

Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (EUPCAC)
Meeting Minutes – APPROVED 6/16/25
Tuesday, April 15, 2025
6:00-8:30pm Eastern
DNR Newberry Customer Service Center Conference Room, Newberry

Council Members Present

Tom Buckingham, Chair	John Kurkowski	Dick Pershinske
Ken Collier	Robert Liebermann	Joe Smith
Jeff Cox	Mark Maida	Julie Weist
Gary Gorniak, Vice Chair	Glenn Moll	Tony Wright
Tim Hass	Tom Paquin	
Bernie Hubbard	Dennis Patchakos	

Council Members Excused/Absent

Grant Dewitt	Rich Mapes
Steve Dey, Secretary	Mark Spencer

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff & Guests

Audrey Baetz, Fisheries Division, Newberry
Dave Caroffino, Fisheries Division, Lake Superior Basin
Eric Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division, Newberry
Michelle Crook, Executive Division, Lansing
PJ Costa, Parks & Recreation Division-Trails Section, Newberry
Kristi Dahlstrom, UPCAC Assistant, Executive Division, Marquette
Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy, Executive Division, Marquette
Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Division, Newberry
Scott Lakosky, Forest Resources Division, Newberry
Cory Luoto, Forest Resources Division, Naubinway
Karen Sexton, Wildlife Division, Escanaba

Welcome & Call to Order

At 6:00pm Eastern, **Chair Tom Buckingham** called the meeting to order. He welcomed members of the public as well as DNR staff and fellow Council members. **Ms. Dahlstrom** confirmed a quorum for the purpose of conducting Council business.

Introductions of New Members

Chair Buckingham, Ms. Haughey and the Council welcomed four new members: **John Kurkowski** (Mackinac County), **Dennis Patchakos** (Chippewa County), and **Dick Pershinske** (Mackinac County). They introduced themselves and provided a brief background of their interests. The Council is now fully seated with 20 members. New member **Rich Mapes** (Luce County) was unable to attend this evening.

Introductions of All Meeting Attendees

All public attendees, DNR staff and council members introduced themselves at the request of **Chair Buckingham**.

Adoption of Agenda

Chair Buckingham asked the Council if there were any corrections or additions to the agenda; none were brought forth. **Mr. Hass** motioned to adopt the agenda as presented; **Vice Chair Gorniak** supported the motion. **After no discussion, Chair Buckingham called for a vote on the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Chair Buckingham asked if there were any changes to the February 19, 2025, meeting minutes which were distributed to the Council via email previously for review. **Mr. Wright motioned to accept the minutes as submitted; Mr. Cox supported the motion. After no discussion, Chair Buckingham called for a vote on the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

Reports from DNR Division Staff

Written staff reports were provided to Council members on April 8, 2025. The following brief updates were added.

1. *Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy*

- Two new commissioners were recently appointed by the Governor to the Natural Resource Commission: Rebecca (Becky) Humphries and James (Jim) LaPorte. Commissioner Humphries was a former DNR Wildlife Chief and Director. Mr. LaPorte of Benton Harbor grew up in Marquette and has a camp on a lake in Gwinn.
- A recent press release was shared on screen about the first cougar cubs verified in Michigan in more than a century. The two cubs were spotted on private land in Ontonagon County but have not been spotted since the first encounter. The DNR has verified 133 adult cougar reports since 2008, with the majority of the sightings occurring in the UP.
- **Mr. Pershinske** asked about the status of the Wolf Management Advisory Council that was appointed a few years ago, and which he served on. **Ms. Haughey** indicated she can get an update and respond after the meeting. She noted she will have an update about wolf management in general later on the agenda.

2. *Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Division*

- New fisheries biologist, Audrey Baetz, in Newberry was introduced. **Ms. Baetz** provided a brief background of her work experience. In her free time, she enjoys fishing, hunting, hiking, and kayaking.
- Egg take on Big Bay de Noc is almost complete, and crews will begin processing those eggs soon.

3. *Scott Lakosky, Forest Resources Division*

- A brief update was provided on the ice storm that damaged over 900,000 acres of forestland in the northern lower peninsula and portions of Mackinac County. A DNR incident management team was deployed and worked alongside the National Guard. A good majority of DNR divisions are involved. The help provided by the DNR is extremely appreciated by area citizens. The damage in this area is incredible. One power company ordered 900 utility poles, with some coming from as far as Arizona.
- Salvage assessments for damage state timber is substantial and the process has begun.
- Spring preparations are typically a busy time for the division; however, damage response has taken priority.
- **Mr. Hubbard** noted he traveled through the impacted area a few times in the last few weeks and the lack of power in the area was unbelievable. Over 840 miles of new line had to be replaced. **Mr. Lakosky** mentioned a similar storm occurred in New York in the late 1990s and the DNR has reached out to involved agencies for their insight and experience.
- **Mr. Hass** noted 7 radio towers went down in the impacted area. Other than the Duck Lake fire, he has never seen that kind of damage before. He suggested to those impacted and/or assisting to keep records of gas, generators and mileage records as they are tax deductible. **Mr. Lakosky** indicated the donation of gas cards to residents and those assisting is very helpful.

4. *Ereic Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division*

- Several park staff aided the cleanup efforts in northern lower Michigan.
- Straits State Park also suffered significant tree damage. Park staff are working to clean it up and be ready for spring and summer activity.

5. ***PJ Costa, Parks & Recreation Division-Eastern UP Trails***

- The Eastern UP trails were not drastically affected by the ice storm. Normal cleanup is in progress to get trails ready for users.

6. ***Karen Sexton, Wildlife Division***

- The written report noted Don Brown recently filled the Shingleton wildlife biologist position. In addition, Morgan Lucot will be filling the Baraga wildlife biologist vacancy. The Newberry wildlife technician position will be posted soon.
- The UP Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative (DHIPI) received another \$40,000, in addition to the annual \$100,000 amount, that will allow additional applicants to be funded. The additional amount was not needed in the lower peninsula.
- Winter snow depth in many areas of the UP is persisting; staff are keeping an eye on the deer herd as a result.
- **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked about a collared moose calf reported as deceased, whether all of the collared cow moose were pregnant, and when findings would be available. **Ms. Sexton** stated the necropsy is currently being completed on the moose calf and blood test results on the collared cow moose are not yet available. Once results become available, she will circle back with the Council, as well as provide when the research team expects to have reports ready.
- **Mr. Liebermann** asked if there were any ice storm-related issues for wildlife habitat in the northern lower peninsula. **Ms. Sexton** stated there may be possibilities for wildlife to be displaced with treetops falling, however, the situation may also create great habitat for pine marten, for example. She indicated staff will be monitoring whether some habitat areas will need to be restored. Possible effects to Kirkland warbler habitat were also discussed. **Ms. Sexton** stated both the Wildlife and Forestry Divisions are working together on this devastating situation.

Public Comments on Agenda Items Only

Chair Buckingham opened the floor for public comments on agenda items only; none were brought forward.

Old Business

1. **Wolf Management Update (Stacy Haughey)**

- This is a standing agenda item at the request of the Council.
- A timeline, listing the steps to establish a public harvest of wolves after a federal delisting, was shared and reviewed. Two notations regarding the timeline were emphasized: 1) some of the steps listed are outside of the DNR's control in how long a particular step takes; and 2) these are the same steps presented to the NRC in October 2023 but in a more condensed or simplified form. No steps have been removed. The DNR Director has not removed any steps.
- Some steps listed are dependent upon when a delisting would occur. Some of the steps have already been updated or continue to be and some cannot be done until a delisting has occurred. The importance of having current information and processes was emphasized. **Ms. Haughey** noted that NRC's action process would be required and involves a certain timeframe.
- Item #3 indicates the Wolf Management Advisory Council (WMAC) would be reconvened (in response to **Mr. Pershinske's** earlier question) when a delisting occurs. The management plan was updated in 2022 by the WMAC.
- **Vice Chair Gorniak** stated the survey method used previously to gather public input (Item #4) was not productive and unnecessarily wasted time.
- **Ms. Haughey** noted the potential impact of federal legislation on the entire process.
- **Mr. Maida** asked if a wolf pack relocates from a previously documented conflict area, how can individuals hunting with hounds find out if a pack is no longer in that same area. He stated hunters don't want to come back to the same area to hunt and sometimes won't come back at all. **Ms. Sexton** stressed the need for

accurate and timely reporting of wolf-dog conflicts, including chases, etc. so that staff can investigate, add it to the online map, and keep abreast of problematic areas. Discussion ensued.

- **Mr. Pershinske** mentioned Wisconsin averages three depredations a week in certain counties according to their website. However, reports of depredations in Michigan seem non-existent as producers are refusing to call it in. **Ms. Haughey** stated if depredations are not reported, there won't be any data to support a harvest and no data to indicate problem areas. She added that Wisconsin's harvest model was initiated by legislation in that state.

2. Follow-Up from February Meeting (Stacy Haughey)

- Completed: Contact list for Mackinac County officers to invite to a sportsman's club meeting (Gorniak). **Lt. Hagy** provided this information to **Vice Chair Gorniak** shortly after the February meeting.
- Completed: Lack of grooming of trail around Chain Lake (Paquin). **Mr. Costa** provided this information to **Mr. Paquin** shortly after the February meeting.
- Update: UP Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative (DHPI) grant amount available (Gorniak). In response to **Vice Chair Gorniak's** inquiry regarding the grant funds available for the UP DHPI this year being lower than the previous year, **Mr. Lemmien** shared the following statement: *There was no reduction in 2025 funding; it remains at \$100,000 each year. Last year, however, another DRIP-funded grant program elsewhere in the state was closed and created access to extra funds.*

New Business

1. Resolution Considerations from Wildlife Committee (Secretary Steve Dey)

- **Chair Buckingham** reviewed a written statement by Secretary Dey who could not be present: *"The moose resolution demonstrates the Council's support for the continuation of the program. The resolution for Supporting the Development of a Framework for Gray Wolf Hunting and Trapping merely requests that the DNR develop a season framework, nothing more. As a lifelong Boy Scout, our motto is "Be Prepared;" that is all we are asking for with this resolution. A side benefit of this would positively reflect on the DNR, showing that they listen to an advisory group that represents sportsmen and sportswomen."*
- Resolution #1: Support of Ongoing Moose Research Efforts
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** provided a brief recap on the background of this resolution, a joint recommendation with the WUPCAC, noting it relays the UPCACs support to the DNR for securing the funding (grants and otherwise) to conduct and continue the moose collaring research project. He added the EUPCAC, in conjunction with the WUPCAC, previously recommended to the DNR in 2023 a limited hunt to generate funds to support research and management, which has now come to fruition. He highlighted the financial investment from sportsmen (SCI, UPSA, etc.) for the initial transfer of moose to the UP and the importance of and need for continued research and management efforts.
 - **Chair Buckingham called for a motion. Vice Chair Gorniak motioned to approve the resolution as submitted; Mr. Pershinske supported the motion. Chair Buckingham called for discussion.**
 - Discussion revolved around funding and the current camera study on wolves, which is providing an added benefit for other species like moose.
 - **After no further discussion, Chair Buckingham called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously (16 support).**
- Resolution #2: Recommend the Development of a Framework for a Regulated Wolf Hunting & Trapping Season Across the UP & Allocation of Resources for Ongoing Management Program
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** indicated this resolution, which is also a joint recommendation with the WUPCAC, recommends the DNR and Natural Resources Commission (NRC) develop a framework for a regulated wolf hunting and trapping season across the entire Upper Peninsula to be implemented during the first hunting and trapping seasons upon federal delisting of the species; and that the DNR allocates

necessary resources to study, plan, and prepare for a science-based wolf management program, ensuring sustainable wildlife, deer in particular, population levels, and also minimizing conflicts with humans, pets, and livestock.

- **Chair Buckingham called for a motion. Vice Chair Gorniak motioned to approve the resolution as submitted; Mr. Paquin supported the motion. Chair Buckingham called for discussion.**
- Discussion included **Mr. Paquin’s** request that discussion on this topic at every meeting be put at rest with this resolution to allow time for other topics on future agendas.
- **After no further discussion, Chair Buckingham called for a vote. The motion passed by majority (15 support, 1 oppose).**

2. Michigan DNR Drone Program Overview (Cory Luoto)

- **Mr. Luoto** provided a brief background of his experience with the use of drones in the DNR. He is a GIS (Geographic Information System) analyst, has been a drone pilot for 4 years, and has been with the DNR for 29 years.
- An overview of the DNR’s drone program including the types of drones used, their capabilities, and their applications in various departments were detailed. **Mr. Luoto** brought several of the drones for the Council to see.
- DNR drones are used for mapping, fire management (fire progression mapping), prescribed burns, wildlife studies (monitoring) and habitat evaluations. They are capable of providing thermal imaging, zoom capabilities, and the ability to map and measure areas with precision.
- An internal website allows employees to request drone flights and track the status of ongoing flights. The drone program is managed by coordinators who assign pilots based on their expertise and the specific needs of requests. After flights are completed, pilots are required to submit reports.
- The FAA certification and authorization process for drone operations were explained, including the ability to fly out of line of sight in emergency situations, such as mapping fires or identifying hot spots. The high resolution imagery captured by drones is crucial for accurate assessments and effective management of emergency situations. The drone program is expected to expand due to new technologies and increased demand for drone services.
- The Council asked a variety of questions including various use applications, search and rescue, moose locations, night flying, fire hotspot detection and the ability to live stream flight data to fire managers.
- **Ms. Haughey** noted she receives several calls a year about drones detected over private land monitoring activity such as bait piles, etc. **Mr. Luoto** stated the DNR does not fly drones over private land unless fire is involved.
- **Mr. Hass** suggested a presentation be held for and advertised to the public; the information is fascinating and would garner goodwill for the DNR. **Mr. Luoto** thanked him for the suggestion and noted he also has attended career fairs in the Eastern UP to engage young people in this carrier path.
- **Chair Buckingham** and the Council thanked Mr. Luoto for his presentation and expressed their support for the drone program and its contributions to various departments within the DNR.

3. Conversations & Coffee Fisheries Regulation Proposals (Cory Kovacs)

- **Mr. Kovacs** explained the Fisheries Division’s purpose in attending the CAC meetings is to gather feedback on upcoming regulation proposals.
- 2025 Michigan Fishing Regulations: The 2025 season started April 1. Any regulation changes that were approved in the last cycle by the NRC will be printed in red and major changes will be listed on page 3.
- Regulation Process: The regulation process includes an internal review, public vetting (attending the CAC meetings, for example), a division regulations review committee and then the NRC. Typically, regulations go to the NRC in September and their decisions are made in October/November so that approved changes can be included in the next season’s guide printing.

- *Brian's Pond (Alger County)*: Current regulation is Type A with a proposed regulation change to remove the Type A regulation as habitat conditions (water temperature, dissolved oxygen) no longer support trout survival.
- *Sawaski Lake (Alger County)*: Current regulation is Type B with a proposed regulation change to remove the Type B regulation as habitat conditions (water temperature, dissolved oxygen) no longer support trout survival.
- *Milakokia Lake (Mackinac County) and Big Manistique Lake (Luce/Mackinac County)*: Proposals for regulation changes were presented at the last EUPCAC meeting. The goals for the proposed protected slot limits (PSLs) for managing walleye populations on these two lakes are to increase adult walleye abundance and to maintain/increase natural recruitment. The current regulation has a minimum size limit of 15 inches and a daily possession limit of 5. The proposed PSLs would be 18-23 inches (no harvest) with a daily possession limit of 3 with only 1 over 23 inches. The impact of invasive species and climate change on walleye populations was discussed.
- *Strawberry lake (Marquette County)*: An update on Strawberry Lake was provided. This lake is a trophy brook trout fishery with fluctuating water levels. The lake has been managed as a Type D fishery, but recent fluctuations have hindered growth and survival. A proposal to liberalize regulations and promote youth fishing was discussed, including the installation of a fishing pier by Sands Township. The management plan aims to increase accessibility and interest in the fishery, moving it to a Type A regulation.
- *Moon Lake (Luce County)*: Current regulation is Type D with a proposed regulation change to a Type A due to a fish community change (i.e. yellow perch) and poor growth and performance of brook trout.
- *High Banks Lake (Chippewa County)*: Current regulation is Type A with a proposed regulation change to a Type B due to a fish community change (i.e. pumpkinseed sunfish).
- *Lake Superior Offshore Reefs (Stannard Rock and Big Reef)*: The unique fisheries of Big Reef and Standard Rock were discussed, noting increased pressure and the need for proactive measures. Charter data and anecdotal feedback indicate declines in size structure, prompting a proposal to limit daily possession to two lake trout (currently five) with no change in the minimum size limits. The regulation aims to protect unique lake trout populations and prevent overfishing. Ongoing research into hooking mortality and the potential for deep-water releases to reduce mortality will continue.
- *Burbot Daily Possession Limit (Statewide) and Burbot Hoop Netting*: The proposal to limit burbot daily possession to five fish (currently unlimited) was introduced, recognizing their native status and high spawning site fidelity. The proposal is based on the need to protect burbot populations from high harvest and aligns with other Great Lakes species limits. The decision to remove burbot hoop netting permits was explained and is due to inconsistent use and the potential impact on spawning populations. The proposal aims to balance cultural traditions with conservation efforts, ensuring sustainable harvest practices.
- *UP Fisheries Division Team*: The availability of the UP Fisheries Division team for public comments was emphasized. The Northern Lake Michigan Management Unit, covering areas in the western UP such as the Menominee River drainage and the Ford River East, was noted. Darren Kramer, Jen Johnson and John Baumann were identified as key contacts for specific areas within the unit and their phone numbers and email were shared. Contact information for fisheries biologists in the Lake Superior Management Unit, covering areas in the western/central to eastern UP, was shared as well. Cory Kovacs, Kris Nault and Audrey Baetz were identified as key contacts for specific areas within the unit and their contact information was also shared.
- *Council Feedback*
 - **Vice Chair Gorniak** feels the daily possession limit for walleye is acceptable; however, the PSLs between 15-18 inches are too narrow. He suggested it be 15-20 inches making the PSL 20-25 inches, which would fall in line with Wisconsin and Minnesota. **Mr. Kovacs** noted hearing this same suggestion previously. **Mr. Caroffino** explained the methodology of their proactive approach. Discussion ensued.

- **Mr. Kurkowski** asked for clarification on the location of Big Reef. **Mr. Kovacs** stated it is northeast of Grand Island.
 - **Mr. Wright** suggested the possibility of improving winter access to fishing areas. **Ms. Haughey** indicated a need for volunteer partnerships to achieve access. If anyone or group is interested in keeping a site plowed during the winter, please contact her.
 - **Mr. Pershinske** asked if there are any lakes in the eastern UP where stocking isn't helping the lake to produce on their own. **Mr. Kovacs** explained the history and current status of stocking programs for lakes in the area.
 - Sucker River H-58 Replacement and Sea Lamprey Barrier: **Mr. Kovacs** invited Kevin Mann from the US Fish & Wildlife Service to provide an update on the sea lamprey control project on the Sucker River and the H-58 culvert replacement.
 - **Mr. Mann** explained the intermittent barrier effect of the culvert and the need for fish passage. It currently is in fair condition with main access to Muskallonge State Park.
 - Sea lamprey control in the Sucker River: There is intermittent recruitment upstream of H-58. The last treatments of the entire system were in 2010 and 2022, with the 2022 treatment cost being \$228,000. Upstream areas can be difficult to treat and survey.
 - The project proposal is a single project with two main components, H-58 road crossing and seasonal barrier. It would open 20 miles of passage year-round for all species and provide 115 miles of seasonal passage. It would “protect” 95 miles of stream from lampricide (TFM) exposure.
 - Collaboration with various partners is key to achieving the project's goals. Partners include Burt Township, Great Lakes Fishery Commission, Michigan DNR, Superior Watershed Partnership, Green Watershed Restoration, Alger County Road Commission, and the US Fish and Wildlife Service.
 - The timeline for the culvert replacement on H-58 and the construction of a new seasonal sea lamprey barrier was outlined. Construction is expected to start this summer. The design was shown and the location of detours during construction explained.
 - The project benefits include opening free passage to all aquatic organisms. Fish species include but are not limited to longnose sucker, white sucker, brook trout, brown trout, rainbow trout (steelhead), etc.
 - The proposed seasonal sea lamprey barrier location was shown. The seasonal barrier will be up in March/April through June. The State of Michigan will own the structure and the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission and US Fish and Wildlife Service will run the structure. Sea lamprey barrier funds were leveraged and will not cost the state anything. This is due to the collaboration with the organizations mentioned and the funding already available. The plan for barrier construction is in 2026.
 - **Mr. Liebermann** asked what would happen if funding is taken away. **Mr. Mann** indicated the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission will move forward regardless.
 - **Chair Buckingham** thanked **Mr. Kovacs** and **Mr. Mann** for the information provided.
4. Moose Survey Media Links (Stacy Haughey)
- The following online media links pertaining to the recent moose collaring and research project were shared with the Council:
 - Showcasing the DNR: The moose are loose
 - 2025 Western UP Moose Study Media
 - Discovering TV6 You Tube Channel: Moose Collaring Study Episodes
5. Additional Agenda Items Added by Council (Chair Buckingham)
- There were no additional items added to the agenda by the Council.

Committee Activity

1. Policy Impact (Tim Hass)

- **Mr. Hass** discussed two pieces of proposed legislation (HB 4073 and 4074) that would require the DNR to obtain warrants and wear body cameras before searching/entering private property, except for an active violation. DNR fire fighters could be affected by needing a warrant.
- Additional potential issues with the proposed legislation were highlighted, including the allowable seizure of personal property and not having to use local prosecuting attorneys. This legislation would deviate from the DNR's current policy. **Mr. Hass** noted courtroom duty would take up three-quarters of a conservation officer's time under these bills.
- **Mr. Hass** stated the proposed legislation, in its current form, is poorly drafted and emphasized the need for well-drafted legislation to avoid unintended consequences. He offered to provide further analysis and assistance in understanding the proposed legislation upon request.
- Council members cited concerns about the bills' origination, practicality and potential legal implications.

2. Wildlife (Secretary Dey)

- No items of business to report.

3. Fisheries (Vice Chair Gorniak)

- No items of business to report.

4. Other Committee Activity: None.

Next Meeting

1. Next EUPCAC Meeting

- **Chair Buckingham** noted the next Council meeting will be held on Monday, June 16 in person, beginning at 6:00pm Eastern, at Lake Superior State University's Cisler Center.

2. Topic Suggestions for Next Meeting

- **Chair Buckingham** asked Council members to forward any topic suggestions for upcoming agendas to Chair Buckingham, Ms. Haughey or Ms. Dahlstrom. A presentation on the UP Deer Camp Survey Results is currently scheduled for the next meeting.

Public Comments (On Any Topic)

Chair Buckingham opened the floor for public comments on any topic; none were brought forth.

Closing Comments from Council

Chair Buckingham opened the floor for closing comments from the Council and DNR staff; none were brought forth.

Adjournment

Chair Buckingham thanked Council members for their participation and contributions to the meeting and to everyone for attending. The meeting adjourned at 8:48pm Eastern.