

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
OCTOBER 21, 2011

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Friday October 21, 2011 at the Pigeon River Country Management Unit Headquarters. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 6:30 pm.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Rique Campa, Arch Reeves, Paul Rose, Jim Supina, Dave Smethurst, Bob Hess, John Walters, Eugene Horan, Don Horrocks, Pete Gustafson, Jack Deming, Kerry Mase

MEMBERS ABSENT: Randy Keen, Mark Ennes, Dick Myers, Ken Glasser, Mike Brown, Randy Sanders

EX-OFFICIO PRESENT : Scott Whitcomb, Brian Mastenbrook

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT: Tim Cwalinski, Nick Torsky, Jeff Stampfly, Rick Henderson

OTHERS PRESENT: Larry Kleinhardt, Joe & Judy Jarecki, Tom Serino, Gordon McMullen, Clem Kassuba, Bill Blanzky, John Mase, Stew Smith, Tony Matelski, CO Eric Bottorff

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS:

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Walters welcomed the attendees to the Fall 2011 PRCAC meeting, followed by introduction of attendees.

AGENDA

Whitcomb added Law Enforcement to the agenda for an Ex-Officio report. Agenda approved as modified.

APPROVAL OF July 15, 2011 ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING MINUTES

Adjustments to the Minutes – Two grammatical errors were found. Minutes were edited to reflect corrections. Motion by Rose to accept the minutes. Seconded by Supina. Motion passed.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Joe Jarecki commented on his disappointment on not sharing minutes from the committee meetings and the PRCAC meetings before they are accepted by the committee members and the PRCAC members. Joe would like the council to reconsider this issue and allow these minutes to be shared prior to being accepted by the committee members and the advisory council members.

Chairman Walters will consider putting this on the next PRCAC meeting as a topic to discuss again.

Larry Kleinhardt questioned whether it was true or not that the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation actually put forth \$20,000 toward the research project Michigan State University is working on **Elk Responses to Recreational Use & Habitat Potential in Michigan**. Rique Campa, Michigan State University indicated that it was indeed true. Campa explained the cost of this research project, which could last over a period of 5 years, could cost up to \$400,000. The \$20,000 the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation put toward the study is just an initial amount toward this project and hopefully will act as an incentive to

get other supporters to join. The money will be put in an account at Michigan State University for this study until the balance is funded.

OLD BUSINESS:

Both the Chairman and Vice-Chairman terms will expire December 2011. Chairman Walters appointed a Nominating Committee consisting of Smethurst, Rose and Gustafson. The Nominating Committee will have their recommendations together by January.

Whitcomb – Equestrian Access Plan Update – A handout was distributed to the members of the council. The Department has yet to make contact with Dr. Wood. Dr. Wood, Clemson University, is known for his work with the equine community. He would be a contact for the Department to use for advice on building and relocating sustainable trails.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service staff did not make their scheduled tour in the PRC and without their input, the Department cannot continue with any new trail designations for equine use. Because a high percentage of lands in the PRC have been purchased with Game and Fish funds, any and all activities on those lands must not interfere with the management that was intended for fish and wildlife. In order to implement any new horse trails that are on this type land, they must be approved or agreed upon with the US Fish & Wildlife Service.

In the State of Michigan there are approximately 3.8 million acres of state land, unless posted closed, these acres are open to horseback riders. The PRC area consists of a total of 100,000 acres.

There has been an increase in illegal horse activities within the PRC within the last few months. The increase in reservations at the Group Camp has been high, due in part to the change in the application process not requiring the 60 day notice for a reservation. Other changes, such as the 5 person rule for a group, have also increased the camping numbers at the Group Camp.

The Elk Hill State Forest Campground facility (non-group) in the PRC is being looked at for a redesign to improve the camping experience with the efforts on this redesign not being detrimental to the footprint of the forest.

Action on the Land Use Order to open 3 dispersed camping sites for horseback riders is now with the NRC and will be acted upon in November 2011.

Kerry Mase brought up the fact that she believed the “horse community” understood all rules had been lifted from the PRC, which may have contributed to the increase in illegal activities in the forest.

Discussions ensued regarding the horseback issues with both advisory council members and the public who attended the advisory council meeting.

SUBCOMMITTEE REPORTS

Standards and Limitations - Chairman Walters explained that the cancellation of the meeting regarding guiding was due in part to its priority level or lack thereof, as first thought by the DNR. This topic can go back to committee when and if it becomes more of a priority.

Wildlife Committee – Supina – handouts were given to the advisory members from the committee meeting. The committee meeting focused on the PRC Compartment Review of the Entry Year 2013. In summary, the committee endorsed most prescriptions put forth by the DNR, with few comments. The committee requested that particular attention be given to assure that grassy openings and upland brush

not be allowed to convert to forest and that silviculture practices assure the regeneration of oak be given particular attention.

Supina made motion to have committee minutes accepted by the advisory council as written. Gustafson seconded. Motion carried.

BREAK

NEW BUSINESS

Elk Management Plan – Mastenbrook gave a presentation to the council and explained the purpose of this updated management plan and the status of where the Draft Elk Management Plan is now. The Draft plan is online for viewing http://michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10363_10856_10893---,00.html

Mastenbrook mentioned if the advisory council had any comments or suggestions to send them to him by December 13th at the Gaylord DNR Office. On November 9, 2011 there will be a public input meeting at the Eagles Hall in Gaylord starting at 7:00 p.m.

EX-OFFICIO REPORTS

PRC Unit Update /District Report – Forest Management Division has deployed 4 Fire Engines to the State of Georgia; 4 Tractor Plows to Texas and 40 Fire Fighters have been sent to Texas. In addition, other resources have been sent to other southwest states and Ontario. There have been a total of 188 fires in the Lower Peninsula, totaling 1,655 acres. The division has had 64 prescribed burns for a total of 4,000 acres in the Lower Peninsula. Between Gaylord, PRC and Atlanta Management Units, there have been 13 prescribed burns for around 1,288 acres. Within the PRC there were 3 prescribed burns. The District Planner for Forest Management Division has retired and the division is not sure whether this position will be filled or not. The Department completed their Forest Certification Audits this year on 3 Management Units. The audit is completed every year in different management units to ensure the Department is managing public lands in a sustainable manner.

Scott presented some slides that showed the advisory council locations of the proposed off-site camping sites for equestrian use.

Whitcomb discussed that PRC staff are starting to work on the YOE 2014. The process includes taking inventory of the land, making recommended prescriptions, working with other resource divisions, and then going to the public for comment. The final prescriptions go to a Compartment Review and if all approved at the Compartment Review, the prescriptions get turned into Timber Sale Proposals and will go out for bid and then finally into the actual Timber Sale Contract.

Scott put together a slide presentation showing the most recent building demolition on three acquired properties. Perry, Kronlund and Hackett Lake properties all had cabins on the property which were removed. The Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation volunteered their services and participated in the demolition of 1 of the 3 sites. All sites are now cleared out, recently seeded and open to the public.

Wildlife Division Updates- The September elk hunt went well. 63 animals were taken, of which 5 were tribal hunters. Of the 63 animals, 32 were bull and 31 antlerless. The December hunt will have 65 permits. No major law issues to note during this past elk hunt. Brian updated the council on his new position as the Northeast Lower Peninsula Wildlife Supervisor. He will continue to perform his current responsibilities in addition to his new position, but is hoping his position will be filled by internal candidates.

Law Enforcement Update – Eric Bottorff, CO reported the Department right now has the lowest number of conservation officers employed. Law division is looking to hire 10 new conservation officers. Regarding patrol issues, as Wildlife reported, very few issues were seen during the past elk hunt. The new fishing regulations on the Pigeon River showed compliance has been good. An increase in ORV issues along Fisherman’s Trail with several citations being written. Horse issues have increased late summer and fall. Law Division is taking a more aggressive stand with equestrian illegal use. Sinkhole Lake patrols showed compliance has been good.

Fisheries Division Update – Cwalinski prepared a brief update and it was distributed at the council meeting.

Chairman Walters – announced that Rick Henderson would like to give a presentation to the advisory council members regarding fracking. Chairman Walters suggested this take place at a non-council meeting and would send out an email suggesting possible dates between now and January to council members. Rick took a new job which now covers the entire State of Michigan. Walters indicated that his old position will be filled.

Walters updated council members that Kelley Smith is acting in the role of Resource Deputy Director and Jim Dexter took the acting role of Fisheries Chief.

Chairman Walters updated council members on the tentative 2012 scheduled dates for advisory council meetings. They are as follows: **Jan 13, April 13, July 13 & Oct 12, 2012 starting at 6:30 pm.**

Discussion ensued on the reason behind Friday night meetings. No change was made to the proposed dates of the tentative 2012 meeting dates. Council members will have a chance to review these dates and if there are any conflicts, will advise Chairman Walters.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS

None

ADJOURN

9:40 pm

Respectfully Submitted,

Scott Whitcomb, Secretary