

Paw Paw River Steering Committee Meeting Summary

Wednesday, December 14, 2005

10:00 am – 12:30 pm

Attendance:

Gaye Blind, St. Joseph River CD
John Lauck, VB Co. Planning Comm.
Peter Vincent, MDEQ, Lansing
Kelly Getman-Dissette, Van Buren MSUE
Dave Diget, Property Owner
Gary Stock, Landowner
Marcy Colclough, SWMC
Chris Bauer, MDEQ, Water Bureau, Kalamazoo

Sue DeVries, TNC
Doug Stiles, Almena Supervisor
Rob Zbiciak, MDEQ, Lansing
Dave Foerster, VBC Farmland Pres
Calli Berg, CWAEDC
Chuck Eckenstahler, Harbor Shores
Amy Seitz, SWMC

Introductions

A Special welcome to Amy Seitz, Associate Planner at Southwestern Michigan Commission. She will be working on the Paw Paw River Watershed Planning Project over the next two years.

Reviewed Grant Tasks and Timeline

The Southwestern Michigan Commission (SWMC) should have a signed contract with MDEQ by January 3, 2006. The next steps will be to develop and sign subcontracts with partners (Kieser & Associates, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, Van Buren Conservation District, St. Joseph River Conservation District and The Nature Conservancy). There is also a need to form a technical subcommittee to begin addressing inventory and GIS needs for the project. Let Marcy or Amy know if you are interested in this sub-committee.

Presentation from Rob Zbiciak, MDEQ, Land and Water Management Division (LWMD)

Rob is interested in providing two watershed projects with additional assistance with wetlands. Rob explained to the group what will be provided, answered many questions and asked the group if they would like the additional assistance. Rob explained that he is interested in seeing the protection and restoration of wetlands become a major goal of watershed management plans because of the essential and beneficial functions that wetlands serve in watersheds. Rob and other staff at MDEQ are proposing to map existing and lost wetlands from existing data (soils, existing wetland inventory maps, land use maps, pre-settlement vegetation maps). Then the wetlands would be classified by the functions that the wetlands perform in the watershed. This classification could assist with prioritizing wetlands for protection and/or restoration. The US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has classified wetlands by function using GIS. Rob passed out an article called "Assessing Cumulative Loss of Wetland Functions in the Naticoke River Watershed Using Enhanced National Wetlands Inventory Data" that explained the GIS technique being proposed for the Paw Paw River Watershed.

The MDEQ has the funds to perform this task for two watershed projects and would like the Paw Paw River Watershed to be one of those two. It will not cost the project any money, as it will be fully paid by MDEQ. Rob expects this task to take 4 months of one MDEQ staff's time.

The Paw Paw River Steering Committee asked many questions and expressed interest in having MDEQ proceed with the wetland GIS analysis work in the Paw Paw River Watershed. The Steering Committee recommended that we put together a GIS sub-committee to ensure that GIS data is shared and produced in a manner so that it will be useable by everyone. Potential sub-committee members would include Michigan Natural Features Inventory, MDEQ, Ted Thar (Van Buren County GIS), John

Burt (Berrien County GIS), Kieser & Associates, SWMC, Southwest Michigan Land Conservancy, The Nature Conservancy and MDNR. Marcy and Amy will follow up with Rob Zbiciak to proceed with this project.

Update on St. Joseph River Watershed Management Plan

Marcy Colclough explained that the Paw Paw River Watershed is a sub-watershed of the St. Joseph River Watershed because the Paw Paw empties into the St. Joseph River in Benton Harbor before entering Lake Michigan. The Friends of the St. Joseph River Association, a non-profit that lead the planning effort, has been hosting meetings with select stakeholders to determine what type of organization would be most appropriate for implementing the St. Joseph River Watershed Management Plan (see the plan at <http://www.stjoeriver.net/>). The group is planning watershed wide stakeholder meetings in April. It will be important for the Paw Paw River Watershed Steering Committee to be involved in these meetings. Marcy will keep you posted on the days and times as soon as they are available.

Harbor Shores Update

The Steering Committee is interested in knowing the status of the Harbor Shores project, as it will have impacts on the mouth of the Paw Paw River. Gary Stock informed the group that he submitted comments to the MDEQ regarding Harbor Shores' permit application for wetland/floodplain fills and dredging. MDEQ is still reviewing the project. One concern that the Steering Committee still has is how they can have any influence on ensuring that resources are not wasted on creating new wetlands for mitigation if other more fragile wetlands in the watershed could be protected. Chuck Eckenstaller explained that he will be the liaison between Harbor Shores and the Southwestern Michigan Commission (regional planning commission). Sue DeVries added that she had spoken with Jeff Noel and he has agreed to speak with the Steering Committee about the project. The Steering Committee is especially interested in knowing which decisions have already been made by Harbor Shores, which ones the Steering Committee could provide some input on and then how to do so. Sue will follow up with Jeff to see if he can attend the next meeting.

Watershed Notes:

It was mentioned by steering committee members that flooding is an issue in Coloma, Watervliet and Lawrence.

****As we move along in the Planning Project, please keep SWMC informed about problem areas or pristine areas in the watershed. An important part of the planning process will be to identify these areas.**

Next Meeting

Wednesday, January 25, 2006, 10:00 am in Lawrence