



**P.O. Box 332  
St. Johns, MI 48879**

**(989) 224-5128**

**[www.friendsofthemapleriver.org](http://www.friendsofthemapleriver.org)**

Friends of the Maple River  
Minutes of February 21, 2007  
VFW Hall, Ovid, MI

Present:

Joe Latoff, President

Ed Mikula, Vice President

Kristine Foight, Secretary

Jack Nutter, Chairperson

Watershed Improvement Committee

Mick Rabe, Chairperson

Education Committee

Tim Wilson, Guest Speaker

USDA, Wildlife Mgmt. Program

Guinevere Barr, Clinton Conserv. Dist.

Jim Ellickson

Brandon Gehringer

Melinda Gehringer

Pat Gehringer

Thomas Gehringer

Phil Hanses, Clinton Co. Drain Comm.

Renae Larsen

Ben Lupu

Dan Lupu

Linda Lupu

Mike Lyon

Josh Peckem

Rex Peckem

Dan Simmon, Stony Creek Conserv. Assoc.

Mark Simpson

Joe Thelen

Brian Valentine

Jeff Wadell

Joe Latoff, President, **called the meeting to order** at 7:00 pm. He read the Statement of Purpose: To preserve, improve, and promote through education, the wise use of the Maple River and the Maple River Watershed.

Latoff **welcomed** everyone to the meeting. He introduced himself; Ed Mikula, Vice-President; and Kris Foight, Secretary. Latoff introduced the guest speaker, Tim Wilson, US Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Management Program. Then the members of the audience introduced themselves.

Mikula moved to approve the **agenda** as presented. Phil Hanses seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Foight moved to approve the **minutes** of January 17, 2007. Mick Rabe seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Latoff reported on behalf of Treasurer Joe Smolka, that the **checking account** has a balance of approximately \$50. He noted that "**Allaby and Brewbaker**" has **donated** errors and omissions Board insurance, and liability insurance policies.

**PRESENTATION - Tim Wilson, US Department of Agriculture, Wildlife Management Program.** Wilson said the Wildlife Management Program has twenty-five employees Michigan's Lower Peninsula and a few in the Upper Peninsula. He said they resolve wildlife/human conflicts and try to strike

a balance. He said these can involve agriculture, health and safety, property and natural resources. He said they can offer technical assistance and direct control measures, both lethal and non-lethal.

One example is bovine tuberculosis. Wilson said it has been found in the northeastern part of the State. He said they believe it originated from cattle during the early settlement of the state. He said it has been documented in the early 1900's, 1976 and 1994. Wilson said deer, cattle and small mammals can be infected. He explained that the concern is passing it from deer to cattle. One way it can be transferred is when infected deer eat grain from feed for the cattle. Wilson said they control through the use of fences and by shooting infected animals. Wilson said they are working with producers and other agencies to eradicate bovine TB.

Wilson said another example is reducing wildlife hazards to aviation. He said they provide both advice and control measures. They use raptor control measures. For waterfowl, they have used netting to prevent the waterfowl from landing on ponds located near an airport.

Wilson said that the Double-Crested Cormorants are another example. He said that, at one point, they were protected because of the impact of DDT. He explained that now their numbers have grown so large that they have affected fisheries in Lake Huron, and to some extent, in Lake Michigan. He said they eat lots of fish, including perch. Wilson explained that they migrate to southern states, like Louisiana and Mississippi, and they are having the same problems with them. Wilson said they use egg oiling to reduce their numbers. He said that it is not legal to shoot them, but in some cases, they have worked with groups to get special permits. Wilson said their control measures have helped and they are starting to see a rebound in the fisheries.

Wilson said that Sandhill Cranes have become a problem in the southern tier of the state. He said the cranes will go through a corn field and pull up seedlings to eat the corn seed that is still attached. Wilson said they have been working with the Fish and Wildlife Service to control them. Wilson said there is now a repellent on the market. Wilson said it is also possible to get a permit to shoot them, if other control measures don't work. In response to a question, Wilson said they can also be found in soybeans, but he said they seem to be eating insects, rather than the plants.

Wilson said they also work with threatened and endangered species. He said they have two employees who only work with wolves. He said they trap them, do wolf counts, and put radio transmitters on them to track them.

Wilson said they protect the nesting grounds of piping plovers.

Wilson said they do starling control on dairy farms. He explained that they can be a problem because they pick out the high-moisture grains. This leaves the grains with less moisture for the cows and that can reduce their milk production. Wilson said they have a toxin they can use which only affects the starlings.

Wilson said that they have a raccoon surveillance program to control rabies. He said it is rare now, but they are concerned about garbage from the eastern states and Canada bringing in diseased animals. Wilson said that less than 1% of bats (35 cases) and skunks (3 cases) have rabies. He said rabies in humans is very rare, only one or two cases a year. Wilson said that a multi-agency group was formed in 1997 to educate the public and provide recommendations.

Wilson said chronic wasting disease has not been found in Michigan. He said it has been found in several western states, Wisconsin, New York, and West Virginia. Wilson said they do annual testing of captive and free-ranging cervids to watch for the disease.

Wilson said feral swine are a species of concern. He said that in 2005, they could be found in seven counties in the thumb area. This year, they are known to be found in thirty-six counties. Wilson said they may be hunted in thirty counties with any valid hunting license. Wilson said the largest populations are in Roscommon and Ogemaw counties. Wilson said they do \$800 Million of damage per year in the US. In 2004, there were two million hogs in Texas and they did \$52 million in damage. The largest populations of feral swine are in the southern states and California. Wilson said they damage wetlands and riparian areas. They cause erosion and stream sedimentation. He said they disrupt ground-nesting birds. They also cause agricultural damage and have the potential to carry diseases to domestic hogs, including pseudo-rabies and brucellosis. Wilson said they multiply faster than rabbits. Wilson said they can breed year-round and can have three litters a year, (their gestation period is only 3 months and 3 weeks.) He added that they can start breeding within their first year of life. Wilson said that if 70% of the population is killed each year, that will just maintain the current population. Wilson said they are trapping them on private land and testing all of them for disease. He said they are working with the Michigan Department of Agriculture, DNR and USDA to have news releases published. Wilson urged hunters to shoot them. He said they would like to be notified when they are shot in order to know where they are.

Avian influenza is another area of concern. Wilson explained that it is a water-borne disease with oral-fecal transmission. He said it is similar to flu in humans and can have just a mild effect. Wilson said that avian influenza can mutate into High Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), which has a high mortality rate. He said there is a concern about Asian birds bringing it into the US. Wilson said that the most probable way it could enter the US is through the illegal movement of poultry and products. Wilson said that the high pathogenic H5N1 is not currently a pandemic flu. He said they are trying to be prepared. Wilson said the risks are to poultry workers and through eating under-cooked poultry. He said they have been doing surveillance with DNR and have taken 3,000 samples. He said they haven't found the high pathogenic virus.

Wilson said that Michigan activities include morbidity and mortality, especially waterfowl; live birds; sentinel surveillance at migratory stop-overs; environmental and fecal samples; and dead birds submitted by hunters.

Wilson said that the public can help by notifying them of suspicious birds. The DNR Wildlife Disease Lab can be notified at 517-336-5030 or his office can be called at 517-336-1928.

Wilson said common-sense precautions should be taken by hunters: use common hygiene; wear gloves if possible; wash hands and knives; cook birds thoroughly; don't eat, drink or smoke while cleaning birds.

What is being done to prevent things from being brought in? Wilson there is a plant and pest quarantine. He said that international shipments are inspected and they use a "beagle brigade" to assist them. Wilson said that they can't stop migrating birds. He said avian influenza is always changing - as long as it doesn't mutate to allow human to human transmission it won't be a major concern. Wilson said that each state has a quota of birds to sample.

Latoff thanked Wilson for the presentation. He added that during the last avian flu in 1918, one of five in the US died. He said it is important to keep it out of the country and under control.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

Latoff reported that the 501c3 status has been approved.

Latoff said that a grant application has been submitted for an information and education grant to purchase entrance signs for the watershed, brochures and other materials. The Timberland Resource and Development Council assisted with the application.

Latoff reported that an application has been submitted by the Clinton Conservation District for a 319 Watershed Management Planning Grant for the Upper Maple River.

Latoff said that the friends of the Maple River will have a booth at the Quiet Water Symposium on March 3rd at the MSU Pavilion.

Latoff reported that he has been discussing setting up an endowment fund with the Capitol Region Community Foundation.

Latoff reported that he has started discussions with the Mid-Michigan Land Conservancy to have a land conservancy program for the Maple River Watershed. He explained that the land conservancy helps to preserve agricultural and undeveloped land through easements and tax breaks.

Latoff said he is investigating starting a woodlot club. Guinevere Barr said that there will be a Woodlot Club meeting on March 13th at 6:30 pm at the RESA Building across from McDonalds. It is open to anyone interested.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

### **WATERSHED IMPROVEMENT COMMITTEE - Jack Nutter**

Nutter said they are looking at dates for potential clean-ups. He said he'd like to use canoes to clean up litter along the river, rather than doing another dump site. Hanses said the County would provide a dumpster again. Nutter said he thought one 20-yard dumpster would be sufficient. After discussion, it was decided to schedule the clean-up for April 28th, with May 5th as the back-up date. Nutter said how much could be done would depend on how many volunteers they got. Latoff suggested that he put an article in the paper and start the sign-up.

Latoff asked about the Elsie Dam project. Nutter said that Duplain Township wants to keep the dam. He said they still don't have a steering committee. He said money is an issue.

Latoff said the Maple Rapids Boat Launch and Park project is moving forward. He said Mr. Underwood, the property owner, will participate in the river trip.

Latoff reported that the Greenspace Commission has purchased land at French and St. Claire for a new boat launch site.

### **EDUCATION COMMITTEE - Mick Rabe**

Rabe said the committee met a couple of times. On the signage project, Rabe said he is looking for ideas to approach service groups. Latoff added that the Clinton County Road Commission will install the signs and donate the posts.

Rabe said the oral history project is moving ahead slowly. He said they are looking for stories about the river and the watershed.

Float Trip - Rabe said they are looking at June 9th or 16th. Latoff added that they would like to schedule it when Mr. Underwood will be in the area. Rabe said they are looking at going from Blair Rd. to Maple Rapids. He said they are looking for someone to run it before the group does. Latoff volunteered. Rabe said it's a small launch site with limited parking. He said he is working on insurance, waivers, checklist, etc. He said the trip would be 4-5 hours. He said there are places to get out along the way. He said they planned on having some stops along the way, including a lunch stop and perhaps some stories about the river. Rabe said Fred Olmstead and Jim Ellickson are working with him.

## **MONITORING COMMITTEE**

Joe Latoff reported on behalf of Amy Noren, committee chairperson. He said the monitoring plan is in draft form and is near completion. He explained that they will start at the outlet of the Maple River into the Grand and use that as a training site, or alpha site, starting with habitat assessment and assessing macroinvertebrates. The next step would be to go to 5 sub-watersheds, plus the alpha site and start purchasing some equipment. Finally, 30 sub-watersheds would be monitored with remote sensing units. Latoff explained that universities, agencies and private companies would be involved to make it a virtual watershed laboratory. He said people he has talked with are excited about it. He said several organizations are interested in participating with a remote sensing unit. He explained that the cost would be \$10,000 per unit. Latoff added that they would be taking a comprehensive approach, including land cover, forests, animals, etc. Latoff explained that they would take a quiet, neighbor to neighbor approach to bring concerns to their attention and offer assistance. Latoff said that when the plan is final, it would be brought to the membership for approval. Latoff added that they were working on a serious, meaningful monitoring program. He explained that data changes tell you that you need to learn more about the cause. He added that Eric Buhr will be bringing together a group of science teachers in the watershed to form an education committee.

In response to a question, Latoff said that the natural features inventory is amazing. He said that from 1800 to 1987 there was a dramatic reduction of wetlands. He added that much of it was to make the land suitable for farming.

## **CURRENT OPERATING AND SUPPORTING PROJECTS**

Guinevere Barr briefly explained the Conservation Innovations Grant project she is working on. It uses a web-based computer model to identify areas with high potential for sedimentation. Barr said she is looking for people who are interested in the project and who would let her use their property to field-check the data.

National River Conference Scholarship - Latoff said that he has a scholarship available for someone to attend the conference. It is May 18-22 in Washington State. Let Latoff know if interested.

**NEXT MEETING** - Latoff said the next meeting will be in Muir, but the location has not been determined yet. Dan Simmon suggested the Senior Citizens Center. Jeff Wadell suggested having a meeting on the river sometime. Hanses said he knows someone with property on the river and would talk with them.

**ADJOURNMENT** - Ellickson moved to adjourn. Nutter seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned.