

**Official MINUTES**  
**PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE**  
December 16, 2013

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee (PRCEC) was held on Monday, December 16, 2013 at the Roscommon DNR Office. Chairman Dick Kleinhardt called the meeting to order at 1:00

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Dick Kleinhardt, Kerry Mase, Chuck Fanslow, Charlotte Prochazka, Norma Laine, Carol Clute, Barb Curtis, Bonnie Cornelius, Darlene Alexander, Carol Hyzer

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** John Walters, Vicki Reinhardt, Don Horrocks

**EX-OFFICIO PRESENT:** Scott Whitcomb, PRCSF Manager

**DNR Staff:** Anna Sylvester, Parks and Recreation Division, Richard Hill Parks & Recreation, Brian Mastenbrook, DNR Wildlife Biologist.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Dour Doherty, Regional Director of Rocky Mt. Elk Foundation and Renee Mondeau

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**COMMENTS FROM CHAIR:** The Chair welcomed all to the meeting.

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:** Barb Curtis recommended that on page 3 the reference to the Elk Hill Trail campground should be changed to read Elk Hill Equestrian campground. **Motion** to approve the amended June 17, 2013 Minutes was made by Chuck Fanslow and seconded by Darlene Alexander . Motion carried.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:** **Motion** to accept the agenda was made by Darlene Alexander and seconded by Carol Hyzer . Motion carried.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

**Elk Hill Equestrian and Group Campgrounds –**

Richard Hill of Parks and Recreation reported that in the Elk Hill Equestrian Campground stumps have been removed, some new picket posts have been put in but more still need to be fixed and depressions where horses have stood need to be filled. The large pull through site has been divided into two separate sites and the new “Buddy” site has been built. The license for this campground will be modified to include these additional camping sites. The reservation system will be updated. Fire rings were put in earlier and some problems have been reported with them not having good enough air circulation to keep fires going. He believes the solution will be for them to build up the

inside of the fire ring so the wood sits higher allowing for better air circulation. The two outhouses have new tops. Before the Mounting Block is built more input is needed regarding location. The Mounting Block has to meet American's with Disabilities standards. They have obtained an estimate for the Solar Well but at two hundred thousand dollars this is felt to be excessive. The original estimated budget was between sixty and ninety thousand dollars. Engineers from PRC will be having further discussion with this company. Norma Laine suggested that MDNR contact the MI U.S. Forest Service that has Solar wells both at South Branch and Hungerford.

In the Group campground, there are twenty-five new picnic tables. There will be replacing the tops to the two current out houses and two additional outhouses will be built. They will provide a smaller group fire ring since the initial ring was too large. Final location for the group fire ring is needed.

Improvements have been made to the entrance road into the new Hardwood Lake off site horse camp (the old oil well platform) but more work is still needed. Connie Kleinhardt provided a series of pictures of the area with notations regarding what still needed to be done.

PRD has been working on replacing the Forest Road posts and signs throughout the PRCSF and will continue on this project until missing or damaged signs are replaced.

A Ranger has been hired for PRC. His name is Scott Thomson and he will work ten months of the year. He attended the PRD Law Enforcement Academy. He can issue tickets. PRCEC members expressed hope that he would be working weekends and would be coming to the campgrounds to meet the campers, and would provide maps and information. There are still visitors to the area who are not familiar with the location of trails and the rules and regulations.

Scott Whitcomb, Manager of the Pigeon River Country State Forest, shared that the Otsego RSVP will continue to provide volunteers to greet visitors to the PRC Field Office. In the last ten years approximately 10,000 people have visited the Field Office which also serves as the visitor center for the PRC. Last year was the first year that the volunteers went through a training program to make sure that they were well informed. This coming year AmeriCorps will provide a worker for 44 weeks. Among other duties, this person will coordinate volunteer activities within the forest. Last year there were 18 to 20 volunteer groups working in the forest and there is a significant amount of paper work that needs to be completed for each as part of the Forest Certification process.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Election of Officers for 2014**

A **Motion** was made by Chuck Fanslow and seconded by Carol Clute that the current officers be re-elected. Motion passed. Chairperson: Dick Kleinhardt, Vice-Chair: John Walters, Secretary: Kerry Mase

## **DNR Director Creagh's Response**

Dick Kleinhardt shared with the group that he had received an email from Director Creagh. The Director requested that “a comprehensive list of equestrian wants and needs for the PRC be provided so that the Department and the equestrian community can make sure we are putting our limited resources where they will have the greatest impact.”

The Director said that he remained committed to opening up some iconic riding areas. The Department was currently working with the federal government to provide access to Inspiration Point and Blue Lakes. Green Timbers will remain closed to equestrians, mountain bikers and motorized vehicles.

The Director requested “a comprehensive identification of where private parties are seeking access”. Currently only three equestrians have held discussions with Scott Whitcomb regarding access. Dick reminded the group that at the last PRCEC meeting in June the Director said that the Department would develop a process for land owners to use to apply for access into the PRCSF. Dick felt that the process should include a paper trail documenting who requested access, the specifics of the access requested and the outcome. Darlene Alexander made a **Motion** that Vicki Reinhardt work with Scott Whitcomb on this process. Seconded by Bonnie Cornelius. Motion carried.

The Director asked for more information regarding the request that Dick has made to again allow riding on existing single track trails in the zone that surrounding the Equestrian and the Group camps which is land that was not acquired with license fees or federal money.

### **Comprehensive List of Equestrian Wants and Needs in the PRCSF**

In preparation for today's discussion the Chair and the Secretary using input from equestrians at previous meetings, developed a list of wants and needs for discussion. During the discussion of the items, Brian Mastenbrook asked that the group prioritize the list. The overall consensus was that items that were already being addressed by the DNR would appear last on the list (items 6 through 10).

1. Increase trails available to equestrians on lands not purchased with game and fish funds or license fee purchased lands
  - a) Restore access to single track trails within the zone surrounding the Elk Hill Equestrian campground and the Group campground that is on tax reverted or exchanged acquired lands.
  - b) Designate as legal the trail out of the Group campground that heads East and travels between the North and South sunken lakes to Twin Lakes Road.
  - c) Designate as legal the river trail between the Group campground and the Elk Hill Equestrian campground.
  - d) Allow equestrian access to Blue Lakes, which was purchased with Natural Trust Fund Money.

- e) Designate as legal the riding trail out of the Hardwood Lake off-site camp that heads East through the forest to access forest road 61.
2. MDNR develop a process by which bordering land owners can apply for forest access to the PRCSF.
3. Access to Green Timbers which was purchased by Natural Trust Fund money
4. Trail access to iconic spots such as Inspiration Point and the Honeymoon Cabin in Green Timbers.
5. New lands acquired with Natural Trust Fund money within the PRC borders and also land bordering or close to the PRCSF be open to equestrians use if suitable for riding.
6. Have current maps available at the kiosk in the Elk Hill Equestrian and Group campgrounds and online.
7. Establish a policy to protect the Shore to Shore Trail in timber management practice and wildlife habitat activities.
8. Improve “river/fish friendly” access to river for horses to water at Elk Hill Equestrian campground.
9. Lower speed limit on the unpaved county roads within the PRCSF
10. “Caution Horseback Rider” signs on the improved County roads within the PRCSF.

**Motion** by Bonnie Cornelius, to accept the list as prioritized. Seconded by Charlotte Prochazka. Motion carried.

### **Big Oaks**

Background presented by Kerry Mase:

On October 9<sup>th</sup> Kerry Mase, Darlene Alexander and Jinjyr Miller met with Joe Hall Supervisor of Clear Lake State Park, Cody Stevens, Forest Manager, and Jennifer Kleitch, Wildlife Biologist to discuss the difficulties that Carol Clute and Kerry Mase experienced over the summer in trying to find enough suitable miles for equestrian trails in the state forest surrounding Clear Lake State Park. Members of the PRCEC (Carol Clute, Kerry Mase, Darlene Alexander and Bonnie Cornelius) assigned the job of working with the DNR to develop potential trails in that area felt that the limited number of equestrian riding miles would not make Clear Lake State Park a suitable location for developing a new equestrian campground. Joe Hall suggested that we look into the possibility of the DNR re-opening the currently closed Big Oaks State Forest Campground on Avery Lake as an equestrian campground as there was potential there for using already existing snowmobile trails and forest two track roads for equestrian trails. The group then visited the area and agreed on its potential. On October 17<sup>th</sup> the PRCEC was updated and on October 18<sup>th</sup> Kerry Mase sent a trails proposal to Joe, Cody and Jennifer that identified four loops ranging in length from 4 to 10+ miles.

Richard Hill, Parks and Recreation, reported that all indications are that moving forward with Big Oaks looked good. The trails proposal and the re-opening of Big Oaks has to work its way though the DNR divisions. In response to Dick Kleinhardt asking for a time line, Anna Sylvester said that Phase I would be the trails proposal and that could be put

on a fast track and possibly be approved by early summer. The re-opening of Big Oaks would be Phase II and would take longer, possibly late fall at the earliest. Bonnie Cornelius said that equestrians would “adopt” the Big Oaks campground and trails to provide labor for work bees. Dick Kleinhardt reported that the ETS passed a motion of support for Big Oaks at their last meeting November 21, 2013.

**Motion** by Darlene Alexander that the PRCEC support the Big Oaks EQ Campground and trails. Seconded by Charlotte Prochazka. Motion carried.

### **Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation**

Doug Doherty, Regional Director of the Rocky Mt. Elk Foundation gave a power point presentation on the extensive conservation work done by the Foundation. Over six million acres of land have been protected by purchase, conservation easements or enhanced of Elk habitat across the country. This includes approximately 3800 acres within the PRCSF. They worked with the DNR in developing the Michigan Elk brochure that contains information about Elk viewing locations and Elk facts. Doug brought several copies of the latest Bugle Magazine for the group. Because of the magazine’s great Elk photos and stories, many people pay the \$35 membership just to receive the six issues. He spoke to the group about the need for people to be respectful of the Elk when viewing and to not approach or disturb them. Cows are very protective of their young and are most sensitive to disturbance.

### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:**

DNR progress on comprehensive list of wants and needs

Update on Equestrian campgrounds and trails: Elk Hill, Stoney Creek, Big Oaks

MDNR management plan for USFWS

**ADJOURN:** Meeting was adjourned at 4:15

Respectfully submitted,

Kerry Mase, Secretary