



Pigeon River Country Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

Location: DNR Pigeon River Headquarters, Vanderbilt, MI

Date: Thursday, April 20, 2023

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Thursday, April 20, 2023, at the DNR Pigeon River Headquarters. Chair Lisha Ramsdell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m., then led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Lisha Ramsdell, Ryan Boyer, Greg Walz, Bill Wood, Paul Rose, Doug Reeves, Ty Ratliff, Bill Loney, Larry Partridge, Don Horrocks, Lance Cottrell, Rique Campa, Matt Hall and Barb Curtis.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Mitchell Beach, Sandy Franz, Conan Smith, and Kyle Yohe.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:

Mark Monroe, Karen Chapman, Madeline Jazdyk, Susanne Biteman, C.O. Matt Theunik, Jeff Clarke, Logan Graff, Neal Godby, Randy Claramunt (via Teams), C.O. Jack Gorno and Nate Stearns.

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:

Shelby Adams

OTHERS PRESENT:

Sandy Schmidt, Guy Lovelace, Stewart Smith, Kevin Stewart, Jason Dowd, Diane Reeves, Jim Kurbel, Rob Pallarito, Curtis Goldsborough, Judy Jarecki, Keith Abrahamson, Joe Jarecki, and Ashton Bieri.

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Chair Lisha Ramsdell welcomed all to the April 2023 meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. Lisha extended thanks to former council members Ken Glasser and Jon Steigerwaldt, and welcomed new members Larry Partridge, representing Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society and Kyle Yohe, representing the Otsego County Board of Commissioners (Kyle was not able to attend tonight).

Lisha called for a moment of silent remembrance in honor of Gary Isaman, who passed away in February 2023. Gary was a long-time friend and advocate of the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

AGENDA:

Lisha noted that the Ex-Officio Fisheries report by Neal Godby would be given immediately after the Cornwall Dam update under Old Business.

Don Horrocks made the motion to accept the meeting agenda for April 20, 2023, as amended, seconded by Ryan Boyer. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, all members present voted in favor to approve the agenda as presented.

MINUTES:

Paul Rose made the motion to accept the January 19, 2023, meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Barb Curtis. There being no additions, deletions or corrections offered, all members present voted in favor to approve the minutes as presented.

P.R.C. FIVE MINUTE SHORT – BILL WOOD:

Bill shared that he grew up in Illinois, and went to college intending to be a biologist, but ended up with an English degree. During college, he read a lot of Ernest Hemingway for class. After college, he obtained a job as an assistant biologist with the Illinois DNR, and in his spare time he liked to travel to Michigan and visit the sites in Hemingway's stories - somehow overlooking the Pigeon River Country. Fast forward to 2018, when he asked his friend Pete Gustafson to rejoin the West Michigan Environmental Action council board, and Pete started telling him about the Pigeon River Country. This led to Pete asking him if he would be interested in taking his seat on the PRCAC advisory council. Along with Pete, he attended the 100 Years of Pigeon River Country celebration in 2019. It was an amazing experience that left him wanting to learn as much as he could about the Pigeon and is honored to serve on the council.

PUBLIC COMMENT (3-minute limit):

Chair Lisha Ramsdell opened the floor for public comment. Curtis Goldsborough, one of the organizers of the “Save Cornwall” campaign offered the following comment:

During the 2020 pandemic he and his family settled in Wolverine, close to the Pigeon River Country State Forest. They immersed themselves in the “Big Wild” and have visited and enjoyed all 28 bodies of water in the PRC, while hunting, fishing and camping. When they saw the press release in January 2023 regarding the planned elimination of Cornwall Creek flooding, it was devastating and spurred him to action. Over the past 57 years, the “Flooding” has become part of the fabric of PRCSF, and he believes that there is nowhere else in the state that offers the same combination of recreational opportunities and experience gifted to the public by Cornwall Flooding. If the Cornwall dam is removed, the flooding is gone forever, and the Pigeon River Country State Forest will never be the same, a little less big, and a little less wild.

CORNWALL DAM UPDATE – NEAL GODBY AND RANDY CLARAMUNT:

Neal Godby, DNR Fisheries Biologist reported that Fish Division has been in discussions internally and with EGLE on how to proceed regarding the Cornwall Dam drawdown. It has been decided to do an additional dam inspection, as the EGLE inspections to date have been external inspections. Using a portion of the funding earmarked for dam replacement, a geotechnical engineering inspection will be performed. This will look at features such as dam stability, camera inspection of the pipe, which will help determine the urgency and risk involved and develop a timeline going forward. Fish Division is working with Huron Pines and the selected engineering company to get plans in place for completing the inspection this summer. Neal reminded all that bids placed on the Cornwall Dam repair/replacement project came in at a minimum of \$800,000 dollars and were as high as \$1.4 million dollars, well over the funding received.

Discussion ensued on what are the plans for the land if the drawdown should take place, and the dam is removed. Also discussed was funding – what is going to happen to the existing funds for dam repair and replacement. The estimate for the geotechnical inspection is \$30,000 and will be used from the money raised for dam replacement. If new permitting, design and additional repair efforts are required the cost will increase from the original construction contractor bids.

Randy Claramunt, DNR Fisheries Chief reported that the funds that were awarded cannot be applied to any dam removal activity. Given the desire from stakeholders to repair Cornwall, and the lack of funding beyond what has already been awarded, it was felt that having an independent contractor complete a geotechnical analysis and full inspection is an appropriate use of the funding and will inform the next steps to be taken. When the public announcement was issued by the DNR that the drawdown of Cornwall Flooding would take place, it was in order to meet the requirements of the EGLE visual inspection and recommendations, which by statute the Department must follow – it is classified by EGLE as a high hazard dam. It was later found that the drawdown itself was of concern with some EGLE staff. During a drawdown, the integrity of the structure may worsen. The geotechnical inspection will help determine all actions going forward.

Don Horrocks shared Cheboygan County's dissatisfaction with EGLE and the dam drawdown, and questioned if other opinions on the dam could be obtained from someone other than the State of Michigan. Don also shared concerns by Cheboygan County citizens, and the Cheboygan County Commissioners that tourism dollars for the local economy will be lost, and other issues if the dam is removed.

Randy reported that this will be an independent inspection, completed by an independent contractor, not an EGLE inspection. As the funds can't be used for anything other than repair and/or data to inform a repair it was felt the geotechnical inspection was an appropriate use of funds, and Fish Division is pleased that Huron Pines is willing to continue to work with them. If EGLE approves the geotechnical inspection, and changes their requirements to the DNR, then under statute, the Department has the ability to pursue additional funding. Fish Division staff was already doing everything possible to obtain funding. If it gets to that point, Fish Division will need support from all of you to push for funding – because time may be gained based on the geotechnical inspection results, but the cost of the repairs could increase because of the new spillway requirements being implemented, and Cornwall could be \$2 million dollar project, not a \$1.5 million dollar project.

Lisha reminded all that the PRCAC has twice now provided resolutions of support for renovation of the Cornwall Flooding Dam, and that still stands today. The Department is aware of the advisory council's position on the subject. She shared that Huron Pines is hiring the engineering firm conducting the geotechnical inspection, they have a good reputation and have been involved with a lot of dam projects across the state. Her understanding of the timeline from the engineering firm is they intend to have the inspection and report completed by July 2023. As soon as the information is available it will be shared with the Department.

EX-OFFICIO REPORT:

FISHERIES – NEAL GODBY:

Neal reported that there are no surveys planned in the PRSCF this year. The usual spring stocking of Pickerel and some of the sinkhole lakes is taking place in the next couple of weeks.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

AQUATIC RESOURCES & FISHERIES MANAGEMENT – GREG WALZ:

Greg reported that the committee met on March 29, 2023. Discussed erosion on the sinkhole lakes, developing plans for access and erosion control measures. Field trip today with Mark Monroe, Lisha Ramsdell and Jim Kurbel to review conditions at Lost Lake and Twin Lakes. Lost Lake has significant erosion issues; an interim control measure may be placing woody debris in some of the erosion channels. DNR is considering stocking grayling in one or more of the sinkhole lakes. More to come on this issue.

FOREST COVER & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT – DOUG REEVES:

Doug reported that the committee has not met, however, a June meeting is being planned.

RESOURCE USE & EXTRACTION –SANDY FRANZ / MARK MONROE:

Mark Monroe reported on behalf of Sandy Franz; the committee met on April 5, 2023. Lambda installed a new compressor station at the Charlton 1-9 facility. Although the electric compressor is quieter than EGLE guidelines required, because the new compressor is more than 150 horsepower, Lambda was required to submit plans for noise abatement. EGLE regulation is that a “bear den” or additional wall surround the compressor station for further noise abatement. The committee voted to support EGLE’s “bear den” requirement for maximum noise abatement. Madeline Jazdyk and Susanne Biteman gave additional details regarding the new Lambda compressor and noise abatement.

Lambda is plugging three wells along House’s Lost Cabin Trail and Sawdust Pile Road in the Unitized Consent Area. Riverside is plugging 7 gas wells, 5 in the non-unitized limited development consent area, and two in the annexed area.

RECREATION & ACCESS – PAUL ROSE:

Paul reported that the committee met on March 22, 2023. As it relates to PRCSF campgrounds, Nicole Hunt, PRD presented a proposed Land Use Order of the Director (LUOD) restricting use of fuel-powered generators between the hours of 10 p.m. and 8

a.m., and the permitting process for on-site reserved campsites, in that posting campsite reservation forms in advance of payment or occupancy will not be recognized as a reservation. As regards the use of generators, it was expressed that it would be desirable for those campgrounds in the PRCSF that have been posted as prohibiting generator use would continue to do so. The committee does not oppose the draft LUOD language as it pertains to generator use and the campsite permitting process, but it does encourage the council to pursue discussion on use of generators at PRSCF campgrounds historically posted as prohibited and other limited access areas in the PRCSF where generators have not historically been used.

The pedestrian bridge construction over the Black River (connects the High-Country Pathway) is scheduled to take place this year, plans for the bridge replacement over the Pigeon River are still in process.

EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT – BILL WOOD:

Bill Wood reported that the committee met on April 10, 2023; the ten year anniversary of 2014 Education & Engagement plan is in July 2024. They will begin the process of revising and updating the plan over the next year. Three points to consider in revising and updating the plan is the existence of the Discovery Center, the rise of social media as a tool of communication, and since the pandemic, the increase in people recreating outdoors. Bill reviewed the existing strategies and metrics and suggested having 1 or 2 metrics per the updated strategies.

Discussion followed from the council on ideas and thoughts for the revised plan. Bill asked all members to think about how they want to be engaged in updating the plan.

AD HOC GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha reported that the DNR is submitting a Natural Resources Trust Fund grant application for the acquisition of Doe Lake, adjacent to public land on two sides and in the heart of the Elk Management area. The committee provided a letter of support to the DNR for the acquisition. Next, the committee supported changing the timeline of the Nominating Committee to start at the July meeting, with elections to be held at the end of the October meeting. Plans for the July meeting date include a pre-meeting tour of the Walled Lake property.

The committee felt that hybrid opportunities to attend meetings in cases of inclement weather should be available. In person meetings will remain the preferred method, as reasonably possible.

Lisha called for a motion – The Governance Committee recommends that the Advisory Council

adopt a procedure to allow hybrid participation for appointed council members that would meet the requirements of Robert's Rule of Order for convening a quorum. Convening in-person is the preferred option for conducting quarterly full Council meetings; however, in the case of severe weather conditions, the decision to call a hybrid meeting lies with the Chair and Unit Manager. Don Horrocks made the motion, seconded by Greg Walz.

Discussion continued as to whether or not the PRCAC falls under the Open Meetings Act, which it does not as confirmed by Mark Monroe. Under the PRCAC by-laws, which state the PRCAC will operate under Roberts Rule of Order, and if hybrid meetings will be included as a quorum, per this motion, it will be added to the by-laws.

With no further discussion, the motion was approved as presented.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORTS:

DISCOVERY CENTER – LISHA RAMSDELL / SANDY FRANZ:

Lisha, reporting for Sandy Franz, shared the Discovery Center 2023 program event list and the new Pigeon River County Association and Discovery Center website. The Discovery Center official opening date is April 29. In partnership with United Way, a fundraiser dinner was held at the Discovery Center, which was very well attended. Mark Monroe reported that they are continuing to work with Sandra Clark on the Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant, using the funds for Discovery Center building preservation and improvement updates.

PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE – BARB CURTIS:

Barb reported that the poor condition of Sturgeon Valley Rd. is very rough on horse trailers. She will reach out to the horse community and ask if they are interested in camping areas with no generators allowed, as some of them now have solar panels, she will share those results with Paul Rose.

NEW BUSINESS:

No new business.

EX-OFFICIO REPORTS:

P.R.C. UNIT REPORT – MARK MONROE / NATE STEARNS:

Mark reported that staff spent the winter on completing inventory work; and is currently

out in the field working on setting up 2023 YOE timber sales. Mark reviewed and discussed the compartment review process, the areas will be available for a public comment period and the public open house date is Wednesday, July 19, 3 p.m. – 6 p.m. at the Pigeon River HQ, he encourages all to attend.

Mark introduced Nate Stearns, DNR Fire Supervisor in Gaylord and PRCSF. Nate reported on the wildfire that broke out near Pine Grove Campground, Nate described the fire and actions taken by staff and other agencies to respond and contain it. Nate went on to discuss the 4 prescribed burns planned for the PRCSF, specifically a 50 acre opening by Cant hook landing, approximately 200 acres in Green Timbers, Hare Trail South, and finally Bobcat Trail.

Mark continued his report by reviewing the process for recruiting a PRCA summer intern. Please let Mark know if you have any candidates for the PRCA intern.

WILDLIFE REPORT – MARK MONROE / SHELBY ADAMS:

Mark reported on behalf of Shelby this evening. Grouse route surveys are in process, and bear hair snare surveys will be conducted. In partnership with Huron Pines, the invasive species removals will continue at the Inspiration Point project. Working on revamping the DNR Elk viewing map, including more driving routes for elk viewing opportunities.

RECREATION REPORT – JEFF CLARKE:

Jeff Clarke reported that staff has been busy preparing the campgrounds for spring; both seasonal staff positions in the PRC have been hired. Jeff reiterated that the bridge over the Black River should be completed this season, when that is completed, options will be explored for replacement of the bridge over Pigeon River. The Elk Hill Equestrian camp work bee is scheduled for May 17-20.

EGLE UPDATE –MADELINE JAZDZYK / SUSANNE BITEMAN:

Susanne shared that everything was covered in the Resource Use & Extraction committee report, nothing further to add. Lisha requested an update about wells that are going to be plugged, including pictures and what the process entails for plugging a well.

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – C.O. MATT THEUNIK:

C.O. Matt Theunik reported that there have been a lot of folks out looking for elk sheds, now getting ready for mushroom hunting season. He introduced C.O. Jack Gorno, new Conservation Officer for Cheboygan County.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha reminded all to please forward any future agenda items to her or Mark Monroe, with a copy to Karen Chapman.

The next meeting is scheduled for 5 p.m., Thursday, July 20 at the DNR Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters. Plan to come early for a chance to explore the Walled Lake area, more details to come. For your future planning, the fall meeting will take place on Thursday, October 19, 2023.

ADJOURN:

The meeting adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,
MARK MONROE, DNR