

Western Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (WUPCAC)

Meeting Minutes

Monday, November 9, 2015

5:30-6:00pm EST DNR Division Reports * 6:00-8:00pm EST Council Meeting

Crystal Falls Township Hall, Crystal Falls

Facilitator: Phil Wirtanen Co-Facilitator: Warren Suchovsky

Council Members Present

A.J. Campbell

Floyd Dropps

Joan Duncan

Larry Heathman

Mike Holmes

Dave Johnson

Katie Kruse

George Lindquist

Jim Lorensen

Horst Schmidt

Robert "Skip" Schulz

Vicki Schwab

Travis Smith

Bob Stinson

Warren Suchovsky

Phil Wirtanen

Council Members Absent/Excused

David Anthony

Ken Buchholtz

Mick Jarvi

Chauncey Moran

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff Liaisons

Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette

Bill Doan, Parks and Recreation Division, Baraga

Stacy Haughey, Upper Peninsula Regional Coordinator, Marquette

George Madison, Fisheries Division, Baraga

Don Mankee, Forest Resources Division, Baraga/Marquette

Tim Melko, Facilities and Operations Division, Marquette

Terry Minzey, Wildlife Division, Ishpeming

John Pepin, Deputy Public Information Officer, Marquette

Lt. Pete Wright, Law Enforcement Division, Marquette

Ron Yesney, Parks and Recreation Division, Marquette

Darrell Welch, Parks and Recreation Division, Marquette

Mrs. Haughey began the DNR Division Reports portion of the WUPCAC meeting at 5:35pm EST. She thanked Council Member **Floyd Dropps** for his assistance in securing the township hall for the Council meeting. She also welcomed Dr. Kirk Schott and Mr. Dale McNamee, both from Senator Casperson's Office.

DNR Division Reports

Written staff reports were provided to Council members on November 2, 2015. The following verbal updates were provided.

➤ **Stacy Welling Haughey, UP Regional Coordinator:**

- **Mrs. Haughey** recognized and congratulated three fellow Council members:
 - **Mr. Warren Suchovsky** for becoming the state's first landowner to achieve the Forest, Wetlands, and Habitat System verification under the Michigan Agriculture Environmental Assurance Program with the Michigan Department of Agriculture

and Rural Development (MDARD). Council Member **A.J. Campbell** is also involved in this process.

- **Mr. Jim Lorensen** for being appointed as Vice Chair of the Board of Directors for the Rural Community College Alliance, a national organization that represents rural community, tribal and technical colleges.
- **Mr. Ken Buchholtz** for receiving the Volunteer Service Award from the Michigan Alliance for Environmental and Outdoor Education, a professional association that supports and advances environmental education in a variety of settings, for his design of shooting mechanisms to assist hunters with disabilities and organizing dozens of volunteers to teach archery and fishing at the DNR's Pocket Park in Escanaba.
- She mentioned the recent partnership with the 1432nd Engineer Company of the Michigan National Guard who has conducted heavy-equipment training exercises that have improved state and local multi-use trails in Iron County. **Mr. Pepin** further explained their accomplishments.
- Pictures of the Oman Creek prisms were shown. **Mr. Doan** described the pictures and how the system works as it related to backfill. He noted the prisms are being used in conjunction with dredging operations, not as a replacement.
- **Lt. Pete Wright, Law Enforcement Division:** **Lt. Wright** indicated he did not have any additions to his report and is available for questions during the meeting.
- **Bill Doan, Parks and Recreation Division:** **Mr. Doan** stated he also did not have any additions to the written report.
- **Terry Minzey, Wildlife Division:** **Mr. Minzey** mentioned an exotic sika deer that has escaped from a pen in northern Wisconsin and has recently been seen by the public in Menominee County. It was road-killed overnight in Bark River and the carcass has been sent in for disease testing. This raised a bit of concern related to Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD); however, it is no longer in the woods and is being tested. Results will be reported when they are received. He also noted wild boar running loose in Delta County. USF&WS has killed 4 of the animals so far. USF&WS will hold a public meeting on Friday, November 13th at 6pm at the Rock Lions Club to let people know the status of the situation and how to help. Deer season opener is this coming weekend and it can be expected that the deer numbers will be down due to the significant mortality on fawns and adult does from recent severe winters.
- **George Madison, Fisheries Division:** **Mr. Madison** introduced Ms. Jennifer Johnson, fisheries manager from the Crystal Falls office, and retired fisheries biologist Mr. Bill Ziegler in the audience. He stated the fisheries staff are busy doing fall spawning. They have been stocking a lot of fish the last few weeks in walk-in trout lakes. They are also getting 200,000 steelhead coming to the western U.P. and are hoping the snow holds off to get them in Lake Superior streams. Salmon are not running the streams due to the low water levels.
 - **Mr. Lindquist** asked if there will be less winter kill due to the lack of ice cover so far this year. **Mr. Madison** stated yes, it is starting out good.
 - **Mr. Dropps** asked if there is any update on the aquaculture proposals. **Mr. Madison** indicated there will be a public meeting in Gaylord on November 19th and public comments will be accepted on the website. There were 5 different studies/reviews completed on various perspectives. He noted to contact him if a computer is not

available to provide comment. **Mr. Suchovsky** asked if there were two proposals; **Mr. Madison** replied yes and explained the growth in interest in this topic. **Ms. Schwab** explained the Delta County Economic Alliance formed an aquaculture group who developed a proposal for a pilot project to see what the possibilities would be to raise fish in the U.P. economy. They have been very pleased with the work by the Quality of Life Departments (DNR, DEQ, and DARD). The final step in the process is getting public input at the November 19th meeting and seeking comments. **Mr. Dropps** stated in the Council's Fisheries Committee it was noted that Hannahville has suspended their part in the pilot project, but that the private partner is still interested. **Mrs. Haughey** suggested aquaculture be a future agenda topic.

- **Don Mankee, Forest Resource Division:** **Mr. Mankee** stated he did not have anything further to add to his written report.
 - **Mr. Lindquist** asked about the benefits of the spruce budworm for deer as a source of food, citing a Canadian article. **Mr. Mankee** indicated spruce budworm is a forest health problem that will be of a special concern to the U.P. for some time. There will be a lot of dead trees. **Mr. Minzey** added snow depth will still be a major issue.

Call to Order

Facilitator Wirtanen called the regular meeting to order at 6:01pm EST. Members recited the Pledge of Allegiance. A group photo of the Council was also taken.

Adoption of Agenda

Facilitator Wirtanen asked if there were any additions to the agenda; there were none. **Mr. Suchovsky** motioned to accept the agenda as presented; **Mr. Lorensen** supported the motion. **Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: Mr. Anthony, Mr. Buchholtz, Mr. Jarvi, Mr. Moran. Motion carried.**

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Facilitator Wirtanen asked if there were any corrections or additions to the September 21, 2015 WUPCAC meeting minutes, which were emailed to each member previously. There were no corrections noted. **Mr. Schmidt** motioned to approve the minutes as submitted; **Mr. Lorensen** supported the motion. **Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: Mr. Anthony, Mr. Buchholtz, Mr. Jarvi, Mr. Moran. Motion carried.**

Public Comments on Agenda Items Only

Facilitator Wirtanen explained the procedure for this section of the meeting. He opened the floor for public comment:

- A member of the audience stated he would like an update on the Chassell to Houghton snowmobile trail. **Mr. Yesney** replied that he will include it in his presentation.

New Business

1. **U.P. Trails Program Update:** **Mr. Yesney** provided an overview of the trails program in the U.P. and the advancements of the program in the last year.
 - Trails are very important for economic reasons. Outlying communities really depend on the trail systems and they are important for health and quality of life reasons as

residents get out and enjoy the outdoors, access businesses as well as communities. More and more people are coming to the U.P. to utilize the trails here. Trails are also important for cultural history, using interpretive trails to tell a story about iron or copper mining for example. The state has also purchased a lot of rail trail property which can be used for rail traffic in the future.

- In the last 12 years, the trails have been in maintenance mode for 10-11 years. Funding is now available to expand the trail systems in the U.P. The Governor wants a trail state and utilization has increased across the board.
- Pertaining to trail staffing in the U.P., the state trail coordinator retired last year and that position has been filled. **Mr. Yesney** stated he was hired as a principle trail coordinator in the U.P. A U.P. trails staffing map was referred to in the meeting packets. Due to a multitude of ownership issues, a position for real estate/easement issues was recently filled by Mr. Darrell Welch (introduced by **Mr. Yesney**). He added Mr. Rob Katona will work with the trails program in the central U.P., Mr. Paul Gaberdiel will handle the eastern U.P., and the western U.P. position will be filled in the near future.
- The Governor's proposed Iron Belle Trail, connecting Belle Isle with Ironwood, does go through Iron County. Grants are available for communities to develop trails along this route.
- Funding for equestrian trails has become available. An equestrian campground was developed in the eastern U.P., and there are proposals for three others.
- Two major mountain biking trail proposals are also being considered.
- For ORV's, the sport is growing with the use of side-by-sides. The sport has almost completely reversed itself in using these vehicles for recreational purposes versus utilitarian purposes back in 1999. The trail system is still in the building process. About 200 miles of trails in the western U.P. has been added in the last year and a half. The DNR is continuing to add trails to try to accommodate the growth in the sport.
- Snowmobile use has been steady, with a peak in 2005, but then took a significant hit in 2008 with the economic downturn. It has started to bounce back, but not near the 2005 levels. The DNR is addressing noise levels and working with landowners on connectors. The western U.P. is ranked #1 (in a magazine) the last two years for snowmobile trails. Over 50% of this trail system is on private land.
- **Mr. Yesney** stated they are addressing infrastructure such as old bridges, trestles, culverts, etc. With the increase in ORV fees, it has helped to rehab some of the infrastructure and take a more proactive approach.
- Overall, the trail program is expanding and is bringing a lot of people to the U.P. which is money from outside the U.P. **Mr. Yesney** stated they are grateful for the support of the U.P. legislators and the Governor who all have gotten behind the trails program. He also thanked the NRC and the Natural Resources Trust Fund in helping to fund several trail projects. They are using money wisely to build capacity and move in a positive direction.
- **Mr. Yesney** opened the floor for comments:
 - In response to a question about the Houghton to Chassell ORV route, the connector was lost in 2005. Since then, the DNR has not had any success working with the local communities or clubs to get another connector. The railroad grade remains open, but it is not part of the designated system. It is in the trails plan to develop

some type of connector from Chassell to Painesdale. Opportunities are limited to the number of private landowners involved. It is in the long-range plan to make improvements on this route.

- **Mr. Schulz** asked several questions. In response, **Mr. Yesney** stated that Bewabic is open to ORV's, the bridge from Florence, WI to Iron Mountain may be open for next year's riding season, and the Bessemer to Wakefield route was purchased for multipurpose use. Discussion ensued regarding funding and buying grades.
- An audience member asked if there is any precedent about a reciprocity agreement for trail fees. **Mr. Yesney** replied there are no states with reciprocity agreements right now. In Canada, Manitoba is trying it with Saskatchewan. **Mrs. Haughey** noted the Michigan's DNR met with Wisconsin's DNR a year and a half ago and at that time, they were not interested in an agreement.
- **Mr. Schmidt** asked questions about funding for maintenance; **Mr. Yesney** discussed the current funding mechanism.
- Questions and discussion ensued regarding using areas off a trail, cooperation, and the quality of life and health element to trails.

Facilitator Wirtanen thanked Mr. Yesney for his time and presentation.

2. Additional Agenda Items Added by Council: There were no additional items added.

Old Business

1. Council Survey: **Mr. Lorensen** distributed a summary of the Council's issue survey and explained the results, which included a description of the issues Council members felt they would like to hear more about and were ranked as important and very important. He noted 18 responded to the survey. A top ten list was also created from the results. The next step will be to work with the NRC in obtaining their planned agenda for the next year so the Council can align related topics two months in advance of it being on an NRC meeting agenda. **Mr. Dropps** stated many of the topics have been discussed previously and he has a concern with duplicating topics and not addressing more important ones. **Mr. Lorensen** stated there are many new members on the Council now that may have not been involved in previous discussions. The listing is just a mechanism to use in formulating future agendas with the flexibility to tailor the agendas as needed based on more current or important issues. Discussion ensued. **Ms. Haughey** stated the survey was similar to what was done a few years ago; however, this time is it more complete and appreciates Mr. Lorensen's time and effort involved. **Facilitator Wirtanen** thanked Mr. Lorensen for the work involved in completing the survey process and stated he looks forward to utilizing the summary in creating future agendas.
2. U.P. Wildlife Habitat Workgroup Update: **Mr. Lindquist** stated the next meeting is on December 14 at the Red Rock Lanes in Ishpeming. A copy of the website and how to navigate for information was included in the meeting packets. He mentioned the group is working well together with all the major landowners in the room. **Mr. Schulz** asked if predators are a problem for deer when they congregate in one habitat area. **Mr. Minzey** stated it is not possible to get away from that; however, it is better to have several smaller habitat areas rather than a large one. It is important to reduce the snow depth in these

habitat areas so the deer can move in them. **Mr. Suchovsky** stated another important factor in identifying deer winter habitat areas is it's a learned behavior for deer to migrate in response to snow depths and temps. **Mr. Minzey agreed**, noting it takes a major event to change that behavior. Discussion ensued regarding funding options and incentives for private landowners. **Mr. Campbell** stated the conservation district works closely with landowners in finding funding opportunities. **Mr. Lindquist** mentioned coyotes are a primary predator for deer. **Ms. Duncan** asked what reference was used to determine this as in her former studies through coyote stomach analyses, deer was not their main source of food. **Mr. Minzey** stated the predator prey study used scat analysis and collaring, and indicated the findings are listed on the website.

- Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Update/Outreach: **Mr. Pepin** stated in an effort to help educate the public about CWD in the hopes of keeping the disease from reaching the U.P. deer population, a U.P. wide campaign (Keep the U.P. CWD Free) began today (November 9th) and includes a press release, informational flyer, three billboards in Ironwood, Norway, and Menominee, updates on the DNR's CWD webpage (www.michigan.gov/cwd), TV and radio spots, bumper stickers, information at DNR check stations and offices, and dissemination of information through the East and West U.P. Citizen's Advisory Councils. Pictures of the campaign items were shown, and flyers and bumper stickers were distributed to the Council members. **Mr. Minzey** added to date, three animals have tested positive for the disease, all in southern lower Michigan, and all were found to be related. A total of 1,500 deer have been tested so far and there is a mandatory deer check in the nine-township area where the disease was found. He stated there is no reason to believe that the disease is here at this point. He reminded those that do hunt outside of the U.P., it is illegal to bring the animal carcass back into the U.P. He also suggested to be mindful of where bait comes from so as to not transport the disease in that manner. **Mr. Lindquist** thanked all those involved in creating the flyer and sticker. He said CWD was discussed at sportsman's coalition meetings in early September, and it is important to be informed as there is so much to lose. He suggested reaching out to taxidermists and meat processors with the information as well. **Mr. Pepin** noted that once the press release goes out, information about the disease will spread across the U.P. in multiple media outlets. Discussion ensued regarding the disease in Wisconsin.
- Bear Season Update: **Mr. Minzey** stated not all the information has been received yet from vendors; however, he provided preliminary numbers (desired range, registered to date, and last year registrations) for western U.P. management units. **Mr. Schmidt** asked what the percentage is designated for hunting out of the total population; **Mr. Minzey** replied that it depends what the yearly goal is to maintain a steady population.

Committee Meeting Reports

- Trails/Recreation/Law: **Mr. Lorenson** reported the committee met earlier this afternoon. Items discussed were ORV trail signing, snowmobile trail grooming and speed enforcement, and an update on efforts to increase trailheads for equestrian riders. He said the committee learned that statewide business increased in state parks this year. They also reviewed some of the same Parks and Recreation Division staffing that was discussed earlier

along with the retention challenges the division has in keeping rangers after they are hired, mostly because of the seasonal nature of the positions. An overview of the Law Enforcement Division strategic plan and officer staffing was provided. He stated Gogebic County will be receiving two new officers and Ontonagon County will be receiving one. Overall, the western U.P. gained four new officers, but have lost three due to promotions. Minutes will be forwarded later.

2. Forestry: **Mr. Suchovsky** stated the committee met just prior to the Council meeting and he will email a printed version of the notes later on. He stated the committee identified the topic of forest health as an issue to focus on. They would also like to have a joint committee meeting with Trails/Recreation/Law to discuss maintenance of trails with the possible development of a resolution. He said they discussed the resolutions that were sent back from the Council regarding forest roads and they will submit a resolution for the next meeting for consideration recommending support of a dedicated fund for bridge and road maintenance. **Mr. Minzey** suggested a topic for possible discussion later next year regarding a joint hardwood project between the Wildlife and Forest Resources Divisions.
3. Fisheries: **Mr. Dropps** stated the committee previously met via conference call and received an update on the aquaculture pilot project proposal on Little and Big Bay de Noc waters. **Ms. Schwab** provided an overview of the proposal and stated several reviews based on science, economics and regulations are available on the web at www.michigan.gov/aquaculture. She noted once the DNR takes a position on it, the committee will determine support.
4. Wildlife/Field Operations: **Mr. Lindquist** stated the committee has not met as there haven't been any concerns brought forth. He will poll the group to see if they'd like to meet before Council meetings in the future.

DNR Reports on Requested Information

1. Trust Fund Breakdown: **Mrs. Haughey** reviewed two slides showing a breakdown of Natural Resource Trust Fund dollars that have supported trail funding. Both non-motorized and motorized funded projects since 1986 were displayed. She stated she will email a copy of the slides to Council members.
2. Copper Harbor (State Harbor) Dock Fishing Regulation: **Mr. Doan** reviewed a copy of the regulation for state marinas regarding fishing at marina docks. He explained some of the reasons a no fishing rule may be enforced. He indicated enforcement was taking place at the Copper Harbor state marina when Mr. Lindquist stated he was there. However, he understands the issue and will clarify the regulation with the staff and work to find an agreeable solution to all parties involved. **Mr. Lindquist** thanked Mr. Doan for the information and stated he appreciated working together to find a solution.

Next Meeting

1. 2016 Meeting Dates for Approval: **Mrs. Haughey** noted the proposed meeting dates for 2016 on the back of the agenda. She indicated that Thursdays were chosen this time over

Mondays due to multiple conflicts. **Facilitator Wirtanen** asked for a show of hands in support of holding meetings on Thursdays next year; a majority of hands were raised. It was noted the proposed September meeting date is the Wednesday before the Thursday NRC meeting in Ironwood. Discussion ensued regarding the best time to meet those two days with the consensus being Wednesday evening.

2. Next Meeting Date: **Facilitator Wirtanen** noted the next WUPCAC meeting is scheduled for Thursday, January 21, 2016 in Baraga County (location to be determined).
3. Items for Next Meeting Agenda: **Mr. Suchovksy** stated the Forestry Committee may have a resolution come forth for the next meeting. Discussion ensued on possible agenda items for future regular and joint meetings such as aquaculture, finance and budget, and the concept of public trust. **Facilitator Wirtanen** stated the survey results compiled by Mr. Lorensen will be used as a guide in determining future agenda items as well.

Public Comments

Facilitator Wirtanen opened the floor to members of the audience for their comments about general topics.

- Mr. Joe Voellinger, Director of the Iron County Chamber of Commerce, read a letter from the Chamber to the Council. The letter reiterated the local benefits of tourism resulting from multiple recreational opportunities available in their communities, especially fishing. He summarized Iron County depends on increasing tourism dollars to help sustain current businesses and future growth and that the Chamber supports the proposition to stock walleye in the inland lakes for this reason. **Facilitator Wirtanen** thanked Mr. Voellinger for his comments.

Closing Comments

Facilitator Wirtanen opened the floor for closing comments from the Council. There were none.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:10pm EST.