

**Eastern Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (EUPCAC)**  
**Meeting Minutes – APPROVED 2/19/25**  
**Monday, December 2, 2024**  
**6:00-8:30pm Eastern**  
**Virtual via Zoom**

**Council Members Present**

Jeff Cox	Tim Hass	Glenn Moll
Steve Dey, <b>Secretary</b>	Bernie Hubbard	Joe Smith
Gary Gorniak, <b>Vice Chair</b>	Robert Liebermann	Tony Wright

**Council Members Excused/Absent**

Tom Buckingham, <b>Chair</b>	Mark Maida	Julie Weist
Ken Collier	Tom Paquin	
Grant Dewitt	Mark Spencer	

**Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff & Guests**

Eric Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division, Newberry  
PJ Costa, Parks & Recreation Division-Trails Section, Newberry  
Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette  
Lt. Skip Hagy, Law Enforcement Division-District 2, Newberry  
Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy, Executive Division, Marquette  
Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Division, Newberry  
Scott Lakosky, Forest Resources Division, Newberry  
Dave Lemmien, Wildlife Division, Sault Ste. Marie

**Call to Order**

At 6:04pm Eastern, **Vice Chair Gary Gorniak** called the meeting to order in Chair Tom Buckingham's absence. He welcomed members of the public as well as DNR staff and fellow Council members.

**Introductions of Council Members/DNR Staff/Public Attendees**

At **Vice Chair Gorniak's** request, **Ms. Dahlstrom** conducted a roll call of attendees from the Zoom participant list. A list of council members was also shown on screen. **Ms. Haughey** provided a brief overview of the Council's advisory role as chartered by the DNR. She then reviewed virtual meeting etiquette and welcomed members of the public who registered to attend: Emma Woelkers from Senator Peter's office, Jan VanAmberg of Manistique, and Craig Lukomski of South Lyon.

**Adoption of Agenda**

**Vice Chair Gorniak** asked the Council if there were any corrections or additions to the agenda; none were brought forth. **Mr. Moll motioned to adopt the agenda as presented; Vice Chair Gorniak supported the motion. Vice Chair Gorniak called for a vote on the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

**Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

**Vice Chair Gorniak** asked if there were any changes to the August 28, 2024, meeting minutes which were distributed to the Council via email previously for review. **Secretary Dey motioned to accept the minutes as submitted; Mr. Hubbard supported the motion. Vice Chair Gorniak called for a vote on the motion. The motion passed unanimously.**

**Vice Chair Gorniak** then asked the Council if there were any changes to the Joint UPCAC October 9, 2024 draft meeting minutes, which were also distributed to the Council via email previously for review. **Secretary Dey**

**motioned to approve the minutes as submitted; Mr. Hass supported the motion. After no discussion, Vice Chair Gorniak called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.**

### **DNR Reports from Division Staff**

Written staff reports were provided to Council members on November 25, 2024. The following brief updates were added.

#### **1. Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy**

- The popular snowmobile trail (Trail 422) to Miner's Castle in Alger County on H-58 was closed Dec. 1. As mentioned at previous meetings, the Alger County Road Commission has decided not to renew an agreement with the DNR to allow usage of 0.8 miles of H-58 near a bridge crossing that has been successfully in existence for nearly 30 years. Alternate re-routes of the trail in this area was explored thoroughly but found not possible due to complex private land ownership. A copy of a letter from Congressman Jack Bergman to the road commission addressing the tragic economic impacts to the area as a result of their decision was shown on screen.

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

- No additional updates to the report.
- Regarding Trail 422 on H-58 mentioned above, a road commission meeting was held earlier today and DNR trails staff will be attending the next one in two weeks. No further recourse has been offered by the road commission at this time.

#### **3. Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Division, Eastern UP**

- **Mr. Kovacs** is the new Lake Superior unit manager for the Fisheries Division. He will be supervising the fisheries biologist in Baraga (Kris Nault) as well as his replacement in Newberry when hired.
- Congratulations and appreciation were given to the Thompson Hatchery staff for their outstanding job on a successful rearing of muskie this fall. With the Wolf Lake Hatchery under construction, Thompson Hatchery picked up the responsibility.
- **Mr. Gorniak** asked about fall walleye survey results from Caribou Lake, noting there were 50,000 walleyes stocked there in the spring. **Mr. Kovacs** further explained the fall walleye index survey process, noting higher than expected walleye catch rates. He indicated he will respond back with the complete results.
- **Mr. Gorniak** asked if there is a listing of lakes in which muskie were stocked. **Mr. Kovacs** stated he will share it with the Council once the database has been updated.

#### **4. Scott Lakosky, Forest Resources Division**

- No additional updates to the report.

#### **5. Eric Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division**

- Construction projects continue, weather permitting, at Tahquamenon Falls State Park, Fayette Historic State Park, Muskallonge State Park, and Brimley State Park.
- **Mr. Dey** noted the new parking lot at Brevort Lake looks great and asked if the bumpers will be marked with snow sticks or something similar. **Mr. Cowing** agrees to check with staff to have it done.

#### **6. Lt. Skip Hagy, Law Enforcement Division-District 2**

- One change to note in the report, on page 10. 21 candidates, not 22, have been selected to attend the next Conservation Officer Academy beginning in January.
- **Vice Chair Gorniak** inquired about the status of a wolf shot in self-defense in Delta County several months ago. **Lt. Hagy** confirmed no prosecution was pursued and it was deemed self-defense. It is standard procedure to have prosecutors review such incidents and make the determination.

## 7. **Dave Lemmien, Wildlife Division**

- Personnel updates include two vacancies, a wildlife biologist position in Shingleton (formerly held by Heather Shaw who took a position with Forest Resources Division in forest certification) and a wildlife technician position in Newberry (formerly held by Jane Roohr who took another position within the DNR). These positions will be filled as soon as possible.

## **Public Comments on Agenda Items Only**

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

## **Old Business**

### 1. Wolf Management Update (Recurring Agenda Topic at Council's Request) (Ms. Haughey & Mr. Lemmien)

- This is a standing agenda item at the request of the Council.
- The wolf surveillance system using trail cameras, with 1,200 cameras deployed in the beginning of 2024 was discussed. The SIM cards in those cameras have been retrieved and research staff have begun the process to analyze over 6 million images recorded. A final report will tentatively be available in late winter or early spring. The wolf track survey will be conducted in conjunction with the camera survey and included in that report.
- An added benefit to the camera survey is the collection of images of all other types of wildlife, such as moose, bear, and fox.
- An additional 100-200 cameras will be deployed next year. Research staff will be collaborating with private landowners to place cameras in areas not previously covered.

### 2. DNR Response to Joint UPCAC Resolution: *Do More to Manage Wildlife in the UP in the State Forest Management Plan* (Ms. Haughey)

- This was a joint resolution from the EUPCAC and WUPCAC. The DNR's response will also be shared at the WUPCAC meeting on Dec. 12.
- The Council was thanked for providing their comments. As the DNR response indicated (shown on screen), the resolution will be recorded in the public input for the state forest management plan.
- Also noted in the response were additional opportunities to provide feedback on the plan at two webinars Dec. 11 and Dec. 18. Feedback by email can be provided at [forestplancomments@michigan.gov](mailto:forestplancomments@michigan.gov) by Dec. 31.
- **Ms. Haughey** explained the overlapping of forestry and wildlife concerns has been discussed extensively, not only at the October NRC meeting but also at the UP Wildlife Habitat Workgroup with a meeting coming up on Dec. 4. The DNR has been prioritizing and working very hard on these concerns.
- Wildlife management is a key focus of the DNR, with timber sales and forest management plans incorporating specific wildlife habitat and management goals. Both the Forest Resources and Wildlife Divisions are jointly responsible for managing the state forest. The discussions between both divisions are very passionate and staff are actively involved. Wildlife habitat is a top priority.
- **Mr. Lemmien** emphasized timber sales as a key tool for habitat management, with public input sought through open houses and sportsman coalition meetings.
- **Mr. Hubbard** stated public input is also accepted during forestry compartment reviews.
- **Mr. Lakosky** added that for those not able to attend the open houses or compartment reviews, emailed comments can be submitted online during comment periods. It is a good, useful way to submit your feedback without a lot of time, commitment or effort. Comments are routinely submitted in this matter and integrated into prescriptions.

## **New Business**

### **1. Preliminary Overview of 2024 Deer Season (Mr. Lemmien)**

- Deer harvest numbers through Nov. 22 show an increase in the UP versus a slight decrease in the lower peninsula. Overall statewide harvest numbers are lagging behind last year at this time, despite a 1% increase in license sales. The reason for a decrease in the lower peninsula is unknown at this time and will be evaluated upon the end of season. The Mackinac Bridge count, which is not scientific, had a deer count of 1,230 as of Nov. 26, up 8% from the same time last year.
- For the UP early archery season, deer harvest was over 4,000 across 15 counties showing an increase of 16% from 2023. Of the 15 counties, 13 showed an increase. Of the remaining two, Schoolcraft County showed a decrease by a few, and Mackinac County reported the same number. Preliminary firearm season deer harvest numbers showed a 15% increase compared to last year.
- Improved antler development and higher birth rates were observed, with many 2.5 to 3.5-year-old bucks brought in. It is well known winter severity has an impact on deer health. Last year's mild winter had a favorable impact allowing food availability to play a significant role in antler development with soft and hard mass being average to above average. Higher nutrition levels in deer also enables them the ability to avoid predators, which can be correlated to the poor nutrition found in several trapped wolves earlier this year. A higher birth rate and weight of fawns have set deer up well for the upcoming winter.
- **Vice Chair Gorniak** questioned the ability to compare the harvest rate without an established population estimate. **Mr. Lemmien** noted the camera survey mentioned earlier may help.
- Concerns were raised about compliance with mandatory harvest reporting, which might affect data accuracy. **Mr. Lemmien** encouraged the Council to communicate to their friends and groups the importance of reporting harvest data to maintain accurate numbers.
- **Vice Chair Gorniak** inquired about the continuation of mail-in surveys; **Mr. Lemmien** will confirm and report back.

### **2. 2024 Fire Season Update (Mr. Lakosky)**

- The 2024 fire season was unusual in the eastern UP, noting unprecedented drought conditions from Sep. 15 to Oct. 31. The drought code records from a weather station near the Seney Refuge broke 50-year records between Sep. 29 to Nov. 1, indicating severe drought conditions. Despite fewer fires in terms of numbers, the fires were difficult to extinguish due to the high drought code.
- Between Sep. 15 and Oct. 31, the eastern UP had 11 fires covering nearly 140 acres. These are the only fires the DNR acted on, not counting those that were put out before they arrived. Statewide, there were just as many fires in October as what normally occurs in April. The east UP was second only to the West UP in occurrence and acreage.
- Assistance was received from the west UP, lower peninsula, federal partners (BIA Forest Service & Refuge, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Forest Service & Refuge) and local fire departments, as well as a 20-person hotshot crew, a Forest Service single engine scooper plane, and a Michigan state police helicopter. A partnership with the state police a few years ago allowed the DNR to purchase a bucket for the helicopter. They utilize for training purposes and reciprocate by helping with fires when needed. The collaboration this fall fire season was amazing.
- Detection of fires was challenging due to deep burning and lack of smoke, leading to fires becoming larger before detection. Hardwood fires were particularly challenging due to leaves burning and blowing across fire lines. The use of leaf blowers and rakes to hold fire lines was an uncommon but effective method employed during the fall season.
- Invaluable training and experience were gained by new hires as well as staff from other units responding to unfamiliar areas when the home unit was handling another fire.
- Notable fires include one near the Tahquamenon River with difficult access and another north of Seney near the Fox River which was easier to access but difficult to contain. There was also a fire on Marquette Island in Lake Huron, which required assistance from the DNR's Law Enforcement Division to access it.

Another fire on an island in Lake Anne Louise was accessed using an amphibious vehicle due to difficult terrain.

- The fire season concluded with a well-deserved break for firefighters, who enjoyed the start of deer season.
- **Mr. Hubbard** recalls similar drought conditions in 1988, when arsonists were caught setting fires.
- **Ms. Haughey** noted the use of drone technology in firefighting, highlighting its ability to detect thermal spots and provide detailed maps of fire areas. **Mr. Lakosky** explained the benefits of drone technology, including better mapping and rescue capabilities, with platforms ranging from \$1,000 to \$10,000. The use of drones can save time and resources, making them a valuable tool in firefighting operations.
- **Ms. Haughey** stated there is a common misconception that all drones, planes and helicopters in the air are DNR-related, such as for bait flights, when mostly they are commercial or medical flights. She suggested a topic on drone capabilities within the DNR at a future meeting.

3. Free Snowmobiling Weekend Date Change & H-58/Trail 422 Update (Mr. Costa)

- The free snowmobiling weekend has historically been held the second week of February, coinciding with the winter free fishing weekend.
- The Snowmobile Advisory Workgroup, along with the Ride Right Committee, voted to suggest moving the free weekend to Jan. 17-19, 2025 with future dates falling on the second weekend of January. It was approved by Parks and Recreation Division chief Ron Olson.
- The change aims to align with International Snowmobile Safety Week, attract more participants early in the season, allowing more opportunities to ride when there is ample snow, as well as reduce conflicts with other winter events.

4. Council Member Term Expirations/Renewals/Selection Process for New Applicants (Ms. Haughey)

- Every two years, terms for half of the council members expire. Those whose terms are expiring Dec. 31, 2024, were shown on screen. All have been contacted and are reapplying for another term.
- Coinciding with staggered term renewals is an application process to fill open seats. There are currently four open seats on the Council and applications have been solicited through a press release. 5 applications were received by the end date. Additional applications for the EUPCAC will be accepted for another week to increase the applicant pool, and members were encouraged seek out those who may be interested.
- The CAC selection team consisting of 3-4 staff and 3-4 public representatives will review applications in early January and select new members to fill the four open seats. Selection is based on a variety of demographics, including experience, counties underrepresented, and interests to name a few.

5. Reminder of Officer Election & Committee Makeup/Chairs at February 2025 Meeting (Ms. Haughey)

- Officer selection (Chair, Vice Chair, Secretary) will be conducted at the February meeting. The current chair is Tom Buckingham, vice-chair is Gary Gorniak, and secretary is Steve Dey.
- Those interested in committee work can express their interest without a formal invitation. Any vacancies for committee leads will also be filled.

6. Additional Agenda Items Added by Council

- There were no additional items added to the agenda by the Council.

**Committee Activity**

1. Fisheries (Vice Chair Gorniak)

- The DNR budget will include funding for cormorant control according to discussions with DNR management. This is a significant development for the Fisheries Division.

- An application for an \$8,000 Fish America grant to stock fish in Brevort Lake was successful and will greatly benefit the community. The contributions of fisheries biologist John Bauman was highlighted and is greatly appreciated.

2. Policy Impact (Mr. Hass)

- The committee has not had a need to meet since the last Council meeting.
- In other matters and related to previous meeting discussion, **Mr. Hass** proposed using amateur radio operators as auxiliary communicators to assist DNR personnel in emergencies. The availability of volunteers in both the UP and statewide to support emergency communications was emphasized, especially at times of short-staffing. These communicators run security for the Mackinac Bridge and are highly trained and experienced. He offered to meet with DNR personnel to discuss the matter further.

3. Wildlife (Secretary Dey)

- The committee has not had a need to meet since the last Council meeting.

4. Other Committee Activity: None.

**Next Meeting**

1. Approval of 2025 Meeting Dates & Locations

- Members reviewed the proposed 2025 meeting dates and locations that were distributed prior to the meeting.
- **Mr. Hass motioned to approve the meeting dates and locations as presented; Secretary Dey supported the motion. After no discussion, Vice Chair Gorniak called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.**

2. Next EUPCAC Meeting

- **Vice Chair Gorniak** noted the next Council meeting will be held on Wednesday, February 19 in a virtual format, beginning at 6:00pm Eastern.

3. Topic Suggestions for Next Meeting

- **Vice Chair Gorniak** asked Council members to forward any suggestions for upcoming agendas to Chair Buckingham, Ms. Haughey or Ms. Dahlstrom.
- **Mr. Wright** expressed an interest in hearing about invasive species issues, specifically musk thistle and hound's tongue, and their impact on managed properties and their association to logging operations. **Mr. Lakosky** stated this topic can be best addressed by DNRs invasive species specialist Simeon Wright and will see if he can attend the next Council meeting. **Mr. Moll** also suggested updates on hemlock woolly adelgid and oak wilt.
- **Mr. Cowing** noted Tahquamenon Falls State Park received funding for seasonal rangers to map hemlock at the park and proactively search for any hemlock woolly adelgid during the last and upcoming winter seasons.
- **Mr. Lemmien** added the DNR collaborates with conservation districts to address invasive species and may be a good resource.

**Public Comments (On Any Topic)**

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

### **Closing Comments from Council**

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

1. **Mr. Hubbard** stated he was notified today that a new Polaris Ranger side-by-side was purchased for their ski committee to groom the ski trail. He thanked Mr. Costa and the Parks & Recreation Division. **Mr. Costa** stated the lead person, Troy, has been great to work with.

### **Adjournment**

**Vice Chair Gorniak** thanked everyone for attending the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 7:28pm Eastern.