



White River Watershed Partnership Annual Meeting Report by Margie Green and Tom Thompson, WRWP

Board of Directors

Tom Thompson
Chairman
231-894-4313

Open Position
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Dave Cordray
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Liz Vos
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231-854-9034

Kelly Bishop
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231-924-2060

Nichol De Mol
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616-331-3092

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Trustee - Upper Watershed
231-854-1620

Jim Cordray
Trustee - Middle Watershed
231-893-7018

Ray Schinler
Trustee - Middle Watershed
231-861-4624

Terry Clark
Trustee - Lower Watershed
231-893-6805

Our second annual meeting was held on Saturday, May 20, 2006. The meeting was called to order by Acting Chairman, Tom Thompson, at 9:30 a.m.

Kathy Evans, of Timberland RC&D presented a program with slide photos on stream bank erosions controls. Several questions and discussion followed.

WRWP Treasurer, Dave Cordray, reported that we have \$1,524.99 in our checking account and \$244.25 in our newsletter fund for a total of \$1,769.24. It was noted that we have a total of \$28,123.00 in our two endowment funds. This was up approximately \$6,000.00 since we did our campaign request mailing last December.

Tom Thompson spoke on the last year and looking ahead. He commented on projects going on and possibilities for the future. He stated that as we go on it will be important to find more stable yearly funding for the WRWP to operate with and that a growing endowment fund can be an important part of this general operating need. He stated that we are thankful for support from the Fremont Area Community Foundation Fund for our newsletter costs, which 550 copies are mailed out.

A general discussion and question time was held for everyone in attendance. There were questions/discussion on the Natural Rivers Act and on a couple of specific erosion sites.

In election of Board Members, three new members were elected, Liz Vos, Jay Peasley and Ray Schinler. Remaining on the Board or re-elected were Tom Thompson, Dave Cordray, Kelly Bishop, Terry Clark, Margie Green, Jim Cordray and Nichol De Mol. (See column to left for specific positions).

Leaving the Board is Dave Wright. Since being elected Supervisor of Big Prairie Township, Dave was finding heavy demands on his time and asked to step down from the Board. We thank Dave for all the work he has done to help the WRWP in their start up years.

Drawings were held for five door prizes (tote bag, fishing rod & reel, four glass tumbler sets, a monogrammed golf towel and a certificate for horseback riding at the Double JJ Ranch).

Several charts, aerial photos and information flyers were available and on display. Thanks to Jan Hamilton for providing coffee and delicious homemade refreshments.

Sixteen people were present and the meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

Lawns and Water Quality—It's a Personal Choice

by Jane Secord, Center for Environmental Studies, Grand Rapids

Lawns - what an interesting concept. They represent wealth and security, tidiness and responsibility. A green carpet of grass from property line to property line is often one of the ultimate goals and challenges for the homeowner. If the lawn is peppered with dandelions in the spring or dries out in the heat of summer, somehow we magically lose a degree of creditability. Lawns are powerful social icons in our great United States of America.

There is some speculation about how this all got started, but my favorite hypothesis is the one about the feudal castles. To protect the castle from a surprise attack, a grassy area the length an arrow could fly was kept free of trees and brush so there was no place for the attackers to hide. That allowed the native grasses to prosper. They developed a thick, rich looking green carpet that complimented the elegance of the castle. If it worked for the feudal lords, so why not for us?

Well, it does work for us, but it is also a lot of work for us. Since the grasses that we use are not native to our area we have to provide an artificial support system (fertilizer, pesticides, water, etc.). And we pay a price, not only financially, but also environmentally. The fertilizer and pesticides that are not captured by the lawns wash out into the streets, down through the storm drains and escape into our waterways. There they do what they are meant to do, encourage plant growth and kill insects - an okay practice on a lawn, but a disaster in a natural system like a lake or stream. The increased plant growth chokes the waterways and the loss of insects disrupts the food chain.

What choices do we have to alter this trend? We could begin by planting a few native Michigan plants in our yards. In addition to being attractive, most native plants have a deep root system so they require less fertilizer and water. Not only have they adapted to the challenges of Michigan's weather, they also require fewer pesticides. Do plants have to be native to be good? Absolutely not, there are lots of wonderful non-native plants that fit nicely into our ecosystem - just choose wisely.

How about design? Here we are limited only by our imagination. A buffer of native plants would have



A native garden is a great feature!

many positive effects on the environment, from increased water quality to habitat restoration. Buffers also form an attractive sight and sound barrier that softens the activity of the outside world while providing year-round entertainment.

The DEQ and the Center for Environmental Study have developed a series of booklets, *Landscaping for Water Quality*. You can download

the booklets at <http://www.deq.state.mi.us/documents/deq-wb-nps-Landscaping-for-Water-Quality.pdf> You can also investigate information from the Wildflower Association of Michigan. They have some interesting database information that may help you in your plant quest. Asking questions of your area plant nurseries may also guide you in your project AND have the secondary benefit of encouraging the nurseries to carry more varieties of Michigan native species.

Whether you decide to completely redo your landscape or just want to start with a small project, be creative and let nature be your guide. The possibilities are unlimited!

New Bridge Completed

by Tom Thompson, WRWP

The county line bridge on Fruitvale Road in Blue Lake Township reopened to traffic on April 27, 2006 after a four month replacement project. The new bridge is a single-span bridge from one side to the other side of the river. The bridge replaces a 60 year old 3-span bridge.

The Muskegon County Road Commission said the project came in on both time and budget at a cost of \$1,098,000. The relatively mild winter weather helped move the project along. The new bridge also has wider shoulders than the old bridge.

The river flow monitoring gage, located next to the bridge, was maintained with an electrical monitoring panel. This panel has been relocated in a box mounted on the bridge side, replacing the little hut structure that was removed.

Survey Results of White River Property Owners in Newaygo Cty.

by Betty Gajewski, Annis Water Resources Institute, Muskegon

It is estimated that the average responding property owner along the White River in Newaygo, based on a recent survey, has about 12.4 acres along 600 feet of White River frontage with a year-round house located 50 to 200 feet from the river. This average property owner has maintained White River property for nearly 18 years, and intends to pass their property on to family. Hunting and fishing represent the primary uses of their riverfront property.

In early May 2006, 371 questionnaires were mailed to property owners along the White River in Newaygo County. Nearly 37% of the questionnaires were completed and returned. The White River Partnership and the Fremont Area Foundation supported this property owner survey, as developed and compiled by the Annis Water Resources Institute of Grand Valley State University.

Over 70% of the respondents are year-round residents. Of those respondents that are seasonal residents (29%), nearly 52% live within an hour driving distance, 32% live elsewhere in Michigan, and 16% live out of state. Over 49% of respondents primarily use their White River property for hunting and fishing while 30% use the property as a natural area. Less than 17% use the property for other types of recreation and only 3% primarily use the property for farming.

Maintaining a heritage to pass on to family represented the single most important long-term goal for their White River property for 40% of the respondents. Nearly 38% identified keeping their land in its natural condition as their long-term goal, while another 22% plan on eventually selling the property on the open market.

In describing the health of the White River, over 67% indicated either excellent or good while 23% considered it as fair or poor. About 10% were not sure about the health of the river. However, nearly 75% indicated that the health of the White River had a major role in the value of their property while over 21% suggested it had a moderate role and more than 2% implied a minor role.

Nearly 76% of respondents were concerned about how land is being used along the White River but 57% did not believe these land uses were hurting the value of their property. The top three qualities of the White River that property owners ranked as very important included water quality (92%), wildlife habitat (86%), and natural scenery (77%). The qualities ranked by property owners as somewhat important included recreational use and farmland while the least important river qualities included economic opportunities and public access. (continued on back page)

If you would like more information about the White River Watershed Partnership or would like to become a member* please contact any board member or write us at:

WRWP

P.O. Box 416
HESPERIA, MI
49421

* Annual Dues are:

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Counties | \$100 |
| Community Based Organizations | \$100 |
| Corporate or Commercial | \$100 |
| Local Municipalities | \$50 |
| Households | \$25 |
| Native American Tribal Govts | \$25 |
| Non-profit Orgs. | \$25 |

White River Watershed Day
Saturday after first full week in May

Monthly Board Meetings
(open to the public)
Second Thursday of the month at 5:30 p.m. at the Fremont NRCS Building.
Starting in Sept. meetings will be held the Third Thursday of the month.

Please complete this form and become a member.
I want to support the White River Watershed Partnership.
Please accept my gift of \$ _____

Name _____

Address _____

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White River Watershed Partnership Membership



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The White River Watershed Partnership's mission is to protect the unique characteristics and the natural resources of the White River Watershed by promoting education, conservation, restoration, and preservation activities.

Survey Results of White River Property Owners in Newaygo County (cont.)

The designation of the White River as a state natural river was known by nearly 75% of the respondents. Respondents indicated that they were most familiar with the following natural river standards: building setbacks and minimum lot widths; setbacks for septic tanks and disposal fields; and the maintenance of a natural vegetative buffer. These standards, according to responding property owners, were accomplishing many of the state law's objectives, such as protecting wildlife habitat and discouraging harmful development. As riparian property owners, maintaining trees and bushes on their property (39%) and keeping a natural vegetative buffer strip along the river (37%) were the most common actions that they had taken to protect the White River.

Respondents believed that the lack of information (33%) more than any other factor was a barrier to riparian property owners in taking actions to protect the river. The state's natural river requirements were the type of information that would be most helpful to White River property owners (34%).

Over 97% of respondents agreed with the statement that controlling development is needed to protect the river while 86% also agreed that zoning improves the value of White River property. If communities coordinated zoning along the White River, 65% of respondents agreed that it would be better for all property owners. Over 78% agreed that educating property owners to voluntarily protect the river would be better than regulating land uses. However, 88% concurred that there are good scientific reasons for establishing land use standards along the White River, but 80% felt that the public pushes for land use controls without considering the effect on White River property owners. There was widespread agreement among respondents (96%) that what one White River property owner does on his/her property can negatively affect other properties downstream.

Finally, less than 29% of respondents indicated that they were aware of the White River Watershed Partnership.

****Upcoming newsletters will address issues/concerns that were brought up by the public as a result of this survey.****

The White River Watershed Partnership THANKS the Fremont Area Community Foundation for its continued support.
