

Healthy Pine River

June 13, 2024

7:00pm

Call to Order: Brittany Sommerville

Approval of May Minutes: Doug/Sara

Financial report: Beginning balance \$23,310.80 deposits \$6,802.80 (includes EGLE) Debits \$1,225.79

Introductions: Logan Banning, Biologist with Gratiot Conservation District passed out information on a new invasive species of plant found in Gratiot County- Black Swallow-wort. This vine like perennial is similar to milkweed, attracts Monarch butterflies that will lay eggs on toxic plant..

Bart Stoneman is from Gratiot and grew up on a farm. He will be a valuable resource with Farm Engagement as he understands both sides of the issues.

Tonight's focus is on Township Outreach. Mikie has worked with the rural community and septic outreach component. Bart, Ladean, Logan are assisting with the Farm Engagement component. Tonight we are focusing on the I and E (inform and educate) the public component. Joining us are representatives of the townships:

Emerson: Jamie Weburg

Seville: Tish Mallory

Sumner: Ronald Hunter

Arcada: Lorraine (filling in for Doug Merchant)

Bethany and Pine River Township were unable to send representatives

Representatives have extensive ties to Gratiot County. Jamie (Emerson) spoke of coming from a farming family, utilizing buffer strips to help prevent run off and seeing the value of the Pine River as a recreational resource. Emerson Township has less homes than in the 1980's. All new homes have new septic systems. Both leading to less contamination. Tish (Seville) discussed Riverdale and their trials with the river and septic systems. They have been very proactive in correcting the problem. Forest Hill and Lumberjack Park are located

in Seville. The river is used daily as recreational source. Lorraine (Arcada) many residents utilize River for boating. Problem in past – with dumping furniture, refrigerators is now under control. There are areas of the Pine which are low and difficult to access in Arcada. The area of the Pine up in Montcalm appears cleaner, higher and faster moving. Ron (Sumner) lifelong resident. Changes observed over years- fill in of swimming holes with sediment, an old dam was destroyed by ice (years ago), disappearance of brown trout and brookies. Sumner has new drains.

Numerous creeks/drains run through the townships. Discussion on how to improve. Working together yields a stronger voice. Examples: ongoing education (EGLE worked with farmer on keeping livestock out of creek); possibility of a catch basin at end of drains to capture solids (then pump when full), flood areas to capture water during heavy rains, tiling are there improved methods or types of tile? Seville borders on Montcalm and Isabella testing shows higher numbers coming into vs going out of township – need partnerships with other counties. Alma College 2023 tested headwaters Mecosta County to St Louis impoundment. E.coli numbers above state standards except Lumberjack Park and Riverdale. Discussion on pros and cons of tiling- drain vs leaching of water. Buffer strips are definitely one stop gap, others needed. While there is boating and kayaking on the river- question is how much compared to past, suspect all-time low. Part of issue is overgrowth of paths. Discussion with parks and recs on opening up waterway. Discussion on cutting path to river – allowed or not. Many small farms are gone and livestock now raised in CAFOs. 3 years ago a study by Alma College showed waste from livestock in Gratiot County equaled the waste of 1.3 million citizens without a municipal (or any) sewer system. Discussion on changes in farming practices, less chemicals, more technology.

Open offer to townships; HPR will come to a meeting; provide information and brochures. Arrange with townships for testing if they have area they question. Each township was provided with a copy of the Upper Pine River Watershed Plan.

Highland Festival: HPR present in parade and had a booth. Successful!

HPR board approved \$8,000 for water testing by Alma College

Applying for EGLE grant is being considered- Environmental justice as both Alma and St Louis are considered impoverished communities

We will be placing our HPR brochures at rest areas (pending approval)

For the good of the cause: Big thank you to intern Sara Warren for all her work, enthusiasm and insight.

She is off to Oregon State for masters in Soil Sciences.

Next Meeting

July 11, 2024

Alma Public Library

7:00 pm

