



# Pigeon River Country Advisory Council

## Meeting Minutes

Location: DNR Pigeon River Headquarters, 9966 Twin Lakes Rd., Vanderbilt, MI 49795

Date: Thursday, April 18, 2024

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Thursday, April 18, 2024, at the DNR Pigeon River Headquarters. P.R.C.A.C. Council member, Paul Rose, called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m., then led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

### **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Mitchell Beach, Ryan Boyer, Lance Cottrell, Barbara Curtis, Sandy Franz, Matt Hall, Bill Loney, Ty Ratliff, Paul Rose, Conan Smith, Greg Walz, and Bill Wood

### **MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Rique Campa, Don Horrocks, Vice Chair Larry Partridge, Lisha Ramsdell, Chair Doug Reeves, and Kyle Yohe

### **EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:**

Shelby Adams, Steve Buyze, Raija Claeys, Jeffrey Clarke, Neil Godby, Dan Heckman, Mark Monroe, and Conservation Officer, Thomas Oberg

### **EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:**

Tim Cwalinski

### **OTHERS PRESENT:**

Katherine Benedict, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki, Andrew Knapp, Guy Lovelace, Glen Matthews, Rob Pallarito, Daniel Peck, Carol Rose, Sandy Schmidt, Stewart Smith, and Kevin Stewart

### **CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS – P.R.C.A.C. Council member, PAUL ROSE:**

P.R.C.A.C. Council member, Paul Rose, welcomed all to the April 2024 meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. Paul explained that due to the passing of Chair Doug Reeves's mother, he was unable to attend the meeting. Paul stated that on behalf of the full council, heart-felt condolences have been passed on to Doug Reeves. Paul stated that Vice Chair Larry Partridge was not able to attend the meeting and that is how it came to pass that Paul Rose was asked to

lead the meeting. Paul ended by thanking the council for the opportunity to conduct the meeting.

## **AGENDA:**

*Greg Walz made the motion to accept the meeting agenda for April 18, 2024, as presented, seconded by Barb Curtis. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, all members present voted in favor to approve the agenda as presented.*

## **MINUTES:**

*Matt Hall made the motion to accept the January 18, 2024, meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Greg Walz. There being no additions, deletions or corrections offered, all members present voted in favor to approve the minutes as presented.*

## **PUBLIC COMMENT (3-minute limit):**

P.R.C.A.C. Council member, Paul Rose, opened the floor for public comment; no public comment was offered.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

### **CORNWALL DAM UPDATE – NEAL GODBY:**

Neal Godby reported that a modification to the prior permit has been submitted to EGLE for safety reasons for the drawdown of up to seven feet. In addition to the EGLE permit modification, a Natural Rivers permit has also been initiated for the drawdown to occur. If the permits are approved in time, the drawdown will occur on June 1, 2024. The drawdown should take six to eight weeks including the staging time and the mandated six inches per day by the EGLE permit. The dam itself will be closed off, but the north parking lot off of Tin Bridge Road will remain open as long as there are not any safety concerns with the staging.

Phase two, which includes the renovation of the dam, is still being planned upon pending the funding piece. Wade Trim is already assessing what needs to be done for the renovation of the dam; those results should be solidified this summer. This spring and summer, bids will be opened to various contractors to perform the work on the dam renovation. The public fundraising campaign being administered by Huron Pines has raised \$47,000 to date. The goal is \$200,000 by June 30, 2024. The other component that is in the works is that EGLE has recommended an increased capacity for the spillway in the design of the new dam to handle larger flows. This is a proactive approach to potential future state regulation changes, so that will be one potential small modification to the existing permit for the new dam design.

Mark Monroe stated that the goal of the Huron Pines public fundraising campaign is \$200,000 but the focus should be on surpassing that goal as the maintenance fees associated with operating the dam are anticipated to increase with new regulations. Neal Godby mentioned that at present the fees are anywhere from \$4,000 to \$5,000 for a three to four-year period associated with the inspection of the dam. It has been mentioned that the inspection fees could increase to \$20,000 for

the inspection cost every three to four years. Basically, the more contingency funds that can be set aside for sustainable maintenance, the better. It was mentioned by Neal Godby that he believes there may be a surplus in funds from the drawdown project as it may not cost as much as originally projected. This surplus can hopefully be applied to the renovation of the dam. He stated that they will know more by the end of August 2024. At present, the major variable that needs to be solved is how much it is going to cost to contract a company to come in and perform the dam renovation. Until that piece is determined the project is in limbo. If for instance the funding is not secured, the dam will remain inoperable, and the waterway will return to a free-flowing stream.

Lastly, Huron Pines is handling the contractual and accounting side of things concerning this project. Huron Pines is going to put out a press release concerning the drawdown, the timing of everything, the reroute, and deterring the public from using the south entrance to the Cornwall Creek Flooding area where there is extremely soft mud. In addition to the press release, Katherine Benedict is going to prepare signage to be posted at key areas while the drawdown and renovation are in motion advising and educating the public on what is going on.

## **STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

### **AQUATIC RESOURCES & FISHERIES MANAGEMENT – GREG WALZ:**

Greg Walz reported that the committee has not met since the last council meeting, but he wanted to discuss the topic of the temperature loggers for the Cornwall Creek Flooding area that was brought up at their last meeting. Greg stated that he had talked to Carl Saunders, the President of the Headwaters Chapter of Trout Unlimited, and Carl stated that they plan on purchasing two brand-new temperature loggers. One will be placed below the dam, and one will be placed upstream of the dam to monitor the temperatures during the drawdown. Carl will work in conjunction with Neal Godby to ensure the temperature loggers are properly placed.

Greg also mentioned that he brought some copies of Michigan Trout Magazine. There is a short article on the overview history of the Pigeon River, and the Advisory Council. He encouraged everyone to take a copy. Paul Rose complimented Greg on the article, stated that it was very well done, and thanked Greg for sharing the tremendous story with a new audience.

### **FOREST COVER & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT – RIQUE CAMPA:**

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

### **RESOURCE USE & EXTRACTION – SANDY FRANZ/MARK MONROE:**

A Resource Use and Extraction Committee meeting was held on April 4, 2024. Sandy very graciously thanked all those that took the time to attend the RU & E Committee meeting and provide information and clarification to the committee. There were three items on the agenda. No action was required on behalf of the committee, but Sandy Franz wanted to bring this information to the full council because, especially the first issue, does point to the continuing long-term nature of oil

and gas in the PRCSF. The first informational item on the agenda was that Core Energy plans to petition EGLE to drill two CO<sub>2</sub> injection wells, and two oil-producing wells in the annexed area. This is a complicated situation which will require some time to sort out because while the surface activity where the rigs are is in the Annexed Area, the bottom holes penetrate an oil and gas reef that is contained in the Consent Area. Many questions about the proposed work will require review by EGLE, by the DNR's Mineral Management Division, and by the Attorney General's office. A partial list of questions includes, but is not limited to, 1. Does this activity constitute an oil and gas development in the Consent Area? 2. Might this result in adverse draining of minerals/revenue from the State of Michigan? 3. Does it conform to/is it allowed by the prior Unit Operator agreements, and the other long-standing legal documents that govern the Consent Area? The timeline for this project is long. In addition to the time required for legal and administrative review, the CO<sub>2</sub> wells will be drilled first, the reef will then be flooded with CO<sub>2</sub> to increase the pressure for up to four years, which is when Robert Mannes, President & CEO of Core Energy, estimates the actual oil and gas production will begin. Steve Buyze from EGLE explained the process Core Energy will need to go through to obtain a drilling permit. Core Energy will first need to submit an application to EGLE. The application will then be reviewed and compared to the rules subject to Part 615. If Core Energy complies with it, a drilling permit can be issued. As mentioned previously, for this specific permit, many things are going to have to be answered by the Attorney General's office.

The second informational item was a partial assignment of an oil and gas lease in the Annexed Area from Riverside Energy to Core Energy. This assignment was only for part of the acreage contained in the original lease, and only for the geologic strata lying below the base of the Dundee Formation, that is the deeper oil-bearing strata. Riverside's main development has been the Antrim gas wells. Core energy has been operating the deeper Niagaran wells, but with this lease agreement increases its ownership interests.

The third informational item was a permit request from Emerson Geophysical to perform seismic operations in the Annexed Area of approximately 450 acres. Permit conditions for seismic exploration are more stringent within the PRCSF and include hand drilling of source holes, use of wireless receivers so no brushing of seismic lines is needed, and activity can only take place on properties currently leased and with documented permission. It has not been determined if any oil and gas development activity might follow from the results of the seismic work.

#### RECREATION & ACCESS – PAUL ROSE:

A Recreation and Access Committee meeting was held on April 10, 2024. Paul Rose referred all to the report contained in each meeting packet. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the implications that the Cornwall Creek Flooding dam drawdown will have on the existing equestrian trail. There were several trail rerouting options explored by Mark Monroe and staff together with the Parks and Recreation Division (PRD). One example of a possible rerouting option was that of creating a temporary trail, but then that option entailed creating a temporary bridge. After further analysis of this idea, it was determined that, if by chance, something catastrophic occurred during the drawdown this option might pose some risk to the riders, and the safety of the riders must be of the utmost importance. Therefore, the recommendation from the Department is to use the existing

roads, Osmun and Tin Bridge Roads, and the existing infrastructure to create a temporary reroute of the trail during the six to eight-week drawdown.

Jeff Clarke stated that signage for the reroute will be posted everywhere to give all of the riders a heads up on what is closed, and the type of work being performed. The signage will be at all of the campgrounds, on the trail itself, and posted at the PRCSF Headquarters. The Cheboygan County Road Commission (CHCRC) is going to allow a couple of signs to be displayed as well. As mentioned earlier in the meeting, there will also be a press release before the drawdown commences. If this recommendation is accepted, Paige Perry, our trails specialist will take the proper steps for the reroute. Jeff Clarke stated that it is actually just a small section that is going to be closed. PRD will work closely with Mark Monroe and staff to create some sort of safe barricade using snow fence up by the dam and then a more structurally sound piece, like a gate, on the actual trail itself. We are hoping to keep the parking lot open, but that is going to be safety dependent. In addition, there will be signage at the south entrance to the Cornwall Creek Flooding area urging individuals to stay out of the soft mud.

Mitchell Beach mentioned that it will be very important to communicate with the horse riders and post signage letting them know that the roads are very busy with normal traffic and with logging trucks especially during the time of the Shore-to-Shore riding event. Mark Monroe stated that it would be an option in October 2024 to communicate with the loggers that have sales out there, let them know about the ride, and the potential for 50 to 60 horse trailers caravanning that day from Elk Hill to Stony Creek. Fortunately, the most significant equestrian trail use will not occur until October 2024 during the Shore-to Shore riding event; and hopefully, the drawdown will have been completed by that time.

In committee a motion was made to support the trail reroute proposal as presented and share the recommendation with the full Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C). On behalf of the Recreation and Access Committee, Matt Hall made the following motion: *"That the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) support the trail reroute proposal as it has been presented by the Department and staff."* Ryan Boyer seconded the motion, after discussion concluded, all present voted in favor, motion carried.

#### EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT – BILL WOOD:

Bill Wood reported that the committee has not met since the last council meeting, but he would like to sum up where the committee is with the conversation around the Education and Engagement Plan. One of the items that has consistently been discussed is the fact that the Discovery Center exists and plays an extremely active role in educating the public with regard to the PRCSF. It was mentioned by several council members that the education directed by Discovery Center has been extremely successful and the Discovery Center at present is very self-sufficient. The education being done is very individually focused, trying to reach children, and future stewards of the forest. Due to the self-sufficiency and success of the Discovery Center, some of the discussion with regard to a revision of the Education and Engagement Plan, has really centered around the audience the Education and Engagement committee is trying to educate and engage. Bill Wood mentioned that after many conversations the Education and Engagement Committee believes that the education

and engagement should be more directed towards the P.R.C.A.C members, and other agency and governmental actors with whom we interact.

Bill Wood stated that he and Conan Smith are both compensated and asked to attend the P.R.C.A.C meetings as part of their positions with their places of employment. Each employer has paid staff that they would like to commission to work on a first draft of the Education and Engagement Plan. The plan will then be taken the next Education and Engagement Committee meeting for review and discussion. Any feedback received at the committee level will then be brought to light in front of the full council along with the first draft of the Education and Engagement Plan. Lastly, the committee mentioned that initially, there should be no more than three easily measured metrics as part of the plan which can be easily monitored.

## **SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

### **DISCOVERY CENTER – SANDY FRANZ:**

Sandy Franz stated that she met the new AmeriCorps member, Katherine Benedict. Katherine has been busy assisting the education committee at the Discovery Center. Shelby Adams, Wildlife Biologist for the PRSF, and Katherine have been busy finalizing some educational events. Sandy shared a listing of events being held at the Discovery Center, and the 2023 year-end report for the Discovery Center. The new waterproof and tearproof Pigeon River Country Maps have been released, they are \$10.00 per map, and available at the Discovery Center and the Pigeon River Country Headquarter building. Sandy Franz thanked Joe Jarecki for shepherding the ambitious map-revision project and she also thanked everyone for all of the hard work that has been going on to get the summer classes in line.

### **PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE – BARB CURTIS:**

Barb Curtis stated that the most recent meeting held on April 3, 2024, centered around the Cornwall Creek Flooding drawdown and dam project and the re-routing of the Shore-to-Shore Trail during Cornwall dam drawdown both of which were already covered by the council this evening. The hitching post project at Inspiration Point is still in progress. Barb stated that the specific location for the hitching post is still being determined. Jeff Clarke, Lynn Noll, and some others are going to meet at Inspiration Point on May 13, 2024, to physically look at a couple of spots just off of the parking lot that Lynn Noll and Chuck Fanslow thought might be a good location for the hitching post. Lynn Noll and Jeff Clarke are working together to secure a specific piping that is more rustic that will coordinate well with the natural environment. Mark Monroe stated that the location needs to be decided upon, then the location needs to be run through the trail approval process with the DNR Parks and Recreation Division. The location of the hitching post will be subject to the archaeological process because Inspiration Point is a Historical Site along with the camp. That will be the determining factor as to whether the hitching post project may move forward.

## NEW BUSINESS:

### STATE FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN UPDATE - DAN HECKMAN

Dan Heckman is a planning and modelling specialist for the Forest Resources Division of the DNR. Dan provided a high-level overview of the 2024 State Forest Management Plan (SFMP) that should be implemented in October of 2024. One of the areas of focus with the new plan is to align it with eight other plans within the DNR. Another area of focus is to ensure that the local management plans at the unit level like the PRC Concept of Management and the Elk Management plan are well represented in the SFMP. The Remsoft/Woodstock software is being utilized for the 2024 plan and it is a robust planning and optimization model system. The company that created this software is out of New Brunswick and it is being used all over the world by forestry organizations. This is a big change and investment for the DNR, but the rewards will be invaluable. Another change to the proposed SFMP is the fact that it encompasses the idea of long-term sustainability. The SFMP is still a ten-year plan, but the modeling effort that supports the ten years goes out over 150 years. This long-term sustainability effort aides in making sure we are not depleting timber and wildlife resources. The 2024 SFMP decreases the management areas across Michigan from 99 to 35. The areas are bigger, but this change helps to simplify things when it comes to implementation. The 2008 SFMP and the three regional plans were combined into one document; therefore, the 2024 SFMP is more concise, less redundant, and 1,600 pages. There are four lines of effort that have been highlighted in the plan: 1. The modeling effort, 2. The planning framework effort, 3. The planning effort, and 4. The engagement effort.

The modeling effort encompasses assessing the current condition for our forest, then thinking about the management strategies the DNR has at its disposal to employ, and what are the timber and wildlife goals that need to be achieved? Then taking those timber and wildlife habitat goals, bringing them together, plugging them in, turning the goals that are written down as sentences and statements and making them into code. Essentially, the current condition of the forest is assessed, then certain strategies are applied, then using the Remsoft/Woodstock software the end user has the capability to analyze different scenarios and then decide upon which scenario is the most advantageous to implement. The key to all of this is to make sure we are doing everything sustainably. There are actually seven parts to forest sustainability. If you are a forester, you think immediately about sustained yield. Yes, there needs to be sustained volume of timber in the 4 million acres of State Forest, but that is just one part. Some other areas of importance are, is there a sustained level of biological diversity, is there strong ecosystem health and vitality, is the soil and are the aquatic resources sustaining their health. The Montreal Process has a set of criteria and indicators that are used worldwide by two dozen countries that really work to define forest sustainability. One point the Montreal Process really emphasizes is that the environment is the basis for everything; it is the foundation. Both society and the economy are completely dependent upon the environment.

The planning framework effort is driven by the DNR Mission Statement as the foundation, but there are other key components that put everything into motion. The management principles that were just discussed in the modeling effort utilizing the Montreal Process give rise to the management goals, strategies, and the key management priorities. Management priorities are those various resources out there that need to be managed. For example, a stream crossing, a



recreational trail, forest products, or carbon are all deemed management priorities. So, the goal of this planning stage is to assign a scale that is appropriate for each management priority, then define a metric that can be monitored, then evaluate the current condition of each management priority, and then designate a desired future condition for each management priority.

The writing effort takes the planning framework effort and organizes the 2024 SFMP by topic to improve the readability of the document. There are statewide and regional management priorities; those are the things we care about everywhere and are not specific to one of the 35 management areas. There are also five Special Analysis Units, and this is the category where the PRCSF fall into. The definition of a Special Analysis Unit is a geographic area that already has a plan, there are already goals associated with it, but it does not match one of the other 35 management areas. The Concept of Management has been an integral piece in the modelling and planning effort for the Pigeon River Country-Concept of Management Special Analysis Unit. Dan Heckman encouraged all those attending the meeting to give the Special Analysis Unit section of the 2024 SFMP a thorough read, especially focusing on the Pigeon River Country-Concept of Management and the Elk Management Plan.

The engagement effort is a necessary component of the 2024 SFMP as it is important from a sustainability perspective for society to understand, be educated, and accept the plan. There have been 30 engagement opportunities since 2019 outside of the DNR. There was also a public survey of "State Forest Values" and the results are posted on the State forest planning website: <https://www.michigan.gov/dnr/managing-resources/forestry/management/region>

On June 24, 2024, via a virtual release, the first draft of the plan will be released to the public for review through July 29, 2024. The virtual release will be followed up by in-person meetings in July 2024, one will be held at Kirtland Community College. The dates will be available on the State Forest planning website mentioned above.

## EMERGING ISSUES – PAUL ROSE

Paul Rose spoke on behalf of Chair Doug Reeves regarding a conversation that was had at the Recreation and Access Committee meeting on April 10, 2024, regarding the use of e-bikes in the PRCSF. There was a Michigan Department of Natural Resources press release and initiative regarding the use of e-bikes on the State Trail system in other parts of Michigan. This does not pertain to the PRCSF; e-bikes are not allowed on trails within the PRCSF. This is a topic that needs to be on the radar of the council; however, as there may be some confusion due to the press release and a need for an educational piece to further educate the public.

## EX-OFFICIO REPORTS:

### P.R.C. UNIT REPORT – MARK MONROE:

Mark introduced new staff assigned to the PRC Field Office; Raija Claeys, new secretary for the Pigeon River Country Management Unit and the Atlanta Management Unit. Mark stated that at this time of year we have staff out looking at our 2026 compartments. He presented a timeline of how the process will go for the 2026 YOE compartments. There is an internal pre-review coming in a



couple weeks where we will utilize some of the new tools that Daniel Heckman just talked about like the modeling forecast, and work with our co-managers in the WLD, PRD, and the FISH Divisions where we will come up with our harvesting prescriptions for the 2026 year. The prescriptions will then be put on the State Forest Public Input website. They will be able to be reviewed for about a month, and then there will be an in-person Open House on July 17, 2024, from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. at the PRC HQ for the public to attend. The final 2026 YOE compartment review will be held on August 15, 2024. When we determined our current prescriptions for the 2024 Timber Sale Plan of Work those prescriptions were decided back in 2022. Our Forestry staff, Joy and Greg have been working diligently on marking our timber sales. So, if you see some fresh paint, these are the timber sale areas that will be put out onto the market through this year and early next year around, 1660 acres.

Working with our WLD co-managers we have three prescribed burns slated for the PRCSF. Part of the reason for the prescribed burns is to meet the goals of the Concept of Management to maintain openings within 6% to 7%. The plan is to do the Green Timbers East prescribed burn first. This burn unit is one of four burn units in Green Timbers and is approximately 334 acres. The second prescribed burn will be the Bobcat Trail burn, and then the Joe's Opening burn between Sawdust Pile Rd. and Tin Shanty Rd. That will be a series of four burns each approximately 40 acres. The Joe's Opening burn took place this this week. Mark explained the importance of some of the goals of the prescribed-burn process. After a series of burns in these units, occurring every four to five years, the warm-season grasses accumulate, which in turn, builds up the fuel loads in these areas which increase the effectiveness of the burns; and therefore, benefiting elk, turkey, and many other wildlife species. Mark mentioned that there have been instances where they will burn one day and then go in to "mop up" the burn the next day and elk have already moved into the burn area; he stated that the wildlife just love it. Another goal of the prescribed burns per Mark is to carefully burn off some of the thatch, kill the cool-season grasses, and burn other woody debris from the forest floor. There is a delicate balance that must occur to maintain the brush at a minimum level to maintain the warm-season grasses. The stem time densities must be just right for the flames to kill off the woody debris or at least set it back so the warm season grasses can flourish. Lastly, there were not any wildfires in the PRCSF in 2024, which is great; the DNR firefighters could not be happier about that. As of last year, 2023, there was just one fire, the Pine Grove fire.

#### WILDLIFE REPORT – SHELBY ADAMS:

Shelby stated this time of year is always an exciting time of year for the Wildlife staff. There are two primary surveys going on right now, the Grouse survey and the Woodcock survey. The PRCSF is in the window right now for the Grouse survey and the window for the Woodcock survey will be opening soon. There are two Grouse routes in the Pigeon and there is one Woodcock route. The Woodcock survey is a national survey run by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; they even designate the routes. It is important to note that these are long-term data sets; they do not give us really specific information for the local area. The results give us a little indication, but really the way the surveys are designed is to give a statewide snapshot of what is going on in the area over a long period of time. The Grouse survey has been going on since the 1990s, but there was a gap of time from 2015 to 2020 that those surveys did not happen for a variety of different reasons; it was not due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It was due to data information issues where people were utilizing

the FOIA process to find out where the birds were located; as a result, it was influencing the survey results because the people were harvesting in the spots where the surveys were being conducted.

As Mark mentioned, there are three burns scheduled in the PRCSF. It is important to conduct the burns when the conditions are right to reach the goal of the project. For instance, the Joe's Opening burn occurring first was not our highest priority burn. Usually, the Green Timbers burn ranks a little bit higher, but it greens up a little quicker at Joe's Opening so that burn occurred first. Green Timbers is set up really well to burn. Mark has been burning that location for a long time now; therefore, we can burn that area a little bit later in the season. Shelby stated she is really hoping with conditions this year that all three of the burns will be able to be conducted. The Bobcat Trail burn was slated to occur last year in 2023, but the realities of fire-season staffing and the conditions being correct to put fire on the ground did not match up so everyone is hoping that burn can be conducted in 2024.

Shelby wanted to revisit the fact that the DNR Wildlife Division, in cooperation with Huron Pines, is continuing the project with the invasive species removal in the PRCSF. This is a huge undertaking that is occurring primarily near Inspiration Point. There are a few stands that are being focused on, stand # 17 which is one of the elk viewing areas, and some of the timber stands, # 18 and # 27.

Shelby mentioned again that a grant was received from the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation for almost \$100,000 to do a native grassland restoration in the PRCSF. The timeline shows that this spring/ summer of 2024, the focus is going to be on eradicating undesirables and preparing the soil. There is a contractor lined up for the work that needs to be done, but some work on the ground needs to be done by the Wildlife Division for access before the contractor can start on the project.

Shelby could not convey enough that wildlife needs to be left where they are. It is springtime and it is very common for many baby animals to be left completely alone. She stated that the mothers know best, and we all need to trust them. She asked that those attending the meeting please spread the word to family and friends that the Wildlife Biologist for the PRCSF stated to please leave the wildlife alone for the best results.

Shelby mentioned she is pregnant and due on 7/20/24. She stated that she will not be at future meetings for a while, but she will strive to have wildlife representation at the meetings.

#### FISHERIES REPORT – NEAL GODBY:

On April 9, 2024, Pickerel Lake was stocked with 2,750 rainbow trout. Some of the Sinkhole lakes including Ford Lake, South Twin Lake, North Twin Lake, and West Lost Lake were all stocked on April 17, 2024. So, all of those lakes are all set for Michigan's statewide trout opener on April 27, 2024

Additionally, this field season the Management Unit is going to be conducting some stream surveys and the technique of electrofishing will be utilized to gather reliable population estimates. This will aid in discovering possible trends going on in the area. The areas on the Pigeon River that will be evaluated are the South Branch of the Pigeon River, and the Historic sites of Old Vanderbilt Road,

the Vanderbilt Road public access, and Whitehouse Trail. They will also be shocking the Black River at McKinnons Bend to get a population estimate.

#### RECREATION REPORT – JEFF CLARKE:

Paul Rose mentioned to the council that in the past Jeff Clarke had been attending the meetings in an acting capacity as a working-out-of-class PRD supervisor. He has now been hired permanently as a DNR Parks and Recreation (PRD) supervisor, congratulations. Jeff Clarke stated that his position became official about a month ago. Jeff thanked everyone for all that they do and stated that it will be a pleasure to work with everyone in the future. Jeff stated that he and Mark Monroe have communicated quite a bit, and they are working very well together.

Appropriate staffing has been a challenge per Jeff. At present, there are three employees to cover the variety of projects in Otsego County. The lead worker, Jacob Vallance, has had to be pulled back to the Otsego Lake State Park in order to help Jeff. The two of them have been trying to get up to the PRCSF at least once per week. Fortunately, one state worker started this week, and another will be starting the weekend of 4/20/24; both have experience and are very competent workers. Jeff also hopes to have a P.R.C. Ranger hired by the end of May 2024 to assist Jacob.

The campgrounds are in good condition at present, but even with the nice weather there have not been too many campers so far. Jeff is insistent upon trying to devote more of his staff to maintaining the trails in the PRCSF. Katherine Benedict, AmeriCorps member, has been working diligently on creating signs and preparing maps and Jeff plans on making sure the trails are ready for those visiting the forest.

The Equestrian Work Bee is coming up at Elk Hill in the middle of May 2024. This is always an exciting event; we will be focusing on trail trimming, replacing some posts, and adding some gravel to the river access near Elk Hill as it always washes away there. As was mentioned earlier, Jeff's staff will be assisting with the Cornwall reroute and the pitching post.

Paul Rose mentioned that the council has always been interested in the number of reservations and campground use on a year-to-year basis. He asked Jeff if that data could be reported going forward as the numbers come in. Jeff said he would be happy to report those statistics to the council even though the way they have to track that data, at present, may not be exact. Paul stated the council would be interested in knowing even if the information is anecdotal.

#### EGLE UPDATE – STEVE BUYZE:

Steve Buyze provided an update to the council regarding the Charlton 4 CPF cleanup. There was a release regarding impactable soils and ground water; a remediation system commenced at the site. The method used for the cleanup was a hydrocarbon plus some brine process; Steve thought the brine had been cleaned up. Steve stated that it was mostly a BTEX plume, so you have volatiles, benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, xylene, and TMVs those are the indicator compounds that are used to see if the groundwater has been cleaned up/remediated or not. Steve stated that the water

quality has been evaluated at the site and the criteria that was evaluated is below the drinking water criteria; therefore, the consultant asked to have no further action on the site. EGLE responded by explaining to the consultant that the water does not have to be monitored at the site for a year if the soil verification sampling is completed. EGLE is waiting for the results of the soil samples to come back so they can be compared to the soil table. At this time, the site is waiting to be closed pending the results of the soil sample.

There was a Lambda meeting on April 17, 2024, and they do not have any real plans other than just regular production. Lastly, Core Energy has not yet submitted an application to commence the project on drilling two CO<sub>2</sub> injection wells and two oil-producing wells in the Annexed Area.

#### **LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – CONSERVATION OFFICER, THOMAS OBERG:**

Thomas Oberg, C.O., is assigned to the northern part of Otsego County which encompasses the PRCFS. He stated that there have been some ORV complaints where individuals are driving their ORVs on DNR trails and on the main roads in Otsego County. The instances where individuals are driving on the main roads cannot be enforced by the DNR conservation officers as it is an Otsego County ordinance, but the officers do take the time to stop the individuals and educate them on the various laws. If an individual is non-compliant and continues to operate an ORV on main roads in Otsego County the conservation officers communicate with an Otsego County Deputy to take action. Thomas also stated there have been some issues where individuals have been going around gates and closed areas with their ORVs.

The conservation officers have also been coming across some dispersed campers throughout the area, but there have not been any major issues. The campers have been very cooperative when asked to get a camp card and display it. Thomas stated normally a warning is issued and it is explained to the campers the necessity for the camp card. If a ranger or a conservation officer comes across camp site, it is necessary for them to verify if the individuals have been there for their allotted time, and they need to document exactly who is camping at a particular location. Lastly, Thomas mentioned that Turkey season will be starting on 4/20/24 and Trout season will be opening at the end of April 2024. The officers will be diligent about checking the hunters and those fishing to make sure all the rules and regulations are being followed.

#### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS – PAUL ROSE:**

Paul asked if there were any thoughts, any issues, or any areas of concern that need to be brought to the attention of Chair Doug Reeves as future agenda items.

The next meeting is scheduled for 5:00 p.m., Thursday, July 18, 2024, at the DNR Pigeon River Headquarters. Plan to come early for a chance to explore some ongoing oil and gas restoration sites, more details to come.

For future planning, the fall meeting will take place at 5:00 p.m., Thursday, October 17, 2024, at the DNR Pigeon River Headquarters.

**ADJOURN:**

The meeting adjourned at 7:11 p.m.

**RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,  
MARK MONROE, DNR**