

SPECIAL MEETING OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
Gaylord Operations Service Center
Monday, February 9, 2015

A special working meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Monday, February 9, 2015 at the Gaylord Operations Service Center, Gaylord, MI. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

John Walters, Lisha Ramsdell, Pete Gustafson, Eugene Horan, Paul Rose, Kurt Jagoda, Jim Supina, Dave Smethurst, Paul Beachnau,

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Dave Matelski, Donald Horrocks, Randy Keen, Sandy Franz, Jason Melancon, Mark Ennes, Arch Reeves, Rique Campa

EX-OFFICIO PRESENT:

Scott Whitcomb, Brian Mastenbrook,

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:

Tim Cwalinski, Steve Milford, Andy Stempky, Nick Torsky

OTHERS PRESENT:

Denise Kinsinger, Charlie Maltby, Pete Datema, Mike Brown

By Teleconference:

Brad Garmon, Kerry Mase

Chairman Walters welcomed everyone to the meeting and announced attendees for the benefit of teleconference persons.

John Walters stated that there is one topic on the Agenda, which is the Draft Pigeon River Equestrian Work Plan received from Anna Sylvester at the January 23, 2015 PRCAC meeting..

Paul Rose advised he would like to go through the draft proposal first because the motion relates to the draft proposal.

1. *Work Plan addressing requests from Pigeon River Equestrian Committee (PRCEC).*

The PRCEC made a proposal to Director Creagh and he asked Anna, Scott and Brian to address the proposed items and respond back to him.

2. *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 exchange acquired lands.*

John Walters asked if there was previously legally a trail there. Scott stated there were never any designated trails there, however, dispersed riding was legal everywhere until the restrictions were put in place in 2008..

Pete Gustafson asked if the wording in bold print was part of proposed plan or taken from EC and then there is a response to it below the bold print.

Scott Whitcomb stated that the EC made two requests in letters to the Director in 2014 and the compilation of those letters are the bold lettered items. The bold is the request and the staff response is below.

Pete Gustafson asked if we are looking for recommendations from the council.

John Walters stated that we may want to go item by item with whether we agree with each item or not.

Pete Gustafson suggested it might be a good idea to have Paul's recommendation for Motion in front of us.

Pete Gustafson stated that Arch Reeves had submitted a letter that he would like read since he could not be here. It was decided to read it later in the meeting.

Since the Draft Work Plan was given to us at the last meeting and in anticipation of tonight's discussion I have taken the liberty of drafting a proposed Motion and I did so in advance only because it becomes very difficult to verbalize the motion when it is lengthy.

Motion by Paul Rose -

The Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) respectfully requests that implementation of the December 2, 2014 Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee Draft Work Plan be delayed until the following items have been provided for PRCAC review and comment:

- 1) A map-type plan which identifies the general location and extent of new equestrian trails and necessary infrastructure including parking and circulation.
- 2) Detailed plans for the proposed trail expansion into those areas which appear to have been acquired with Fish and Game Restricted funding.
- 3) Clarification of the criteria which would be used in the determination of trail expansion on "new" Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund acquisitions.
- 4) Detailed design criteria and proposed location for the equestrian access to the Pigeon River at Elk Hill Campground.

The PRCAC also respectfully requests that these items be incorporated into a single, comprehensive plan which identifies both existing and proposed equestrian trail locations, and that further incremental changes be avoided.

The Motion was seconded by Dave Smethurst.

In April 2013, Director's Order added about 7 miles of trails and some additional camp facilities. The AC was not involved in that process. It was indicated that the Director may not have been aware of the protocol at that time and did make a commitment that they would avoid future trail modifications and plans that didn't include council input and communications. This seemed to be inconsistent with input from 2013.

Dave Smethurst – Paul talked about the meeting in 2013 where it was discussed to please advise us in the process. We did not receive this draft work plan and we seem to continually have to make the pitch to come thru the AC.

Kerry Mase stated that part of this plan includes the development of the Recreational Management Plan that Parks and Rec. is going to put together which is going to be at a minimum of 1 to 1-1/2 years. So are you saying that Parks and Rec. needs to delay what they are doing?

Paul suggests we have the right to see this in a map type plan before this is adopted.

John Walters stated that number 1, of our Draft Work Plan, next step, "Team will finalize the work plan before February 2, 2015 after input from PRCEC and approved by the DNR Director. It makes no mention the work plan going into the Strategic Plan of Parks and Rec at all, or the Advisory Council.

John stated we do not want to stop, but delay the process so we can make really quality decisions on what the Work Plan is. We are having problems with "Restore" and "Zone" and how it is defined.

Pete Gustafson stated that the bold print items are suggested by EC and not necessarily part of the Work Plan itself. We are more interested as an AC in what the proposed Work Plan is.

Scott Whitcomb stated that there is room for limited trail expansion but it would be good to see maps and trails on the ground so sound decisions can be made.

3. Designate as legal the trail out of the Group campground that heads east and travels between the Sunken Lakes to Twin Lakes Road.

John Walters – There are erosion issues. Currently there are trails that go around the lakes but not between them.

Scott Whitcomb – With minimal modifications this could be done and allow viewing without contributing to the erosion.

4. Designate as legal the river trail between the Group Campground and Elk Hill Equestrian Campground.

Scott - The trail would end at the watering area. It really leaves the river at that point and is rerouted below the bluff.

Kerry Mase – There are currently erosion issues that have to be addressed before that could be done.

John Walters– This would be a heavily used trail because of its proximity to the campgrounds and water.

Mike Brown – Fish and Wildlife did a trip report and recommended that the watering point be closed.

Scott Whitcomb - The department has not acted on that at this time.

Paul Beachnau had to leave but stated he generally supported the motion.

5. Allow equestrian access to Blue Lakes, which was purchased with Natural Resources Trust Fund money.

Paul Rose - This was an area in the motion, what does the bold sentence mean? What does development mean, parking lots, etc.? I have concerns about the number of elk in that area, especially in the fall.

Dave Smethurst – This plan is silent about other impacts in the PRC. Blue Lakes is intensely managed for wildlife. We have to consider core values and conflicts with users.

Kerry Mase – Part of the Recreational Management Plan is going to be looking at that.

John Walters – The Concept of Management allows for foot traffic only in Blue Lakes.

6. *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.*

Scott Whitcomb - This will be a legal trail and just needs a Land use Order of the Director.

7. *Trail access to iconic spots such as Inspiration Point.*

Paul Rose - This land was acquired by fish and game funding.

Scott - Site of the wildlife habitat grant we are going to be working on this next year.

Jim Supina - There is sensitive wildlife in that area and we believe it should be foot traffic only.

Mike Brown - Possibility of hitching posts or something similar to tie up your horse and then walk from parking lot.

Dave Smethurst - What does "such as" mean and how many other iconic spots might there be?

8. *Trail access to iconic spots such as the Honeymoon Cabin in Green Timbers.*

John Walters - This is also a human foot traffic area as well.

John Walters - This is really a moot issue because the cabin(s) will be coming down.

Scott Whitcomb - There were legal trails there until 2008.

9. *New lands acquired with Michigan 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.*

Paul Rose - What is the criteria going to be for newly acquired lands?

10. *Have current maps available at the kiosk in the Elk Hill Equestrian and Group campgrounds and online.*

11. *Establish a policy to protect the Shore-to-Shore Trail in timber management practice and wildlife habitat activities.*

Scott Whitcomb - We have a policy now in place that addresses this concern of protecting the Shore-to-Shore due to timber management. We came up with a department wide policy that addresses this.

12. *Improve "river/fish friendly" access to river for horses to water at Elk Hill Equestrian Campground.*

Dave Smethurst asked to amend the motion to have a detail design criteria and proposed locations for Equestrian access to water at all lakes and rivers in the PRCSF as part of the Comprehensive Plan.

John Walters stated that there are only two legal watering spots in the PRC; Tin Shanty at Black and this on the Pigeon.

After some discussion the amendment was withdrawn by Dave Smethurst

Natural Rivers meeting next week to make sure it is an approved plan.

Charlie Maltby - The plan is proposed as a log step down, 2 horses at a time, with gravel and rip rap.

John Walters stated that we as an advisory council would like to see what the plan looks like in it's more definitive form.

13. Lower speed limit on the unpaved county roads within the PRC.

14. "Caution Horseback Rider" signs on the improved county roads within the PRCSF.

This action is complete.

Pete Gustafson read the statement from Arch Reeves to PRCAC in his absence.

Amendment to Motion by Paul Rose

The proposed draft equestrian plan and its schedule would appear to be inconsistent with the Advisory Council input process which was thought to have been re-established in 2013. This was referenced in the 2nd and 3rd paragraphs of page 3 of the April 12, 2013 meeting minutes.

Dave Smethurst seconded the friendly amendment. Kerry Mase opposed. Motion carried.

John Walters - Pointing out that bullet point #4 is vitally important, and should be #1.

Dave Smethurst requested that prior to the Park Planning Meeting on February 17 you ask PRD to offer Forest Service models and asked Charlie Maltby if he could get any information on that.

Meeting adjourned at 7:48.