Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.)

Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, October 16, 2025-Regular Council Meeting
Meeting Time: 5:00 p.m.
Location: DNR-Pigeon River Country Headquarters, 9966 Twin Lakes Road, Vanderbilt, MI 49795

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Thursday, October 16, 2025, at the DNR Pigeon River Headquarters in Vanderbilt. Chair Doug Reeves called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m., then led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call:

Members Present:

- Mitchell Beach
- Rique Campa
- Barb Curtis
- Sandy Franz
- Matt Hall
- Bill Loney
- Lisha Ramsdell - **Vice-Chair**
- Doug Reeves - **Chair**
- Paul Rose
- Greg Walz
- Bill Wood

Members Absent:

- Ryan Boyer
- Carlos Calderon
- Lance Cottrell
- Zachary Evans
- Ty Ratliff

Ex-Officio & Department Staff Present:

- Shelby Adams
- Steve Buyze
- Raija Claeys
- Neal Godby
- Jordan Hurst
- Mark Monroe

Ex-Officio Absent:

- Jeffrey Clarke
- DNR-Law Enforcement Division (L.E.D.)

Others Present:

- Katherine Benedict

- Janet Benson
- Joe Jurecki
- Judi Jurecki
- Guy Lovelace
- Brian McPhail
- John Paige
- Sandy Schmidt
- Stewart Smith
- Kevin Stewart
- Dave Wilson

Chair's Opening Remarks – Doug Reeves:

Chair Doug Reeves welcomed all to the October 2025 meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. Doug thanked everyone who organized, educated, and transported the group during the tour of Cornwall Creek Flooding. The tour also encompassed a view of a new trail to prevent erosion leading down to one of the sinkhole lakes, an oak wilt site at Walled Lake, and a breathtaking view of Walled Lake from the dock.

Chair Reeves then asked that moment of silence be shared in remembrance of Don Horrocks who passed away. Don represented the Cheboygan County Board of Commissioners on the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council.

Motion by Rique Campa, supported by Barb Curtis for the P.R.C.A.C. to send a card to Don Horrocks' family with notes of the numerous years of service that Don has served on the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council with passion. The motion was approved unanimously.

Agenda:

Motion by Greg Walz, supported by Bill Wood to accept the meeting agenda for October 16, 2025. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, the agenda was approved unanimously as presented.

Minutes:

Motion by Matt Hall, supported by Vice-Chair Ramsdell to accept the July 17, 2025 meeting minutes as presented. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, the minutes were approved unanimously as presented.

Public Comment:

Chair Reeves mentioned that some years ago it was stated that the Pigeon River Country State Forest (P.R.C.S.F.) was an underutilized resource. Chair Reeves reflected on his observations from the many activities that went on during the fall of 2025 and stated, "the dust rarely gets to settle". He does not believe that it is underutilized any longer and that the P.R.C.S.F. is getting a lot of publicity and many visitors.

Old Business:

Cornwall Dam Update – Neal Godby/Lisha Ramsdell:

Per Lisha Ramsdell, the project is moving right along. The most recent communication received has conveyed that the project will be substantially completed by November 10, 2025. In the spring of 2026, it is expected that there will need to be some touch-up work done concerning erosion control and revegetation. After the dewatering of Cornwall Creek Flooding, there was some chronic seepage going on in the berm. Sheet piling was used to remedy the issue and protect against further seepage. At present, the contractor is working on the drop tube structures that carry the water down to Cornwall Creek. It has been very dry and the water level in the impoundment is lower than the grade control

structure. Per the permit, there is supposed to be water flowing through to Cornwall Creek. E.G.L.E has authorized through the rest of the construction that the lack of flow from the impoundment is all right. Further down Cornwall Creek there is a lot of groundwater input into Cornwall Creek that will aid in the flow. Lisha did mention that the contractors conveyed that there has been some equestrian use trying to get over the berm, so it needs to be clearly marked as it is not safe and stops construction.

Neal Godby mentioned that they are also working with E.G.L.E on when to put the boards in and fill up the impoundment, this fall or in the spring. Aluminum stop logs will be put in that will lock to prevent theft and unauthorized lowering of the pond. In the future, if the impoundment needs to be lowered for some reason that option will be available.

Standing Committee Reports:

Aquatic Resources and Fisheries Management – Greg Walz:

Greg Walz reported that the committee has not met since the last council meeting. He reminded the group of the potential for a collaborative project between the DNR and perhaps Michigan Trout Unlimited (Michigan T.U.) to do some habitat mapping on the Pigeon River to be supported by DNR funding. Bryan Burroughs from Michigan T.U. told Greg Walz that he, Paul Rose, and Tim Cwalinski met in the field, surveyed the Pigeon River, and discussed the work Michigan T.U. is willing to do. The next step will be to hopefully secure grant funding and a motion has already been approved in a past meeting for the letter of support for the project.

Forest Cover and Wildlife Management – Rique Campa:

Rique Campa reported that the committee has not met since the last council meeting. Rique and Doug Reeves have continued to receive a few variances for the 2025 Ice Storm damage.

Resource Use and Extraction – Sandy Franz/Mark Monroe:

Sandy Franz reported that the committee has not met since the last council meeting.

Recreation and Access – Paul Rose:

Paul Rose reported that the committee has not met since the last council meeting. Access continues to be impacted in many locations due to the 2025 Ice Storm.

Education and Engagement – Bill Wood:

Bill Wood reported that an Education and Engagement Committee meeting was held on October 8, 2025. A copy of the Education and Engagement Committee report from the October 8, 2025 meeting and a Draft copy of the revised Education and Engagement Plan were both made available to all individuals in attendance at the meeting on October 16, 2025. Bill Wood conveyed that one of the goals of the revised Education and Engagement Plan is to create an internal document that helps to perpetuate the accumulation of knowledge as P.R.C.A.C. members leave, and new members are appointed. Bill stated that the sharing of information will help the P.R.C.A.C. members be better ambassadors for the P.R.C.S.F. It was supported by many individuals at the meeting that the revised Education and Engagement Plan will be a useful tool in educating those members that are new to the P.R.C.A.C, for those members and close collaborators that want to continue their education of the P.R.C.S.F., and be utilized to convey knowledge to those parties outside of the of the P.R.C.A.C, such as, legislators.

Discovery Center (D.C.) – Sandy Franz:

Sandy Franz reported that the new geology exhibit is available to view at the Discovery Center and the last day the Discovery Center will be open is October 26, 2025.

Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee (P.R.C.E.C.) – Barb Curtis:

Barb Curtis stated that the P.R.C.E.C. has not met since the last meeting, but that they have a meeting scheduled for next week. Barb mentioned that the camping has been very nice in the P.R.C.S.F. since the spring of 2025.

New Business:

Explorer Guide P.R.C./Discovery Center (D.C.) – Katherine Benedict:

Katherine Benedict presented the following information to the group via a PowerPoint presentation.

Katherine has been working as a Program Manager for the Discovery Center during the spring and fall of 2025, and she just concluded her summer position working as an Explorer Guide for the Marketing and Outreach Division (MOD) of the DNR. It is important to note that the Program Manager position with the D.C. was the first time that the D.C. was able to fund a staff member. Previously, the D.C. was an all-volunteer organization. This summer also marked the first time that there was an Explorer Guide assigned to a state forest. Katherine emphasized that both of her jobs supported the same purpose, "To further the nature education at the Discovery Center with the goal of creating a new generation of stewards for the P.R.C.S.F.". Katherine presented on the various program offerings that she conducted and facilitated throughout the spring, summer, and fall arising from the two positions. Katherine mentioned that, in the past, the D.C. was able to offer maybe eight to twelve programs per year. As a result of the newly implemented positions, the number of programs increased substantially. Multiple programs were offered every weekend, and the D.C. and the Pigeon River Country Headquarters were open more to the public. Katherine assisted twenty-nine individuals in observing their first Michigan elk in the wild. Katherine discussed the opportunities that the D.C. participated in this season to increase outreach to the gateway communities surrounding the P.R.C.S.F. Many individuals did not know about the P.R.C.S.F. or the D.C.

Katherine stated that she would love to stay on with the D.C. for another year, but in order for that to happen, funding needs to be secured via donations and grants. At present, Katherine does not know if the pilot Explorer Guide position assigned to the P.R.C.S.F. will be renewed. Katherine did find out just before the meeting the D.C. received a grant from the Otsego Community Foundation in the amount of $10,000.00. Katherine stated that she needs letters of support from the P.R.C.A.C. for future grants for which she will be applying, and she needs a letter of support from the P.R.C.A.C. in support of the renewal of the Explorer Guide position in the P.R.C.S.F.

Motion by Paul Rose, supported by Greg Walz for the P.R.C.A.C. to ask the Department of Natural Resources (Department) to continue the Explorer Guide position in the P.R.C.S.F. A letter of support will be composed, signed by each P.R.C.A.C. member, and sent to the Department. The motion was approved unanimously.

Motion by Sandy Franz, supported by Vice-Chair Ramsdell for the P.R.C.A.C. or a subset of its members to prepare a letter of support for the programming efforts at the Discovery Center, some of which, would be of general applicability and, some of which, would be tailored to a specific grant or program. The motion was approved unanimously.

Requests for Council Action in between meetings – Doug Reeves:

Chair Doug Reeves stated that since the July 17, 2025 meeting, there have been two occasions where he was asked to write letters on behalf of the P.R.C.A.C. Chair Reeves stated that he was not comfortable speaking as an individual for the entire council and asked for input from the group as to how to remedy this situation. A discussion ensued and many viable options were explored. It was mentioned that possibly at a future meeting some of these governance pieces can be addressed so that everyone feels comfortable with the process.

Election of Chair and Vice-Chair:

Paul Rose stated that the amended Articles of Organization made it so the Chair is able to serve a two-year term that is limited to two consecutive terms and is confirmed annually by the P.R.C.A.C. members per the Concept of Management. Chair Doug Reeves began his first term in January 2024 and has expressed the willingness to continue to serve. The Nomination Committee reached out to the full council and no other nominations were proposed. The

committee is unanimously recommending to the full P.R.C.A.C. that Doug Reeves' name be offered in nomination for Chair and that Leesha Ramsdell's name be offered as Vice-Chair to continue their service for another two-year term which would be confirmed annually.

Motion by Paul Rose on behalf of the Nomination Committee, supported by Barb Curtis of the formal nomination and proposed motion that Doug Reeves and Lisha Ramsdell be offered, their names, as Chair (Reeves) and Vice-Chair (Ramsdell), that the floor be closed to further nominations, and their elections be cast in a unanimous ballot. The motion was approved unanimously.

Ex-Officio Reports:

P.R.C. Unit Report – Mark Monroe:

Mark Monroe presented the following information to the group via a PowerPoint presentation.

- The Pigeon River Country FMU ended up completing 28 timber sales that included 2,216 acres for the 2025 fiscal year. A normal year consists of 20 sales for around 1,000 to 1,200 acres.
- The focus at present is finishing aspen salvage and then focusing on hardwoods for the next year.
- There is a renewed effort on the opening of roads which is focusing on the 12-county ice storm area. This is being led by an IMT where the first priority will be the high snow belt areas and then working east. Several roads are still closed and there is still much work to be done.
- Building demolition was completed in the P.R.C.S.F. utilizing funds contributed by the Executive Division. The Parks and Recreation Division (PRD) construction crews out of Cheboygan and Grayling completed the work. The structures that were taken down were the Castle pole barn, the pole barn at Walled Lake, and Steven's cabin,
- Mark provided an update on the State Forest 1-14 Oil Spill that occurred on April 16, 2025, and elaborated on the data from his presentation showing monthly vegetative decline for the months of June 2025-August 2025. Successive drone flights were utilized and will continue to identify the impacted area and cover type damage from the oil release. Mark stated that vegetative damage correlates to water quality issues because it is killing the vegetation. The vegetation shows the extent of the impact of the release. The DNR is working with Lambda to simplify some of the clean-up methods such as installing a parallel pipeline to take the oil to the disposal well to minimize trucking.
- A second pocket of oak wilt, which included two trees, was found at Walled Lake. It will be treated by cutting the root grafts, then cutting down the trees, and then burning the spore-forming trees.

Wildlife Report – Shelby Adams:

Shelby Adams presented the following information to the group via a PowerPoint presentation.

- Results from the 2025 Michigan elk hunt period 1 (August-October). There were 100 licenses issued (30 any and 70 antlerless only).
- A total of 51 elk were harvested (26 bulls were harvested + 1 Pure Michigan (PM) bull and 24 antlerless). Shelby stated that this is lower than in recent memory. The entirety of the elk range was impacted by the 2025 Ice Storm as far as the way the elk move across the landscape and impacted access for the hunters as well.
- The elk camera project is hopefully going to prove to be a cost-effective way to provide a population estimate with increased flexibility. An aerial survey will be conducted in January 2026 and the data captured from the two models will be compared.
- 204 cameras were placed across the elk range, 45 were in the P.R.C.S.F., and were out continuously from July-early October 2025.
- Technicians from the Michigan Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Lab are reviewing all of the pictures and data.

- The majority of the cameras were placed on public land, but there were some larger private landowners that had some cameras set up on their property.
- The native grassland restoration project funded by a grant from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (R.M.E.F.) to benefit elk and other edge species is still ongoing in the P.R.C.S.F. The 109-acre area has been sprayed to eradicate undesirables, and high-quality seed will be planted in the fall and winter of 2025. Follow-up spaying will occur in the spring of 2026, if it is needed. The sites will be subject to ongoing monitoring and spraying if it is needed in the future.
- The habitat work that was conducted in the fall of 2025 included 127 acres being planted in the elk viewing areas and 180 acres mowed. Habitat work was not able to be done in the spring due to the 2025 Ice Storm.
- Deer season is coming up and Shelby mentioned that all deer harvested must be reported within 72 hours. The harvest may be reported online to the website, Michigan.gov/DNRHarvestReport or by logging in to eLicense.
- TB testing is available at the Atlanta and Gaylord deer check stations.

Fisheries Report – Neal Godby:

- The Northern Lake Huron Management Unit (N.L.H.M.U.) where Neal is a fisheries biologist covers most of northeast Michigan and the eastern Upper Peninsula. Two of the fisheries technicians retired in June 2025 and as a result, it was an extremely busy summer for the unit. Recently, approval was given to hire two new fisheries technicians on a limited-term basis. The technicians have been hired and the N.L.H.M.U. is very excited to be more fully staffed.
- Two locations were surveyed on the Black River, Blue Lakes Road and Tin Shanty Bridge. The reports have not been written yet, but preliminary data showed that in that reach of the Black River, the pounds per acre biomass of the brook trout is up quite a bit. Neal ran the population estimates and the number per acre is within historical range, roughly the same number of fish, but bigger.
- Every year the N.L.H.M.U. has a number of trout-managed lakes that are stocked with trout; there are quite a few in the P.R.C.S.F. Each year the unit tries to evaluate some of the lakes to look for survival and growth of the fish stocks. This year they will be evaluating Pickerel Lake and Neal stated that he is hoping to provide a report of the findings at the January 2026 meeting.
- With help from Michigan T.U., the Upper Black River Council (U.B.R.C.), and other volunteers, temperature data concerning the Pigeon River and Black River watersheds continue to be gathered. Neal stated that he has most of the temperature loggers back. He plans on downloading and summarizing the data over the winter to look for changes.
- There was brief discussion regarding the navigability of the Pigeon River after the 2025 Ice Storm. It was stated that much of the clearing has been left up to the anglers. There are portions of the Pigeon River that are clear enough to get a kayak down, but there is much work to be done. A normal half an hour float could take anywhere from two to five hours.

Recreation Report – Jeff Clarke:

Jordan Hurst presented on behalf of Jeff Clarke.

- 95% of the equestrian trails are open.
- Jacob and Jordan are the only two high lift operators in northern Michigan. Due to the 2025 Ice Storm, they were both asked to assist in the 2025 Ice Storm efforts all over northern Michigan. As a result, they got a late start on the campgrounds and trails in the P.R.C.S.F.
- The walking trails are completely open and the painting of trees along the trails is on the agenda.
- The only campground that is still closed is Johnson's Crossing Campground. Jacob and Jordan were assigned to the campground for two full weeks and only about 30% of the cleanup is done. The lift that they were using was reprioritized to some of the state parks in the area. They will have to finish the project in the spring of

2026. The campground itself has been cleared, but the high lift work still needs to be done. One campsite can take three to four hours. Bringing extra help and an extra high lift in the spring has been discussed.

- The solar well for the Elk Hill Group Equestrian Campground is still in process and Jeff has been working on acquiring funding.
- The camping numbers are down by about 56%. There were some campgrounds that did not open until later in the season due to the 2025 Ice Storm.

E.G.L.E. Report – Steve Buyze:

- E.G.L.E. has approved the installation of the parallel pipeline to minimize trucking.
- Lambda's environmental consultant has done some work in the release area, but E.G.L.E. does not agree with Lambda that delineation is complete. A report from Lambda and the environmental consultant will be forthcoming. Until E.G.L.E. gets the report regarding the water and soil sampling that was done, E.G.L.E. cannot determine the extent of the damage.
- At the end of September or early October 2025, an update was provided to E.G.L.E. that showed that around 32,000 barrels of groundwater have been removed from the release area. There is a check dam set up so that the impacted water can be captured and then withdrawn before it continues to the rest of the wetland.
- The plan is to continue the removal of groundwater at the check dam and see what the environmental consultant is going to recommend for further actions.
- The second release that occurred on June 24, 2025 from a flowline due to truck traffic has been resolved from E.G.L.E.'s perspective and they are just waiting for paperwork to close it out.

Law Enforcement Report – L.E.D. Conservation Officer:

A report from the Law Enforcement Division was not provided on October 16, 2025, per Chair Reeves.

Future Agenda Items - Discussion:

Sandy Franz requested that there be an update to the P.R.C.A.C. on the oil spill map.

Chair Doug Reeves mentioned to please forward any other future agenda items to Doug Reeves or Mark Monroe.

Next meeting dates:

January 15, 2026 – 5:00 p.m. Otsego County Library-Second Floor Conference Room

April 16, 2026 – 5:00 p.m. P.R.C. Headquarters Building

July 16, 2026 – 5:00 p.m. P.R.C. Headquarters Building

October 15, 2026 – 5:00 p.m. P.R.C. Headquarters Building

Motion by Vice-Chair Ramsdell, supported by Matt Hall, to accept the meeting dates for 2026. The motion was approved unanimously.

Adjourn:

The meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Monroe, DNR