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

Meeting Minutes

Date: Thursday, January 15, 2026 - Regular Council Meeting
Meeting Time: 5:00 p.m.
Location: Otsego County Library, Second Floor Conference Room, 700 South Otsego Avenue, Gaylord, MI 49735

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Thursday, January 15, 2026, at the Otsego County Library in Gaylord. 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:

- Carlos Calderon
- Lance Cottrell
- Barb Curtis
- Matt Hall
- Zachary Evans
- Bill Loney
- Lisha Ramsdell - **Vice-Chair**
- Ty Ratliff
- Doug Reeves - **Chair**
- Paul Rose
- Kevin Stewart
- Greg Walz
- Steve Warfield
- Bill Wood

Members Absent:

- Mitchell Beach
- Rique Campa
- Sandy Franz

Ex-Officio & Department Staff Present:

- Shelby Adams
- Steve Buyze
- Raija Claeys
- Jeff Clarke
- Neal Godby
- Dan Heckman
- Kerry Heckman
- Mark Monroe
- Mike Shelton
- Cody Stevens
- Jacob Vallance

Ex-Officio Absent:

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

Others Present:

- Peter Aiello
- Karen Chapman
- Rod Cortright
- Tony Dunaske
- Calvin Floyd
- Joe Fullterton
- Paul Fullerton
- Jim Gaffney
- Tanmoy Ganguly
- David Garland
- John Grant
- Edward Harris
- Denise Harris
- Sid Hausding
- Eric Jarema
- Joe Jurecki
- Judi Jurecki
- Bill Keating
- Jen Keating
- Craig Lively
- Guy Lovelace
- Alan Martin
- Sheri McWhirter
- Bev Pekrul
- Keith Pekrul
- Tom Stitt
- Allan Sturza
- Nick Summerland
- Ryan Thompson
- Kevin Wickenheiser

Chair's Opening Remarks – Doug Reeves:

Chair Doug Reeves welcomed the large group to the January 2026 meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council.

Agenda:

Motion by Vice-Chair Ramsdell, supported by Greg Walz, to accept the meeting agenda for January 15, 2026, as presented. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, the agenda was approved unanimously as presented.

Minutes:

Motion by Paul Rose, supported by Bill Loney, to accept the October 16, 2025 meeting minutes, as presented. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, the minutes were approved unanimously as presented.

Public Comment (3-minute limit):

1) A member of the public, who did not provide their name, spoke about the Black River Ranch (B.R.R.) airstrip, the Recreational Aviation Foundation (R.A.F.), and a partnership with the State of Michigan (S.O.M.) regarding the B.R.R. airstrip.

2) E. Harris – Discussed the B.R.R. airstrip, revenue sources within B.R.R., and the Experimental Aircraft Association (E.A.A.).

3) D. Garland - Discussed the Black River Ranch airstrip.

4) T. Ganguly - Discussed the strength of R.A.F. and the Black River Ranch airstrip.

5) T. Dunaske – Had questions regarding Black River Ranch.

6) A member of the public, who did not provide their name – Had questions regarding Black River Ranch.

7) P. Fullerton – Discussed some benefits of a partnership with R.A.F. concerning the Black River Ranch airstrip.

8) T. Stitt - Stated concerns about East Branch Road getting cut off to snowmobile and O.R.V. use, and concerns about stands of mature oak trees contained in B.R.R. that folks would like to see saved.

9) C. Floyd – Discussed the preservation of the historic buildings contained in Black River Ranch.

10) S. Hausding – Mentioned that B.R.R. is a newly acquired property and that the public should be able to utilize it before a bunch of decisions are made. The strength of R.A.F. and their contributions were also discussed.

11) A member of the public, who did not provide their name – Discussed the many benefits of preserving the B.R.R. airstrip for when emergency services are needed in northern Michigan when minutes do matter.

12) A member of the public, who did not provide their name – Discussed keeping the B.R.R. airstrip open so that B.R.R. is more accessible to the public.

13) R. Thompson - Discussed some benefits of a partnership with R.A.F. concerning the Black River Ranch airstrip.

14) A member of the public, who did not provide their name – Discussed the Black River Ranch airstrip and its opportunities.

15) A member of the public, who did not provide their name – Discussed keeping an open mind about the opportunity gather revenue, the opportunity to make people aware the PRCSF and its importance in history, and that there are people that are willing to volunteer.

16) A member of the public, who did not provide their name – Discussed keeping the B.R.R. airstrip open so that B.R.R. is more accessible to the public for camping.

17) A. Martin - Discussed the many benefits of preserving the B.R.R. airstrip.

18) K. Wickenheiser – Discussed some of the benefits of preserving the B.R.R. airstrip that make Michigan nationally unique.

19) A member of the public, who did not provide their name – Discussed how wonderful it would be if all pilots had the opportunity to utilize the Black River Ranch airstrip.

Old Business:

Cornwall Dam Update – Neal Godby/Lisha Ramsdell:

Lisha Ramsdell presented the following information to the group via a PowerPoint presentation.

- The construction of the Cornwall Dam renovation commenced in early September 2025.
- The new water control structure was created and is in place. The old water control structure was demolished and plugged to prevent any seepage going through the old dam.
- Some seepage issues were encountered. As a result, sheet piling was installed into the core of the levee.
- In early December 2025, the weather conditions became prohibitive; therefore, the project was paused. The project has been deemed substantially complete, and the final pieces will be completed in the spring 2026.
- There were several funding sources that guided this project to its fruition. The Michigan Department of Natural Resources (70% of the funding), The Great Lakes Fish Commission (14% of the funding), The Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (10% of the funding), and the Public Campaign where almost 200 donors contributed 6% of the support. The total contributions totaled $2,461,084.00 and $421,559.00 remains to finish up the work in the spring 2026.
- The existing permit through the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy (E.G.L.E.) expires March 10, 2026; therefore, a new permit will have to be secured to complete the work.

Neal Godby stated that it cannot be determined as to when Cornwall Creek Flooding will be at its normal water level as the situation is dependent upon the amount of precipitation received. Adding the stop logs must be done in a very safe, controlled manner to ensure that the structural integrity of the dam is not affected. This process will begin in the spring 2026.

Standing Committee Reports:

Aquatic Resources and Fisheries Management – Greg Walz:

Greg Walz reported that an Aquatic Resources and Fisheries Management meeting was held earlier in the week.

- An application for a Fisheries Habitat Grant available through the DNR will be submitted by Michigan Trout Unlimited (Michigan T.U.) next week. A letter of support was approved by the P.R.C.A.C., has been composed, and was signed by Chair Reeves. This letter will be included in the application packet to the DNR. If received, this grant will help to remedy the excessive amounts of woody debris in the Pigeon River that were a result of the 2025 Ice Storm.
- The group touched on angling access and regulations in the new Black River Ranch property.
- Bill Wood attended the Aquatic Resources and Fisheries Management meeting to discuss how the P.R.C.A.C. subcommittees can aid in the success of the new Education and Engagement Plan. A comprehensive discussion was held that touched on new users, existing users, and the recruitment of new individuals to the P.R.C.A.C.

Forest Cover and Wildlife Management – Rique Campa:

Mark Monroe reported on behalf of Rique Campa that the committee has not met since the last council meeting.

Resource Use and Extraction – Sandy Franz/Mark Monroe:

Mark Monroe reported on behalf of Sandy Franz 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. Paul stated that he would like to convene a Recreation and Access committee meeting open to all P.R.C.A.C. members to talk about some of the issues associated with the planning process for B.R.R. This meeting could incorporate the Department's planning

process for B.R.R. and how all of this coincides with the charge of the traditional management of the P.R.C.S.F. Paul stated that this will help the P.R.C.A.C. members answer questions posed by the public.

Education and Engagement – Bill Wood:

Bill Wood reported that the committee has not met since the last council meeting.

- Bill plans on continuing to attend meetings, discuss, and solidify the metrics that will be incorporated into the Education and Engagement Plan.
- Lisha mentioned that the Education and Engagement Committee would like to get back to offering an orientation to new P.R.C.A.C. members. She also reminded the council members that the committee meetings are not just for council members, but are a great way to bring in expertise and recruit individuals to become part of the P.R.C.A.C.

Special Committee Reports:

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

Lisha Ramsdell reported on behalf of Sandy Franz.

- The Discovery Center is closed for the season, but the group is working on their program offerings for the upcoming year. The complete list of programs should be solidified by March 2026.
- The D.C. will open on April 25, 2026, and there is usually a program or two that will occur prior to the opening. The D.C. will continue to focus on youth engagement and education.
- Lisha stated that it is important to remember that the D.C. is a non-profit organization that is supported by donations.

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

Barb Curtis reported that one meeting has been held since the last P.R.C.A.C. meeting on October 16, 2025. Items discussed were the experiences the group had camping and the trail cleanup. The members of the committee are looking forward to the upcoming year.

New Business:

Property Update – Kerry Heckman - Property Specialist:

Kerry Heckman presented the following information to the group via a PowerPoint presentation. Kerry stated that it was a very active year for land transactions within the P.R.C.S.F.

The first land transaction that Kerry discussed was the Camp Pishtoning/Schock land exchange which was completed on August 27, 2025. The private land that was offered to the DNR by the Shock family totaled 139.5 acres and the state land that was desired by the Shock family amounted to 160 acres. Kerry stated that it is not a normal practice to entertain land exchanges in the P.R.C.S.F., but the benefits of this land exchange are as follows:

- The state land desired by the Shock family is encumbered by a conservation easement held by Headwaters Land Conservancy; therefore, the DNR knew that by giving the Shock family the property that it was still going to be protected. The private property that the Shock family was offering to the DNR had no protection, but by bringing the private property into state ownership the entire area is now protected.
- After the exchange, the Pigeon River is now more accessible to the public.
- It was discovered that there is equal Pigeon River frontage.
- The private land that was offered to the DNR is completely surrounded by state land.

The second land transaction that Kerry discussed was the 33.8-acre acquisition of the Perry Estate property which was finalized on September 8, 2025. The property is surrounded mostly by state land except for a small area, includes approximately 1,600 feet on Oxbow Creek, and there is access through the property off of Canada Creek Highway. The funding for this acquisition came from the Land Exchange Facilitation Fund. Kerry educated the group on how the funds accumulate and the purpose of the Land Exchange Facilitation Fund. Kerry stated that more than 50% of the state forest land in Michigan came to the state through the nonpayment of taxes through tax reversion. In turn, when the state sells any of those lands for various reasons the proceeds go into the Land Exchange Facilitation Fund and is used when replacement land is purchased.

The third land transaction that Kerry discussed was the acquisition of Doe Lake and Elk Run which was finalized on September 19, 2025. This acquisition included two separate parcels and two different sources of funding. Doe Lake is a 313-acre parcel and Elk Run is a 243-acre parcel; they were funded by a grant from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (M.N.R.T.F.) and a grant from the Forest Legacy Program - Inflation Reduction Act (F.L.P. - I.R.A.). Kerry conveyed that Huron Pines and Little Traverse Conservancy were fantastic project partners concerning the acquisition of these two parcels. Each agency financially held the parcels until the DNR had the grant funding in place. There is access through state land off of Grass Lake Road.

The fourth land transaction that Kerry discussed was the 8,844.11 - acre acquisition of Black River Ranch which was finalized on December 2, 2025. This property adds many attributes to the P.R.C.S.F.; such as, 14 miles of the Black River, East Branch of the Black River, and Stewart Creek. There are three lakes on this property; one of which is Silver Lake, that is a 150-acre lake. The property may be accessed via Clark Bridge Road. There were many partnerships and funding sources that helped this seven-year project reach fruition. The owner of the property first contacted the Little Traverse Conservancy which then directed the owner to the State of Michigan (S.O.M.); they have worked closely with the DNR throughout the process. The Rock Mountain Elk Foundation (R.M.E.F.) made their largest contribution to a land protection project in Michigan to date. The JA Woollam Foundation and The Nature Conservancy were also project partners and contributed. The B.R.R. acquisition was supported by grants from the M.N.R.T.F. and the F.L.P., private funds, and a bargain sale from the owner.

Kerry communicated the next steps regarding Black River Ranch:

- A complete assessment must be conducted regarding the property, buildings, and infrastructure.
- The public engagement process must be determined for access, use, and management.
- There are several statues and documents that will need to be followed and will aid in guiding this process. There are requirements that need to be followed concerning some of the funding sources contributed to B.R.R., and the Concept of Management which guides the management of the P.R.C.S.F. will also be considered.

Lastly, Kerry shared some exciting statistics concerning the P.R.C.S.F. for the months of September 2025 through December 2025:

- 9,432.91 acres were acquired and are now part of the P.R.C.S.F.
- The federal funding contributed to the P.R.C.S.F. via the Forest Legacy Program totaled $10,911,750.00
- The funding that was provided by the State of Michigan totaled $5,961,250.00 from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund ($5,847,250.00) and from the Land Exchange Facilitation Fund ($114,000.00).
- Private funding totaled $2,000,000.00
- The total funding contributed to the P.R.C.S.F. between the months of September 2025 through December 2025 totaled $18,873,000.00

State Forest 1-14 Spill Update – Nick Summerland - Lambda Energy:

Nick Summerland from Lambda graciously provided an all-encompassing view from his perspective to the P.R.C.A.C. regarding the leaking flowline that was discovered on April 16, 2025. The State Forest 1-14 is located in Cheboygan County within the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

- Nick stated that a routine maintenance operation was being performed on the flowline. The fluid that was expected to return to the facility did not make it. Lambda immediately shut down the pump trucks and went looking for the problem. Nick Summerland was the first Lambda employee on site to see the spill. Lambda initiated their emergency response right away. Due to the 2025 Ice Storm in late March 2025, the group had to cut their way in and clear trees just to get to the flowline and start recovering the oil. The next day they consulted the DNR and E.G.L.E. on how to go about building roads to completely encapsulate the oil-impacted area. At the same time as the construction of the roads was going on, the environmental contactor working with Lambda was on site investigating, providing preliminary information, and advising all parties involved. At present, the investigation process is still ongoing.
- In the three or four days it took Lambda to build the berm to contain the oil, it was discovered that another production fluid, brine, had had skirted across the surface of the wetland and headed to the north. Nick stated that fortunately based on the data from the ground sample points that have been taken over time, the level of brine is going down. Out of necessity, the emergency response and investigations transitioned right into a remediation operation. They started installing sumps to collect the oil which was mostly on the surface and what they found was that any of the groundwater or any water that was collected by the sump pumps was basically contaminated with brine; the water had a high concentration of chloride. Initially, sumps and vacuum trucks were being utilized 24 hours per day for removal. Later in the process, Lambda worked with the DNR on an easement for a new line to automate the removal process. Lambda was able to connect to an idle line that was good and utilize the old line that had failed as their remediation line to return the contaminants to their facility. This process may only be utilized in the warm months due to the pipelines and flowlines freezing. As a result, Lambda has resorted to using vacuum trucks once again during the winter. They send a truck once per week to recover a load of water to keep the process moving forward.
- Lambda has been working with E.G.L.E. on a separate issue involving two feeder creeks that flow into Canada Creek. A plan has been approved by E.G.L.E. that involves Lambda doing monthly sampling in several different areas until it warms up.
- Nick Summerland confirmed that restoration of the site is absolutely part of the clean-up process. It will include their environmental contactor and wetland specialist. Lambda will also consult with the Water Resources Division (W.R.D.) of E.G.L.E. to assist with the restoration process. Lambda is currently working with two individuals from the Forest Resources Division of the DNR to identify the type of soil that should be brought to the area that is free from invasive species to ensure the situation is not made worse.
- Estimates concerning the release are approximately 221 barrels that includes a combination of oil, brine, and natural gas condensate.

Emerging Issues:

There were not any emerging issues reported at the P.R.C.A.C. meeting on January 15, 2026.

Ex-Officio Reports:

P.R.C. Unit Report - Mark Monroe:

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

- The 2027 Y.O.E. inventory was not able to be completed due to the 2025 Ice Storm; therefore, the 2027 Y.O.E. inventory and the 2028 Y.O.E. inventory must both be completed in 2026.
- The inventory dates have been extended out to the fall and early winter of 2026.

- Pre-Review - October 6, 2026 - Internal Co-Management Discussions. In a normal year, these discussions would occur in May.
- Public Comment Period – November 6, 2026 through December 8, 2026
- Open House – December 8, 2026 – In-Person Public Comment 2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m. – P.R.C. Headquarters
- Compartment Review – December 17, 2026 – P.R.C. Headquarters
- The 2025 Timber Sale Plan of Work was pretty much bypassed due to the 2025 Ice Storm. The Pigeon River Country Forest Management Unit (P.R.C. - F.M.U.) prepared over 2,000 acres of salvage wood for sale in the 2025 fiscal year. As a result, the F.M.U. still has the 2025 Timber Sale Plan of Work, the 2026 Timber Sale Plan of Work, and the hardwood assessments for the hardwood salvage wood left to contend with for the 2026 fiscal year. This could result in approximately 3,000 acres of timber to prepare for sale. Mark stated that there is no way to reach that goal for the year; therefore, the F.M.U. will prepare 1,000 acres for sale. Mark stated that the Pigeon River Country F.M.U. will meet internally with Cody Stevens and other staff to prioritize the 1,000 acres for the 2026 fiscal year and they will be playing catch up for the next couple of years.
- The oak wilt site at Walled Lake - the vibratory plow was used to sever the roots; the trees will be cut down and burned in the winter 2026.
- Indicators of oak wilt – Around the month of August, if an oak tree has lost all of it leaves and the leaves that are on the ground are all green. Also, when the fruiting bodies develop from the fungus, the smell of something that resembles the smell of Juicy Fruit gum will be emitted. That is the smell that attracts the insects to the pad.

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 2 (December 13 - 21). There were 160 licenses issued (50 any elk and 110 antlerless only).
- A total of 104 elk were harvested (40 bulls were harvested + 1 Pure Michigan (PM) bull and 63 antlerless).
- There has been a downward trend over the past few years for hunt period 1. There was a 50% success rate for the 2025 Michigan elk hunt period 1 (August-October). The success rate for the 2025 Michigan elk hunt period 2 (December 13 - 21) was 64%. Shelby advised that there are many factors that could be affecting the success rates. There were many access issues in the woods and roads that were open in past seasons may not have been accessible in 2025 due to the 2025 Ice Storm. The elk movement and where they were after the 2025 Ice Storm was not normal. Shelby stated that the weather and temperatures can also affect the success rates.
- The aerial surveys utilizing fixed-wing aircraft are being conducted right now to survey the elk. The snow cover and having the right weather conditions are very important for the accuracy of the survey. Three planes are being used this year rather than two and the group is about halfway through the survey.
- There are a variety of other research methods being utilized to survey the elk. The data acquired from these other methods will be compared to the data collected from the aerial surveys. The remote camera study will continue in 2026 and tooth collecting and aging will occur. A gift was received from the Dallas Safari Club in the amount of $60,000.00 to be used on an infrared aerial survey as well.
- The remote camera survey will run from 2025 – 2027 in the months of July – October of each year. This research is being done collaboratively with Michigan State University. The data achieved from 2025 will be forthcoming.

- Shelby discussed the fact that 2026 is regulation year for elk; therefore, there are some proposals that will be presented to the Natural Resources Commission (N.R.C.) to potentially affect the elk hunts.

- A proposal has been created to change season dates for hunt periods 1 and 2. Hunt period 1 would run from the second Saturday in September - second Sunday of October. Hunt period 2 would run from December 1 – 15.

- A proposal has been created to require that the harvest be reported the day of the harvest and could be reported online.

- Lastly, it has been proposed that the elk be sealed and samples collected within 72 hours rather than within the current 24 hours.

- There was a brief discussion led by Chair Reeves, regarding the numbers of people travelling to the P.R.C.S.F. from all over Michigan to observe and photograph the Cassin's Finch at the CCC fields. Other unique birds found in the P.R.C.S.F. are Pine Grosbeaks and Bohemian Waxwings.

Fisheries Report – Neal Godby:

Neal Godby presented the following information to the group via a PowerPoint presentation.

- Neal discussed which lakes received brown trout and which lakes received rainbow trout within the P.R.C.S.F. He also reported on the average lengths of the two species in each lake and how many were placed in each lake.
- Neal so discussed that in May 2026 that Silver Lake, contained within B.R.R., will be surveyed for the first time to gain some preliminary data on which to base future management.
- There will be some early fall electrofishing to gain population estimates on trout in the Pigeon River at Song of the Morning Ranch and at Elk Hill. The Black River Springs will also be surveyed.
- Temperature monitoring will continue on the Pigeon River and the Black River working in conjunction with several volunteer groups.

Recreation Report – Jeff Clarke:

- Jacob and Jordan tried to get as much debris cleared from the Johnson's Crossing Trail Camp as they could before the end of the season. They stated that they have roughly two weeks of work left to do in the spring 2026 at Johnson's Crossing Trail Camp.
- Jacob has been plowing in the P.R.C.S.F. The campgrounds that are routinely plowed are the Pigeon Bridge Campground, the Pigeon River Campground, and the Elk Hill Campground. Jordan has been assisting those at the Otsego Lake State Park with their oak wilt situation.
- Jeff mentioned that there have been a few winter campers, but not many.

E.G.L.E. Report – Steve Buyze:

- Steve Buyze informed the group that there is no longer a plan to initiate a horizontal drill on the State Charlton 1-4 Niagaran well. An application has been submitted to initiate the enhanced recovery process. It has been proposed that natural gas will be purchased and injected into the reservoir. It is believed that this process should free up some natural gas liquids that will then be pumped out. Steve stated that they should be able to get back most of the natural gas that they pump in as well. At this time, the application is under review with E.G.L.E.

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

A report from the Law Enforcement Division was not provided on January 15, 2026, per Chair Reeves.

Future Agenda Items - Discussion:

Chair Reeves mentioned to please forward any future agenda items or emerging issues to Doug Reeves or Mark Monroe so they may be added to the next agenda.

Next Meeting Dates:

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

Adjourn:

The meeting adjourned at 7:49 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Mark Monroe, DNR