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Friends of the Maple River  
Minutes of March 21, 2007  
Lyons/Muir Lions Club, Muir, MI

Present:

Joe Latoff, President

Ed Mikula, Vice President

Joe Smolka, Treasurer

Kristine Foight, Secretary

Jack Nutter, Chairperson

Watershed Improvement Committee

Mick Rabe, Chairperson

Education Committee

H. William Rockwell, Jr., Ph.D., Forester

Guest Speaker

Keith Abrahamson

Guinevere Barr, Clinton Conserv. Dist.

Jeanne Bewersdorff

Ben Bierstetel

Paul Bierstetel

John Chickering

Jim Ellickson

Earl Flegler, MDNR, Wildlife

Leo Geller

Ardy Graham

Jim Graham

Phil Hanses, Clinton Co. Drain Comm.

Betsy Kaehnlein

Dale Ladouceur

Gloria Miller, Friends of the Looking Glass

G. Muirhead

Kevin Schneider

Joe Thelen

Jeff Wadell

Joe Latoff, President, **called the meeting to order** at 7:02 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 the guest speaker, H. William Rockwell, Jr., Ph.D., Forester. Then the members of the audience introduced themselves.

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

Hanses moved to approve the **minutes** of February 21, 2007, with the list of those who attended to be added. Ben Bierstetel seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Joe Smolka, Treasurer, reported that the **checking account** has a balance of approximately \$190, with \$105 available. He noted that the St. Johns Rotary Club has donated \$250. Smolka said that he had met with Tyler Munger of Bee Sports. He has asked them about donating a prize, such as a canoe or kayak for a fund-raising raffle. He said Munger was receptive, but would have to meet with others for a

final decision. Smolka added that they may have second and third place prizes, too. Ben Bierstetel moved to accept the treasurer's report. Nutter seconded the motion. Motion carried.

Latoff said that the Friends of the Maple River had been accepted into the "One Percent for the Planet" program. This program works with various businesses to donate 1% to participating non-profit organizations.

Earl Flegler, DNR, announced that the Boy Scouts were having a clean-up at the State Game Area on March 31<sup>st</sup> and possibly on April 1<sup>st</sup>. He said there would be a dumpster east of Maple Rapids on Maple Rapids Road. He said anyone could participate. Latoff added that they are supportive of working with the DNR, especially in the State Game Area.

**PRESENTATION** - H. William Rockwell, Jr., Ph.D., Forester.

Rockwell said that he writes forest management plans, does auditing and helps with timber sales. He noted that forests are not stable, they are always changing.

Rockwell showed a map of bedrock patterns. He noted that the Maple River is in the middle of the "target" of the bedrock patterns. He explained that the glaciers were so thick and heavy that they depressed the earth's core and it is still rebounding. He said that rivers that went east and west were split into two rivers as the core rebounded, one going east and one west. He said the Maple and the bad rivers were split in this way, and that's why the river bed is wider than today's flow.

Rockwell said the "Climax Theory" of natural history was an idea from the 1800's. In this model, forests reach a stable, mature state. The model saw forests as pristine and undisturbed. Rockwell said we now know that this model had more to do with philosophy than with actual forests. Rockwell explained that sub-climatic conditions, such as fires, floods, etc., can divert how forests develop. Currently, a chaos model is used, where more or less stable forest conditions change over time to other more or less stable conditions.

Rockwell went on to explain that in the 1800's the American Indians were idealized as noble savages who didn't impact the natural ecosystem. We now know that they had a huge impact. They used the forests and in some cases burned them for hunting or war.

Rockwell said that in modern history trapping had an impact on forests, both directly and by providing markets. American Indians were displaced by diseases and war that pushed the Indians ahead of them. Rockwell explained that logging was tied to farming. Commercial logging was interspersed with farming and farmers often logged during the winter months. Different waves of logging went through that took different products, including charcoal, white, and hemlock for tanning.

Rockwell said that in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, forest changes were tied to markets. In the early 40's, red oak was considered a weed tree, then it became popular. Rockwell said that in his youth, yellow birch was popular. He commented that the industry uses what's there and develops markets to sell it.

Rockwell said the Maple River watershed has as little woods as anywhere in the state. But, he noted, farmers saved woodlots for firewood, lumber, grazing animals, hunting, maple sugar, etc. Rockwell said that farms are much larger now than in the past. And fewer people live on the farms or hunt. He noted that there were much fewer deer when he was growing up, and that has an impact on vegetation. He said when a farmer uses a woodlot for grazing, the cattle can be moved out. With deer, it's harder to control.

He said that hardwoods in this area come up naturally, but the need to get big enough that the deer don't browse them. He added that the deer population is being supported more by cropland than by forests.

Rockwell said that land development can be both a threat and an opportunity. He said it can have an impact on habitat.

Rockwell said the next big threats are exotic plants and insects. He mentioned Dutch elm disease, emerald ash borer and oak wilt. Rockwell said that in the past, most of Michigan was forested. Sugar maples were cleared for farming. The areas with oak and hickory trees were less suitable for farming. Elm, ash and cottonwood grow in the wetter areas along rivers. Elms were eliminated by Dutch elm disease, ash is expected to be gone and there are few cottonwoods.

In response to a question on oaks, Rockwell suggested thinning them out if diseased, but cautioned that the disease could already have spread through the roots. He noted that white oaks are less susceptible to oak wilt. Red oak is more susceptible.

Rockwell said that government programs and tax breaks can also have an impact on forests. He said forest programs haven't had a lot of impact, except pines and spruce. He said now programs are more focused on wildlife habitat. He said there is a new tax break to preserve forested lands. He said he anticipates a bigger impact in the future. Rockwell also mentioned non-governmental programs, like conservancies.

There was a question on oak openings. Rockwell said they could be frost pockets, from Native Americans or areas where sand and gravel were mined out. He noted that bur oak is especially resistant to fire. Earl Flegler noted that there was an oak opening nearby.

Flegler asked Rockwell if he thought the ash would come back in a cycle, like 20 years. Rockwell said they probably would keep growing back. The beech scale disease was also mentioned. Rockwell said that the young trees are not threatened by the beech scale disease, so they are growing back in thickets. It was also mentioned that hemlock is threatened.

Flegler mentioned chestnut blight and asked if chestnuts were ever a significant component in this area. Rockwell said this area is on the edge of the central hardwoods area, where chestnuts were a major component. He said there are some healthy ones in the Traverse City area, but he doesn't know why. He said that a popular strategy is to cross them with European chestnuts and then keep breeding the survivors with the native species to develop a native species that is resistant.

Rockwell said he believes sugar maple trees will always be valuable. He noted that they can grow up under maples. He said that the soft maples are considered hardwoods.

Ben Bierstetel asked how many species of elm there are. Rockwell mentioned three, red or rock, Chinese and American. Ash in the area include white, green black and red. There are also blue ash. All are affected by the emerald ash borer. The green and blue grow in swampy areas. The white grows on uplands. Rockwell noted that a lot of insects are species-specific.

Rockwell said that the emerald ash borer came from China. He said it was first identified in Michigan three years ago. He said, at that time, there was only one article written about it. The article was in Chinese and had survived the Cultural Revolution.

Darren Hickman has been organizing a group of landowners who share an interest in deer hunting, on a coop basis. They have about 5100 acres. They encourage management practices of interest to them. They focus on habitat, aggressive shooting of does, and protecting males, to some degree.

Latoff thanked Rockwell for his presentation.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

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 would be meeting with their Board the next evening.

Latoff reported that he has been discussing setting up an endowment fund with a couple of banks.

## **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

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

Nutter said they are planning a clean-up for April 21<sup>st</sup> from 9-1. Anyone interested in participating should call Jack Nutter at 989-862-5541. Anyone interested can float a section of the river and pick up junk. He said he would like to coordinate the sections that people choose. Everyone will need to supply their own boats or canoes. A dumpster will be provided by Clinton County. Nutter said he has a location at the Elsie Dam, but is looking for other suggestions. Paul Bierstetel suggested a Maple Rapids site. Hanses noted that it needs to be in Clinton County, since the County is providing it. Another suggestion was made to have two dumpsters at different locations. Hanses suggested that people make note of the locations of large items. They can try to make special arrangement to pick those up. Nutter asked that people also note little dump sites. Nutter asked that people stop at road crossings and clean up those areas. He said bags could also be left at the road crossings. Ben Bierstetel said the Stoney Creek Conservation Association has an adopt-a-stream program.

Nutter said that he will give out a cell phone number so people can get picked up along the way. He said he'd also like to have someone help people to spot cars. Gloria Miller noted that the American Rivers Association has a national Clean-Up Day in June. Nutter said he was aware of it, but the vegetation would hide too much of the trash and he's concerned the insects would be bad.

Latoff said that he had put out some information on clearing deadfall. In a way that's good for habitat. Latoff said he's clears the river from Elsie downstream twice a year. He noted that their approach is to tell people what they are doing. He said no one has objected. Flegler noted that a permit is needed in the State Game Area to use a chainsaw.

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

Rabe said the signage project is still in the works.

Rabe said he is taking names and numbers of people who might have stories to share for the oral history project. He can be contacted at 517-290-5135.

Float Trip – Jim Ellickson said that the gentleman in California who has agreed to donate some land for a boat launch has agreed to participate in the float trip. He float trip will be on June 9<sup>th</sup> and go from Blair

Road to Maple Rapids. He said there would be other options for a shorter trip. He said he'd like to give people the option to spot cars and they are working on getting drivers. He said they'll be advertising soon. Ellickson said they're hoping for a big turn-out.

Latoff introduced Gloria Miller and explained that she has been working on a National Heritage Water Trails project. He suggested that Mick Rabe talk with her about the friends of the maple River project. Latoff added that he has agreed to be on their Board to coordinated efforts.

## **MONITORING COMMITTEE**

Jeff Waddell said that the committee had met the day before. He said they are working on setting up some training. The first site will be where the Maple River goes into the Grand River. Latoff is working on setting up a science advisory board to review monitoring results. Latoff said they have a map with thirty sub-watersheds. 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, temperature and assessing macroinvertebrates. The next step would be to go to 5 sub-watersheds, plus the alpha site and start purchasing some equipment. Long-term, 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 and they would pay for their own satellite fees. There would be a contractual agreement, and they would only be able to use the data for research and education. Only the Friends of the Maple River could use it for watershed improvement. Latoff said that the DEQ, USGS, DNR and other have received the draft plan for review. He added that people in the watershed would be aware that it is being monitored.

## **CURRENT OPERATING AND SUPPORTED 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. She said she would be setting up a focus group, probably later in the summer.

Latoff reported that a grant has been applied for that would help pay for watershed signs and educational materials.

**NEW BUSINESS** – Latoff reported that Barr and Joe Woodruff are looking at a layered approach that would present a range of options for people interested in forestry. He added that there is a national registry of big trees, and he'd like to do the same thing for the Maple River Watershed.

Gloria Miller announced that the Friends of the Looking Glass have a float trip every Spring and Fall. She said that information is available on their web site, [www.lookingglassfriends.org](http://www.lookingglassfriends.org). She said they start near Laingsburg and end in Portland. Everyone is invited. Latoff extended his appreciation to her for her assistance. He also thanked Phil Hanses for his assistance and noted that Ed Mikula did PR and articles for the Friends of the Maple River.

**ADJOURNMENT** – Latoff adjourned the meeting.