

Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (EUPCAC)
Work Session Minutes – APPROVED 6/13/23
Wednesday, April 26, 2023
6:00-8:30pm Eastern
LMAS Health Department Conference Room, Newberry

Chair: Tom Buckingham Vice-Chair: Gary Gorniak Secretary: Jack Thomas

Council Members Present

Ken Collier	Gary Gorniak	Joe Smith
Jeff Cox	Tim Hass	Mark Spencer
Grant Dewitt	Bernie Hubbard	Jack Thomas
Steve Dey	David Lieble	Tony Wright
Al Garavaglia	Glenn Moll	

Council Members Excused/Absent

Tom Buckingham	Robert Liebermann	Tom Paquin
Travis Kangas	Mark Maida	Julie Weist

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff Liaisons & Guests

Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette
Neal Godby, Fisheries Division, Northern Lake Huron Management Unit-Gaylord
Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy, Executive Division, Marquette
Randy Claramunt, Chief, Fisheries Division, Lansing
Dave Lemmien, Wildlife Division, Sault Ste. Marie
Jon Spieles, Chief, Marketing & Outreach Division, Newberry/Lansing

Call to Order/Roll Call

The Eastern UP Citizens' Advisory Council meeting was called to order at 6:00pm by **Vice Chair Gary Gorniak**, in Chair Tom Buckingham's absence. **Vice Chair Gorniak** welcomed everyone in attendance.

Adoption of Agenda

Vice Chair Gorniak asked the Council if there were any corrections or additions to the agenda; none were brought forth. **Mr. Collier motioned to adopt the agenda as presented; Mr. Cox supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See listing on page 1. Motion carried.**

Introductions of New Council Members

Vice Chair Gorniak and the Council welcomed four new members: Mr. Steve Dey, Mr. Mark Maida (absent), Mr. Glenn Moll, and Mr. Joseph Smith. They introduced themselves and provided a brief background of their interests.

Introductions of Council Members/DNR Staff/Public

Council members, DNR staff and members of the audience introduced themselves. **Ms. Haughey** especially noted those Council members whose terms were recently renewed: Mr. Ken Collier, Mr. Jeff Cox, Mr. Grant Dewitt, Mr. Al Garavaglia, Mr. Gary Gorniak, Mr. Travis Kangas (absent), Mr. Robert Liebermann (absent), Mr. Mark Spencer, and Mr. Jack Thomas.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Vice Chair Gorniak asked if there were any further changes to either the December 15, 2022 or February 15, 2023 meeting minutes, both of which were distributed to the Council via email for review. **Mr. Spencer motioned to accept both minutes as submitted; Mr. Hass supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See page 1. No further discussion. Motion carried.**

Chair Comments

Vice Chair Gorniak commented on a page of the 2022 deer harvest report that included a comparison of the Mackinac Bridge deer count and the DNR count. He indicated the numbers may never match; however, both follow the same trend. **Secretary Thomas** noted there were a lot of doe permits given during the peaks that were shown.

Public Comments on Agenda Items

Vice Chair Gorniak opened the floor for public comments on agenda items only.

1. **Secretary Thomas** took this opportunity to speak about deer in Luce County and specifically provided deer statistics on the Hiawatha Sportsman's Club property (36,000 acres) as well as in Luce County. He stated there is much less deer per square mile in these areas and it is not due to hunting. He wore an orange vest to signify that coyotes can be hunted all year long and stated an increase in predator hunting may prove beneficial for the deer herd.

DNR Reports from Division Staff

Written staff reports were provided via email to Council members on April 19, 2023. The following were verbal additions to those reports:

1. Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy
 - Fisheries Division Chief Randy Claramunt and Marketing & Outreach Division Chief Jon Spieles were welcomed to the meeting.
 - This month's division reports are full of good information. The proposed budget mentioned in the report notes the DNR's portion of the entire State of Michigan's budget is 0.6%. For 0.6%, residents can enjoy over 200 state parks and state forest campgrounds, over 13,000 miles of trails, millions of acres of state forest land and much more.
 - The status of the AuTrain Dam was explained along with the detrimental impact it could have on the resources that surround it if it's not repaired. **Mr. Hass** indicated at a meeting he attended it was stated another company has come forward to operate it; he will pass on contact information to **Ms. Haughey**.
 - Appreciation for the members serving on this council was given.
 - Questions:
 - **Mr. Spencer** asked about status of the Brevort Lake equestrian park as only sparse gravel has been put down. **Ms. Haughey** indicated she will have **Mr. Costa** respond back.
 - **Mr. Cox** mentioned the professionalism of Conservation Officers during a recent traffic stop. **Ms. Haughey** noted COs are fully commissioned officers.
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked when docs will be put in at boating access sites. **Ms. Haughey** stated it is usually shortly after full ice is off lakes and as staffing allows.

2. Neal Godby, Fisheries Division

- The Michigan Sea Grant has been holding several spring workshops about Lake Huron, one of which will be held in Cedarville on May 4. Virtual attendance is an option. This workshop will focus on the Les Cheneaux Islands and St. Mary's River and include a discussion on cormorants.
- Questions:
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked about the status of the walleye egg take. **Mr. Godby** stated the weather and take were both good in Bay de Noc and the Muskegon River. He added steelhead was a challenge. **Vice Chair Gorniak** stated he will need a permit for stocking 1,000 rainbow in Castle Rock Pond; **Mr. Godby** will email him.
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked if the challenges for walleye fry rearing at the Thompson Fish Hatchery have been worked out. **Chief Claramunt** indicated yes, adding there are swings all the time with the ponds. He noted southern Lake Huron ponds do best for spring walleye fry. Musky did really well also.
 - Northern Lake Huron Management Unit personnel changes were also mentioned.

3. Jon Spieles, Marketing & Outreach Division

- Congratulations to Mr. Spieles on his promotion to Chief of the Marketing & Outreach Division was provided.

4. Dave Lemmien, Wildlife Division

- The UP region for the Wildlife Division is now fully staffed after several years of vacancies. There is a biologist and technician at each wildlife office.
- It is spring survey season with sharptail grouse, ruffed grouse and woodcock surveys starting next week. The Duck Lake fire area has benefited the sharptail.
- Due to the rapid snow melt, farm fields and woods are flooded, providing a great opportunity to check out waterfowl habitat and see other wildlife as well.
- Questions:
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked how deer have been affected this past season with winter having been so different across the UP landscape. **Mr. Lemmien** explained the division's process and review of snow depth/pack across the UP; since 1960, the long-term average is 61 days with 12" of snow or greater on the ground in the UP. Averages are taken at different spots in and throughout each UP county to determine a region/broad scale measurement. Information is also received from the weather service. This year, the UP is at 104 days of 12" or more snow depth and would be considered a severe winter. This winter has affected the deer herd and biologists are collecting dead deer to send to the lab to determine if the cause is starvation. The fawn to adult ratio this spring will determine the effect of this past winter.
 - **Secretary Thomas** stated for many years in the eastern UP, winter severity was measured by zero degree days. He doesn't believe the western UP should be considered when evaluating the eastern UP. Discussion ensued regarding differences in measuring temperature and snow depth versus only snow depth.

Annual Election of Officers - Deferred

Vice Chair Gorniak indicated that although the yearly officer election was to be conducted at this meeting, he is requesting the election be held at the next meeting when the current Chair (Buckingham) can be present. The Council agreed.

Old Business

1. Wolf Management Update

- **Ms. Haughey** noted this is a standing agenda item at the request of the Council.
- Wolves are currently on the federal endangered species list and cannot be hunted in Michigan.
- An excerpt from the February 9, 2023 approved Natural Resources Commission (NRC) meeting minutes was recited. In summary, the NRC Chair stated the commission will be working with DNR officials to establish a decision tree on what management options could be employed once wolves are no longer on the endangered species list and that the goal is to have the decision tree ready for the UP NRC meeting in October. **Ms. Haughey** reminded the group that NRC Chair Baird verbally reported this same sentiment when he attended the EUPCAC meeting last December.
- Questions:
 - **Secretary Thomas** stated he and other hunters would like to see the enactment of a hunting season as soon as Michigan receives the ability to manage them. **Ms. Haughey** indicated it is a discussion between the Wolf Management Advisory Council and the NRC, and although the DNR can make a recommendation, the NRC is the body that makes the decision. **Secretary Thomas** indicated he will send an email to the NRC chair.
 - **Mr. Hass** suggested a Council resolution may be necessary. **Vice Chair Gorniak** indicated the Council did submit a resolution indicating the same previously and was passed unanimously.
 - **Ms. Haughey** reminded the group that the CACs are an advisory body. As individuals, members can proceed as they like. The decision is up to the NRC.
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** stated there needs to be three NRC meetings in the UP as he doesn't feel the NRC understands the problem with wildlife and deer in particular in the UP and need to hear from more UP sportsmen. He said he is working with some legislators to put pressure on the DNR to make it happen. **Ms. Haughey** stated the NRC has been very receptive, noting the NRC Chair attended an EUPCAC meeting (December 2022) to listen to discussion and there are two UP commissioners on the NRC.
 - **Mr. Dey** asked if the NRC will take input from UP residents on what they plan to present in October. **Ms. Haughey** stated if it requires NRC action, there will be a public comment period.

New Business

1. Cormorant Funding & Control Update (Mr. Randy Claramunt, Fisheries Division Chief)

- Depredation orders that were in place for many years were overturned by a judge in 2016.
- Michigan helped to get a solution that is fair and equitable for everyone involved.
- Opposition is beginning to grow; Canada is opening a hunting season on cormorants.
- The new permit system was explained. If there is a pattern, the permit can be amended in an hour providing a response to affected areas immediately. For this year, the program is 2,500 birds and 1,000 nests. Funding for additional control was not granted; therefore, the focus is on six colonies across the state.
- The process for volunteers and how they are trained was explained.
- Questions:
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** stated he was a volunteer for USDA Wildlife Service for many years; all the volunteers are gone now. The previous program was very successful and accomplished what was needed. The cost is in administrating the program.

Cormorants can devastate the state’s fisheries and need to be controlled, not eliminated. He said he has worked with Chief Claramunt for 10 years on this issue and he has done a good job. He thanked him for coming to the meeting to discuss the issue. **Chief Claramunt** stated he will continue to ask for support as cormorants are on a slight increase with more nesting habitat and less control.

- **Mr. Dewitt** asked about the purpose of a background check for volunteers. **Chief Claramunt** stated it is for liability purposes. **Mr. Gorniak** stated background checks are definitely needed.

2. *Fisheries 2024 UP Proposed Regulations and Conversations & Coffee Events Update (Mr. Godby)*

- Two UP fish regulations are being proposed for the upcoming 2024 regulation cycle. They include:
 - *Combined Lake Trout – Splake Daily Possession Limit:* Combine daily possession limits for Lake Trout and Splake in all Great Lakes and Connecting Waters, similar to what currently exists for Lake Huron management unit MH-1. The combined daily possession limits would match current daily possession limits for Lake Trout in all Lake Trout Management Units.
 - *Catch-and-immediate release fishing for Lake Sturgeon in the Ontonagon River:* Allow for targeted catch-and-immediate-release fishing for Lake Sturgeon in the Ontonagon River from July 16 to March 15 (identical to other Michigan waters that have a catch and release season for Lake Sturgeon). Regulation is for the Ontonagon River from Lake Superior to Victoria Dam Road. No bait or tackle restrictions are proposed.
- There are also minor wording updates for two northern Lake Huron regulations which do not affect the actual regulations.
- Conversation and Coffee events were held throughout the state in March and April. Public feedback on proposed 2024 regulations were the main focus of these events.
- Questions:
 - **Mr. Wright** asked about the requirements for setting up and installing fish cribs on a lake. **Mr. Godby** stated creating habitat is important and certain requirements must be followed for material used, placement, etc. Those interested must first obtain an EGLE permit.

3. *Snowmobile Season Summary to Date (Ms. Haughey for Lt. Hagy)*

- **Ms. Haughey** reviewed a written handout provided by Lt. Hagy in his absence.
- As of March 9th, 2023, there have been 19 statewide fatal snowmobile accidents with 6 of them occurring in District 2 (Eastern UP): 2 in Alger, 3 in Luce, and 1 in Schoolcraft Counties. Alcohol and speed were the leading cause.
- The snowmobile season for District 2 started off extremely busy with the UP having the only rideable snow in the state. Officers noticed good compliance this year with trail permits and registration laws being followed, however one officer did come across a group of snowmobilers who tried to pass an ORV trail license as their snowmobile trail permits. A disturbing trend this year was the amount of careless operation citations that were issued to snowmobilers, such as failing to stop at stop signs and not staying to the right, especially on sharp corners of the trail.
- Sound enforcement patrols were conducted, but citations issued for this violation has decreased due to manufacturers making aftermarket exhaust systems that will pass the test

of being under 88 decibels at 4000 RPM'S, however, the sound levels jump dramatically beyond the testing point.

- Additional information on the I-500 snowmobile race, searching for missing people, responding to several personal injury accidents, and general 2023 snowmobile season stats were also included in the handout.

4. *Snowmobile Ride Right Messaging (Ms. Haughey for Mr. Costa)*

- **Ms. Haughey** reviewed a slide provided by Mr. Costa in his absence.
- The focus of the Ride Right Campaign is on speed. 80% of snowmobile accidents are related to speed.
- Educational tools, such as posters and placemats, are posted in area hotels and restaurants heavily frequented by snowmobilers. Social media is also utilized. A difference is being made and the message is getting out.
- With the lack of consistent snow downstate, the trails were heavily used this year bringing more congestion, accidents and fatalities. Modified sleds and excessive speed cause accidents.
- New messaging will be introduced next year, called the Ride Right, Lead Right campaign. The first four fatalities this year were wives, girlfriends and daughters. Women make up 15% of riders and over 50% of accidents. The message conveys to only ride to the ability of your most novice rider and not more than six in a group. It puts the onus on the lead rider for the safety of those behind them. It is hoped the message will curb some of these devastating situations.
- Volunteers who groom and take care of the trails are very dedicated and do good work. The economic impact of snowmobiling in rural UP areas is very important to smaller communities. Staff are working to address the negative aspects with more sound and trespassing enforcement and education about the importance of staying on the trails.
- If anyone has ideas to share about snowmobile safety and/or education, please contact Mr. Costa.
- Questions:
 - A female member of the public indicated additional education is needed for female riders and stated there are other dangerous riding situations that need to be shared with new riders. She indicated she has offered youth rides and there is a huge interest in them.
 - Another member of the public noted that most of the accidents seem to be occurring on rental sleds, which may indicate a larger number of inexperienced drivers.
 - **Mr. Hass** said he noticed a 50% decrease in riders going down his street and described a few dangerous riding situations.
 - Discussion ensued regarding sound enforcement and the training and equipment needed.
 - Mr. King from the public stated a local municipality can institute a local speed limit on trails within its district.

5. *Proposed Deer Regulations to NRC (Mr. Lemmien & Ms. Haughey)*

- Deer regulations are on a three-year cycle. Local biologists begin talking about regulations in public forums (radio, etc.) in the spring.

- The timeline of presentations on the proposed regulations and the opportunity for public input at upcoming Natural Resources Commission (NRC) meetings or by email was shown on a slide.
- Slides from Mr. Chad Stewart’s presentation at the April NRC meeting containing proposed regulations for the UP were shown.
 - UP Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) regulations specific to the UP CWD surveillance zone
 - UP Specific Deer Regulations: antlerless harvest with archery equipment in select units and allowance of crossbow in late antlerless season
 - Liberty Hunt Regulations (statewide)
 - Antler Point Restrictions (statewide)
 - Additional Topics: Harvest reporting, and wildlife conservation order (WCO) language clean-up for deer damage shooting permits and for North Manitou Island permits
- The process for how proposed regulations is developed, reviewed through the chain of command and presented to the NRC was explained.
- At the May 11, 2023 NRC meeting, the proposed regulation recommendations will be presented to the Commissioners for information only, which will then kick off the public comment period.
- At the April NRC meeting, statistical and historical information on the November 15th season date was provided; however, a change is not being recommended at this time. Suggestions for season extensions to benefit hunter recruitment and retention was also presented.
- Questions:
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked if there was any research on why the deer herd is down in the UP and if solutions were presented. Discussion ensued on the combination of factors that affect deer survival.
 - **Mr. Wright** and **Mr. Hubbard** spoke about a resolution passed by the Michigan Chapter of the Society of American Foresters related to deer habitat.
- **Ms. Haughey** indicated that Chair Buckingham had placed on the agenda an opportunity for the Council to revisit the deer regulation recommendations that were submitted in a 2016 EUPCAC resolution to the Director. She paraphrased each recommendation. The Council agreed to hold any discussion until then next meeting when Chair Buckingham will be present.

6. Additional Agenda Items Added by Council: No additional items were added.

Committee Activity

1. Fisheries Committee (Vice Chair Gorniak)

- **Vice Chair Gorniak** presented a resolution regarding cormorant funding and control, which was emailed to Council members for review on April 19th.
- The resolution requests that the Michigan DNR find the funding of approximately \$250,000 annually and reimplement the very successful USDA Wildlife Services program of cormorant control utilizing volunteers.
- **Chief Claramunt** explained the current program and issues earlier in the meeting.
- **Mr. Spencer motioned to approve the resolution as presented; Mr. Dey supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See page 1. No further discussion. Motion carried.**
- The resolution will go forward as a Joint UPCAC resolution since it was also passed at the March WUPCAC meeting.

- **Mr. Dewitt** asked if the brook trout limit will be changed on certain streams, opening it back up to a limit of 10 UP-wide. **Chief Claramunt** explained the current regulation and suggested he speak with biologists and the NRC if he wishes to see a change.
2. Opportunity for Council Members to Join Committees & Resolution Process (Vice Chair Gorniak)
- Members indicated their interest to serve on various council committees.
 - Fisheries Committee: Gary Gorniak as lead, Grant Dewitt, Joe Smith, Neal Godby as DNR advisor
 - Forestry/Invasive Committee (New): Bernie Hubbard as lead, Jack Thomas, Glenn Moll, Travis Kangas, Robert Liebermann, Scott Lakosky as DNR advisor
 - Policy Impact Committee: Tim Hass as lead, Mark Spencer, Stacy Haughey as DNR advisor
 - Recreation & Trails Committee (New): David Lieble, Grant Dewitt, Glenn Moll, Eric Cowing as DNR advisor
 - Wildlife Committee: Steve Dey as lead, Tom Buckingham, Jack Thomas, Grant Dewitt, Gary Gorniak, Bernie Hubbard, Dave Lemmien as DNR advisor

Next Meeting

1. Next Meeting Date/Location: **Vice Chair Gorniak** indicated the next meeting will be Tuesday, June 13 at 6:00pm, at LSSU's Cisler Center in Sault Ste. Marie.
2. Items for Next Meeting Agenda
 - **Mr. Smith** suggested information on dams and water levels as an agenda topic. **Chief Claramunt** mentioned the DNR is reviewing all the dams that the DNR owns; however, there are some that are regulated by townships, cities and private owners. Mr. Smith indicated the dam he is concerned with is a private dam on South Manistique Lake. **Ms. Haughey** stated she will look into who has control of that dam and provide resources to Mr. Smith.
 - **Secretary Thomas** stated as a member of the Wildlife Committee, he would like additional information on how the snow depth measurements can be changed to temperature for deer survival outlook, information on the recent moose survey along with the results of past surveys, and how deer surveys are conducted in the eastern UP. **Mr. Lemmien** stated once the moose survey results are provided to the NRC, they will be available. He noted the traditional moose range is west of Marquette County and explained the plot system used. Moose in the eastern UP are not surveyed. **Mr. Lemmien** stated he will follow-up with Secretary Thomas' requests.

Public Comments

Vice Chair Gorniak opened the floor for public comments on any topic.

1. Mr. Stephen King of Newberry spoke about zebra mussels impacting commercial fishing, creating dead zones. **Chief Claramunt** stated zebra mussels have impacted the whitefish populations in Lake Huron and Lake Michigan. Overall, they can cause a very acute nutrient limitation. He noted there will be a pilot conducted using innovated techniques to eliminate them.

Closing Comments from Council

Vice Chair Gorniak opened the floor for closing comments from the Council and DNR staff.

- **Mr. Dewitt** mentioned that Chippewa County SORVA put in place 38 additional miles of designated ORV trail and explained the locations. He stated it has taken 12 years to work through the federal forest and that he used the support letter from the Council provide several years ago.
- **Mr. Moll** stated in the local newspaper, folks are bothered by 4x4s and wider vehicles tearing up the edges of the roadway and would like to see them ride on the road. They may not realize riding on the road is illegal.
- **Mr. Spencer** stated a WCO amendment on nuisance control animals is up for action at the May 11th NRC meeting. He explained what the amendment includes and what the issues and concerns are with it. He also noted there is a legislative bill being introduced that would ban all predator hunts, including coyotes. Those interested should watch it closely.
- **Vice Chair Gorniak** mentioned the Straits Area Fishing Club is hosting a Kids Fishing Day on June 10. 1,000 rainbow have been planted in a 5-acre pond. This is the same weekend as Free Fishing Weekend.

Adjourn

There being no further business, **Vice Chair Gorniak** thanked everyone for attending. He adjourned the meeting at 8:41pm Eastern.