

Eastern (EUPCAC) & Western (WUPCAC) Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Councils
Annual Joint Meeting Minutes – APPROVED 1/24/2024
Wednesday, October 11, 2023
3:00-5:00 pm EST
Delta County Chamber of Commerce Multi-Purpose Room, Escanaba

Western Council Members Present

Erik Bessonon	Suzanne Petschke
Floyd Dropps	Horst Schmidt
Barb Gajewski	Kirk Schott, Vice Chair
Dave Hall	Carol Mason Sherrill
Mike Holmes	Jeff Sierpien
Dave Johnson	Tom Solka, Chair
George Lindquist	Dwaine Starr
Chauncey Moran	Lucas Vold

Western Council Members Absent

Skip Schulz	Warren Suchovsky
Kelly Bennett Simon	Faye Williams

Guests

Dave Anthony, NRC Commissioner
Tom Baird, NRC Commissioner, Chair
David Cozad, NRC Commissioner
Carol Rose, NRC Commissioner
John Walters, NRC Commissioner
Julia Cogger, CUPPAD
Craig Cugini, City of Ishpeming
Al Ettenhofer-UP Whitetails Association
Brent Graves
Jim Hammill, SCI Foundation
Merle Jones, MTPCA

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff

Scott Bowen, Director, Lansing
Craig Brunet, Legislation Section, Lansing
Randy Claramunt, Chief of Fisheries Division, Lansing
Eric Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division, Newberry
Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette
Erik Eklund, Chief of Finance & Operations Division, Newberry
Lt. Skip Hagy, Law Enforcement Division-District 2, Newberry
Patrick Hanchin, Fisheries Division, Marquette
Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy, Executive Division, Marquette
Tori Irving, Office of Public Lands, Newberry
Darren Kramer, Fisheries Division, Escanaba
Scott Lakosky, Forest Resources Division, Newberry
Dave Lemmien, UP District-Wildlife Division, Sault Ste. Marie

Call to Order

WUPCAC Chair Tom Solka called the Annual Joint Meeting between the Western (EUPCAC) & Eastern (EUPCAC) Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Councils (CACs) to order at 3:03 pm Eastern. He welcomed everyone in attendance, including DNR staff and the Commissioners of the Natural Resources Commission (NRC).

Eastern Council Members Present

Tom Buckingham, Chair	Mark Maida
Steve Dey	Glenn Moll
Gary Gorniak, Vice Chair	Tom Paquin
Bernard Hubbard	Mark Spencer
Robert Liebermann	Julie Weist
David Lieble	Tony Wright

Eastern Council Members Absent

Ken Collier	Tim Hass
Grant Dewitt	Travis Kangas
Al Garavaglia	Joe Smith

Joe Kaplan, Delta County Conservation District
Richard Larson, Newberry
Nancy Moran
Randy Pearson, Boundary Waters Muskey Club
Jack Thomas, Newberry
Mike Thorman, Michigan Hunting Dog Federation
Amy Trotter, MUCC
Melody Wagner, 109th District Candidate
Emma Woelkers, Senator Peters Office
Craig Woerple, WDBC News
Bill Ziegler, UPSA

Shannon Lott, Resources Deputy, Lansing
Jason Peterson, Facilities & Operation Division, Marquette
Dr. Tyler Petroelje, Wildlife Division, Marquette
Doug Rich, Parks & Recreation Division, Baraga
Brian Roell, Wildlife Division, Marquette
Bill Scullon, Wildlife Division, Norway
Jon Spieles, Chief of Marketing & Outreach Division, Newberry
Jeff Stampfly, Chief of Forest Resources Division, Lansing
Eric Thompson, Forest Resources Division, Escanaba
Sara Thompson, Chief of Wildlife Division, Lansing
Scott Whitcomb, Office of Public Lands, Lansing
Capt. Pete Wright, Law Enforcement Division, Ishpeming

Welcome & Introductions

Stacy Haughey, DNR UP Field Deputy and liaison to the CACs, welcomed everyone in attendance on behalf of the DNR and the East and West UP Council members, including NRC Commissioners, DNR Director Bowen, Resources Deputy Lott, as well as DNR chiefs and staff from Lansing and the UP. She noted Commissioner Dave Anthony was a former Western UP CAC member.

Stacy provided a brief overview of the UP councils, whose primary role is to provide local input and advise the DNR on regional programs and policies, identify areas in which the DNR can be more effective and responsive and offer insight and guidance from members' own experiences and constituencies. Since the CACs began in 2008, they have submitted over 100 resolutions to the DNR for consideration. She indicated these two groups are very collaborative, want to make a difference, have respectful discussions and learn from each other. She thanked them for their volunteerism in serving on the CACs.

EUPCAC Chair Tom Buckingham also welcomed everyone for attending the meeting. He asked council members and those in attendance to introduce themselves.

WUPCAC Chair Solka indicated there will be an opportunity for public comment later on in the meeting and if time allows, updates to the DNR division reports.

Overview of the Office of Public Lands

Scott Whitcomb introduced himself as Director of the new Office of Public Lands (OPL) under the DNR's Executive Division. He also introduced **Tori Irving**, an analyst for OPL based in the UP. Scott spoke about some of the projects they are working on.

- *DNR is a Land Managing Agency:* 3.9 million acres of state forests, 360,000 acres of state parks, and 364,000 acres of state game and wildlife areas.
- *Office of Public Lands Priorities:*
 - Climate and resiliency for natural and working lands.
 - Renewable energy and efficiency at DNR facilities: There currently is a 25-30% savings by transferring to solar energy on a few of the DNR facilities. \$2.2 million is spent with Consumers Energy so finding ways to save those monies is important.
 - Planning, solutions, and strategy for DNR lands portfolio.
 - Chronic wasting disease (CWD) response: This was a statewide issue of high importance, and former Director Eichinger wanted an executive level unified response with communications and strategy.
 - The outdoor recreation economy: 4.6 million acres provides a lot of space for people to recreate. The DNR also wants to play a supportive role to those that make equipment used to recreate outdoors. Public lands can be used as an asset in making products, testing them, etc. A partnership with Polaris was used as an example.
- *Forest Carbon Pilot Project:* The DNR issued a request for proposal (RFP) and contracted with Bluesource/Anew as carbon credit developer. Credit accounting uses American Carbon Registry protocols and Improved Forest Management methodology. Credits are independently verified and sold on voluntary markets.
 - Allows harvest and accounts for durable timber products.
 - DTE Energy has purchased the first 10 years of credits.
 - New project areas registered on the ACR-Wolverine-Copper Country.
- *Brownfields to Green Energy:* Brownfields, including some former mining sites, are often difficult to redevelop due to environmental issues. Constructing large-scale solar arrays on these sites is a way to put public lands back in use to produce clean, renewable energy.
 - Two Potential Sites: Groveland Mine in Dickinson County, a 613-acre former iron mine gifted to the state; and 7 Mile Pit in Crawford County, a 169-acre former sand and gravel mine acquired through tax reversion.
 - Project Description and Benefits: Produce renewable energy by leasing environmentally degraded former mine sites to private developers of utility-scale solar energy projects. Benefits will include repurpose

underused public lands for greater benefit, increase local tax base, and provide locally generated electricity to northern Michigan.

- **CWD Response:** This is a big effort and the DNR will be vigilant. Staff are working on how to get enough samples of deer in the UP.
- **Polaris:** The DNR is partnering with Polaris for off-road/on-road EV charging and an infrastructure pilot. This does not involve state land.
- **Ms. Irving** provided an overview of the projects she is currently working on. They include evaluating the DNR marine fleet (Law Enforcement and Fisheries) and the use of electric boats, EV for off-road vehicles, state forest management plan, evaluating state lands that could be used for utility-scale solar development, and working on the Keweenaw Heartlands Project with The Nature Conservancy.
- **Questions:**
 - **Mr. Lindquist** asked about the purchasing and managing of deer wintering complexes, stating he doesn't see a focus on priority of these lands. **Mr. Whitcomb** mentioned the land cap has ceased and the state can buy more land. They are currently focusing on prioritizing hunting land in the southern lower peninsula, however, as lands in the UP become available, there are funds that can be utilized for that purpose.
 - **Mr. Schmidt** asked if the DNR will be working with Brad Garmon of MEDC for new revenue streams pertaining to outdoor recreation. **Mr. Whitcomb** stated when Mr. Garmon's office moved from the DNR to MEDC, a memo of understanding named Mr. Garmon as a liaison so the relationship can be maintained. **Mr. Schmidt** asked if this partnership would lead into merchandise being placed in DNR facilities in the future. **Mr. Whitcomb** stated there are some concessionaire developments and it is certainly possible.
 - **Mr. Johnson** asked if there is an overlap with Pittman-Robertson (PR) funded lands. **Mr. Whitcomb** replied the US Fish & Wildlife Service was here today to discuss audit findings with the DNR, and when looking at any of these uses, PR lands are looked at very carefully.
 - **Mr. Maida** noted, based on his experience, solar panels in remote locations are very expensive in Michigan than they are in other states because of the amount of cloud cover.
 - **Ms. Mason Sherrill** indicated although there was a presentation at one of the CAC meetings about selling carbon credits, the CAC did not hear both sides. She has concerns with the negativity surrounding carbon credits and with companies who buy carbon credits but still continue to pollute. She stated she does not like public land being sold to companies that continue to pollute. She indicated she is hoping for a presentation on this at a future meeting. **Mr. Whitcomb** indicated he has reviewed the harshest criticisms of carbon credits and noted credits are strictly voluntary and help to offset emissions and contributes to the climate. He stated they are being sensitive to concerns.
 - **Mr. Liebermann** asked if there were maps available of the Keweenaw project. **Mr. Whitcomb** stated the project involves 10,000 eastern most acres and is connected to Fort Wilkins State Park and the state forest lands already there. **Ms. Haughey** noted maps are available online ([Keweenaw Heartlands Project](#)).
 - **Mr. Vold** asked what the contractual time is for carbon credits. **Mr. Whitcomb** stated the contractual time is 10 years with a commitment of 40 years.
- **WUPCAC Chair Solka** thanked Mr. Whitcomb and Ms. Irving for their presentation and willingness to answer questions from the Council.

DNR Budget Overview

Erik Eklund, Chief of the Finance and Operations Division provided an overview of the DNR's budget for Fiscal Year 2024 which runs from October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024.

- **FY 2024 State of Michigan Total Budget by Department:** Of the State's total budget of \$81.7 billion, 92% goes to four areas (Health & Human Services 43.8%, Education 30.5%, General Government 10.1% and Transportation 8.1%). The Department of Natural Resources' budget is 0.7% of the overall state budget.
- **FY 2024 State of Michigan General Fund by Department:** This fund is made up of general tax dollars that can be allocated to different level of services. For FY 2024, Health and Human Services, General Government, Corrections, and Education receive 90%, leaving 10% for all other areas, including the DNR. The DNR's allocation is 0.6% of the overall total of \$15.2 billion.

- *FY 2024 DNR Budget Fund Source Summary:* The DNR's total budget of \$572.3 million is quite large, even though it seems small in the scope of the entire state budget. Total ongoing funding is \$530.3 million from federal state restricted, general fund and private funding. One-time funding is \$42.0 million from federal, state restricted and general funds. Of the DNR budget, two-thirds (2/3) are state restricted fund dollars. These are fees collected through hunting and fishing fees, camping fees, recreation passport fees, etc. One-fifth (1/5) of the budget comes from federal funds which is 14% of the overall DNR budget.
- *FY 2024 DNR Budget Funding Sources:* A variety of funding sources was shown in a pie chart (for example, waterways, park endowment, forest development, game and fish protection, marine safety, snowmobile funds, etc.). Five (5) important funds were highlighted:
 - Federal Funds: This is the biggest pot of funding. Examples of what make up these funds include Pittman-Robertson and Dingell Johnson dollars, which comprise of \$42 million alone.
 - State Park Improvement Fund: From camping fees.
 - General Fund: This is a distinct fund and is a major factor in supporting the DNR's budget.
 - Game & Fish Protection Fund: From hunting and fishing license sales.
 - State Timber Sales.

Federal and state restricted funding is restricted by federal or state law on where it comes from and how it can be used. It comes from a specific purpose or collection and can only be used for certain things. It is very critical to ensure the DNR is distributing these funds in the right categories and using them according to the corresponding laws. The DNR is audited frequently by various agencies, both external and internal, to make sure this is done correctly. For example, the DNR is audited every 5 years on how hunting and fishing license dollars are being used. On a state level, the Office of Auditor General audits the DNR's books annually on major federal programs, performance audits, etc. Internally, the DNR identifies programs for the State Budget Office to assess efficiency. There are several safeguards in place to make sure the DNR is being good stewards of all funds.
- *FY 2024 DNR General Fund Budget:* These funds are restricted for a specific purpose. For FY 2024, the largest portion is going law enforcement, with the next largest going to one-time initiatives, then parks & recreation for the new Nature Awaits Program for 4th graders to go to a state park for free, and next is forest resources which supports the wildfire protection program. The general fund represents about two-thirds (2/3) of the DNR's budget.
- *FY 2024 DNR Budget by Program:* One-quarter (1/4) of the DNR's budget is for state park operations. Fisheries, wildlife and law enforcement represents another quarter (1/4). Forest Resources, capitol outlay and grants are another quarter (1/4). The remaining quarter (1/4) is everything else (communications, customer service, technology, etc.).
- Questions:
 - **Mr. Moran** asked for an explanation of how the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund dollars fit into the mix as well as funding allocated for wildfire firefighting. **Mr. Eklund** explained the trust fund was established within the state's constitution and it reached its cap in 2021 at \$500 million (from gas and oil leasing royalties). The overage goes to the state park endowment fund. He also explained the grant process for the trust fund and due to a recent change in the constitution, 25% of the amount made available for grants by the trust fund board goes towards the acquisition of public land and the rest to public recreation. **Mr. Moran** asked how much money was received from Eagle Mine since 2014; **Mr. Eklund** did not have that information on hand. In response to the wildland firefighting funding question, the key piece is the general fund, the forest development fund (sale of timber on state forest land) and other small pieces.
 - **Ms. Mason Sherrill** asked if the trust fund is part of the land and water conservation fund. **Mr. Eklund** stated they are two separate funds. The land and water conservation fund is a federal source of money and is part of the DNR's annual appropriation.
 - **Ms. Petschke** spoke about market values of large tracts of privately owned UP land and the need to hold on to historical resources.
- **WUPCAC Chair Solka** thanked Mr. Eklund for the very informative presentation on the DNR's budget.

Wolf Abundance Project

Dr. Tyler Petroelje, Wildlife Research Specialist with the Wildlife Division based out of Marquette, provided a presentation on a new research project funded by the Wildlife Division in partnership with Michigan State University: Developing a Cost-Effective Technique to Estimate Wolf Abundance in Michigan. Please see attached presentation for slide details.

Questions from the Council were entertained:

- **Mr. Johnson** asked how private property fits into the project. **Dr. Petroelje** stated cameras are currently placed on public land which includes federal forest land, CFA land with permits and approval, NGOs, some tribal lands and state land. There are no cameras on small private holdings.
- **EUPCAC Chair Buckingham** asked about placing cameras where there is no cell signal service. **Dr. Petroelje** stated cell cameras are not being used because of this issue. Most of the cameras are store-on-board cameras. Cell service is hard to overcome in this project and subscription fees are cost prohibitive.
- **Mr. Lindquist** stated he appreciates the hard work on this great program, and he is excited to hear about the results. He questioned a concern raised on various Facebook sites about the DNR monitoring people with these cameras and feels more education is needed. **Dr. Petroelje** stated the artificial intelligence (AI) software being used to go through the thousands of photos from the cameras blurs all images of people and vehicles prior to staff seeing the pictures of wildlife. No pictures of people or vehicles are viewed or saved by staff. He stated for every camera that is damaged or covered up is less detection of wolf activity. The goal has never been to get photos of people, rather only of wildlife.
- **EUPCAC Vice Chair Gorniak** stated he welcomes this survey and noted one of the differences between sportsmen and the DNR is the way wolves are undercounted. This will help the relationship with sportsmen. He stated sportsmen can help as they know where the wolves are. **Dr. Petroelje** stated this is a new research project and it is being rolled out slowly to other partners to help deploy cameras. They are hoping for an opportunity down the road to have cameras checked by others through partnerships.
- **WUPCAC Vice Chair Dr. Schott** asked if the AI software can differentiate several pics of the same animal. **Dr. Petroelje** stated the technology does exist to do this; however, more training and better cameras would be needed, and it would be costly.
- **Mr. Bessonon** stated if cell cameras were used in certain areas, perhaps an aerial survey could be done on the same day in which a lot of photos are being taken. **Dr. Petroelje** stated with aerial surveys, forest cover does present issues in certain areas. It is also difficult to detect animals outside of winter, which is why GPS collars have been used.
- **Mr. Hall** stated in reviewing the wildlife species detected, he did not notice any cougars. **Dr. Petroelje** stated they have not detected any in this survey to date. In previous work on the UP deer study, there were three incidences of cougars on camera. They do expect to see some throughout the camera survey with the structured camera grid.
- **Mr. Moran** asked how the camera research project is funded and if the general public can donate towards it. **Dr. Petroelje** stated the project is funded with Pittman-Robertson dollars and much of the research is for the DNR Wildlife Division. He is not sure about external funding as he's not involved in that process. **Deputy Lott** added the DNR does accept donations, such as those from SCI, and they are placed in a gift account which can be used for studies like this.
- **Mr. Wright** asked, since the camera sites are not baited, how does the abundance study account for the same animal. **Dr. Petroelje** explained a new class of survey models that look at sampling intervals.
- **Ms. Gajewski** asked about comparing the occupational based pilot study to traditional tracking and if there were any difference in detectables. **Dr. Petroelje** stated it was a feasibility study and it could be scaled up.
- **Mr. Spencer** indicated he has noted a lot of cameras in his area that have tribal stickers on them. **Dr. Petroelje** stated the Soo Tribe is running their own camera surveys; DNR staff has reached out to them about partnering. **Mr. Spencer** stated he also agrees with the need for additional public education.

WUPCAC Chair Solka thanked Dr. Petroelje for his presentation and thanked the Council members for their high level of interest. He stated he can foresee additional updates at future Council meetings.

Public Comments

WUPCAC Chair Solka explained this portion of the meeting and opened the floor for public comments.

1. *Richard Larson, Luce County – Bear Tags for Private Property and Organization of Two Upper Peninsula Sportsmen’s Groups:* Mr. Larson spoke about the development of management units and the need to update size and locations. He stated the size of the Newberry bear management unit is grossly misinterpreted due to the large amount of private property and bear tags should be adjusted. He also spoke about the need to do more for habitat and mentioned the development of food plots on his property.
2. *Jack Thomas, Luce County – Wolves & Other UP Resource Information:* Mr. Thomas spoke about the lack of deer in Luce County and recited statistics on the number of deer 13 years ago to today. He also feels the winter severity index for the eastern UP needs to be adjusted as there hasn’t been as many bad winters as has been reported. He spoke about member hunters at the Hiawatha Sportsmen’s Club on their 35,000 acres and how only 12 bucks were taken last season. He stated he challenges the CAC to request no more doe hunting in the UP and no more hunting at all in the eastern UP until the wolf issue can be resolved. He said trapping needs to occur for wolves and work on a federal delisting needs to happen. He also suggested three NRC meetings be held in the UP since 43% of the land base is here.
3. *Craig Cugini, Marquette County –* Mr. Cugini indicated he was the city manager in Ishpeming. He said that artificial intelligence (AI) is collected on everyone all the time and the DNR should be utilizing this data. He also suggested the DNR should be encouraging the installation of broadband on all trails.

WUPCAC Chair Solka stated he appreciated everyone’s comments.

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Division Updates

Written reports submitted from UP division representatives (see below) were provided to Council members on October 4, 2023. Due to time constraints, no additional updates since the printing of the reports were given. **WUPCAC Chair Solka** encouraged everyone to review the information and if there were any questions, staff would be available after the meeting or questions can be emailed to them later on.

- Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy
- Lt. Ryan Aho & Lt. Skip Hagy, Law Enforcement Division District 1 & 2
- Darren Kramer & Neal Godby, Fisheries Division
- Dave Lemmien, Wildlife Division
- Jason Peterson & Becky Randazzo, Finance & Operations Division
- Tom Seablom & Scott Lakosky, Forest Resources Division
- Jon Spieles, Marketing & Outreach Division
- Doug Rich & Eric Cowing, Parks and Recreation Division
- Ron Yesney, Rob Katona & PJ Costa, UP Trails Program-Parks and Recreation Division

Adjourn

WUPCAC Chair Solka thanked the Council for their commitment and contributions and thanked those in the audience for attending. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 5:13pm Eastern.