dry pavement, it is no longer doing any work and will be washed away. The excess can be swept up and reused for the next snow or disposed of in the trash.

For more water quality tips visit: www.swmpc.org/what_can_i_do.asp

The 2014 CEDS Performance Report is Complete

Each year, Economic Development Districts must complete a review of their region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) to determine what progress has been made in the region. This year's performance report was submitted to the U.S. EDA on November 3rd, 2014. View it on SWMPC's Economic Development page: www.swmpc.org/ceds



The 2014 Performance Report shows us that a range of economic development indicators have been slowly improving since the Great Recession; particularly in the categories of industry growth, employment, education, and public investments. While this news is encouraging, there is still significant room for improvement if southwest Michigan hopes to catch up with rapidly growing regions.

Southwest Michigan Unemployment Rate, August 2013 to August 2014

| Counties | August 2013 | August 2014 | 12-month net change |
|-------------------------|-------------|-------------|---------------------|
| Berrien County | 8.8 | 6.1 | -2.7 |
| Cass County | 7.7 | 5.1 | -2.6 |
| Van Buren County | 8.0 | 6.0 | -2.0 |

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics: LAUS – August 2014: Unemployment rates by county, *not seasonally adjusted*

What can partner organizations and local units of government do to encourage the kind of development our region needs to grow and thrive into the future? For starters, supporting talent development efforts in coordination with our local higher education institutions and workforce development leaders. Growing the pool of skilled workers in southwest Michigan will show industries that our region has the talent to make their business a success. Focusing efforts on growing industries like agribusiness and manufacturing are the keys to success in our region.

Second, local units of government must invest in “Place”; which means developing our communities as vibrant places where people want to live, work, and play. Vibrant communities are better equipped to attract the talent that drives economic development in the New Economy, they are more resilient to economic downturns, and they support the growth in personal prosperity of their residents in a variety of ways. To find out more about opportunities to encourage good Placemaking in your community, visit: www.miplacepartnership.org

Finally, we must manage the resources and community infrastructure that growing businesses require. Roads, water infrastructure, and energy are important to us all, but maintaining a high level of quality and reliability for these resources is critical for enterprises looking to locate to our region. Likewise, maintaining buildings, sites, and business districts for those perspective companies is a necessary consideration when planning for a community's economic development future.

Staff Departure

Recently SWMPC said farewell to Terri Moore who worked as an Administrative Assistant. Terri has worked at SWMPC since 2004. We appreciate all of the hard work that she has done for us in these past 10 years! We would like to wish her well on her retirement.



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The SWMPC Mission is to promote a sustainable high quality of life through facilitation of sound planning and decision making

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SWMPC

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Calendar of Events 2014-15

| <u>December</u> | <u>January</u> | <u>February</u> |
|---|--|--|
| 16 th 1:00 pm NATS TAC & Policy Mtg* | 1 st SWMPC Office Closed | 16 th SWMPC Office Closed |
| 24-25 th SWMPC Office Closed | 19 th SWMPC Office Closed | 23 rd 9:00 am TwinCATS TAC & Policy Mtg** |
| 31 st SWMPC Office closed in Afternoon | 26 th 9:00 am TwinCATS TAC & Policy Mtg** | 24 th 1:00 pm NATS TAC & Policy Mtg* |
| | 27 th 1:00 pm NATS TAC & Policy Mtg* | |

*NATS Meeting 1345 E. Main Street, Niles, MI

**TwinCATS Meeting 1123 Territorial Road, Benton Harbor, MI

For more information visit: www.swmpc.org/calendar.asp

| 2015 SWMPC Board Meeting Schedule | |
|---|--|
| SWMPC Full Commission Meetings <i>Location: Lake Township Hall, 3220 Shawnee Bridgman, MI</i> February 3, 2015 9:30 am April, 21, 2015 9:30 am July 21, 2015 9:30 am October 20, 2015 9:30 am | SWMPC Administrative Committee Meetings <i>Location: SWMPC Conference Room Benton Harbor, MI</i> March 17, 2015 9:30 am June 16, 2015 9:30 am September 15, 2015 9:30 am December 15, 2015 9:30 am |