

Pigeon River Country Advisory Council



Meeting Minutes

Location: Zoom Virtual meeting

Date: Thursday, April 22, 2021

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Thursday, April 22, 2021 via Zoom due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Chair Paul Rose called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m., then led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Paul Rose, Rique Campa, Ken Glasser, Bill Loney, Barb Curtis, Doug Reeves, Lisha Ramsdell, Bill Wood, Conan Smith, Greg Walz, Drew YoungeDyke and Sandy Franz.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Randy Keen, Don Horrocks, Brian McPhail, Brent Shank and Dave Smethurst.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:

Mark Monroe, Brian Mastenbrook, Kerry Wieber, Kelly Kinser, CO Tom Oberg, Andy Stempky, and Karen Chapman.

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:

Tim Cwalinski.

OTHERS PRESENT:

Joe Jarecki

INTRODUCTIONS – PAUL ROSE:

Chair Paul Rose welcomed all to the April 2021 meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. Rose noted that a quorum of members is present. Special welcome to Mark Monroe, new Pigeon River Country Unit Manager.

AGENDA:

The agenda was amended to allow Kelly Kinser to present the Ex-Officio Recreation Report first. Drew YoungeDyke will present the Ex-Officio Fisheries report on behalf of Tim Cwalinski. Agenda approved as amended.

RECREATION REPORT – KELLY KINSER:

Kelly reported that campgrounds are seeing more use this spring than they have in years past. Recreation across the state is increasing, and the trend is expected to continue. The annual Elk Hill work bee is scheduled for the weekend of May 21. There will be a smaller work crew this year due to COVID guidelines, and will focus on campground maintenance, trail clearing, and blocking of illegal trails. Dedication of the Elk Hill Pavilion is still on hold due to COVID, the timing of the dedication depends on when COVID restrictions are lifted. The "Tubes" replacement project is starting soon, it is hoped that construction will be complete by the end of June. The High-Country Pathway bridge replacements project is moving forward, thanks to Joe Jarecki for the great feed-back on bridge placement locations. Staff is working on campground clean-up, trail work, and trying to hire summer help.

MINUTES:

Doug Reeves made the motion to approve the minutes from the January 21, 2021 meeting, seconded by Rique Campa. There being no additions, deletions or corrections offered, all members present voted in favor to approve the minutes.

P.R.C.A.C. APPOINTMENT STATUS:

Paul noted that there are 17 out of 18 positions filled on the advisory council. Discussions are ongoing with regards to filling that open position.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Paul opened the floor for any public comment, there was no public comment offered.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

RESOURCE USE & EXTRACTION – SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy reported that firstly, the Oil & Gas Production Fulfillment resolution that was passed at the January 21, 2021 meeting has been brought to the attention of Director Eichinger and other DNR staff, who are now researching and documenting the legal history and other relevant background information as a basis for correspondence between the department and the oil and gas operators in the P.R.C.S.F. Secondly, as information, Core Energy is proposing to drill a new well on private land adjacent to the annexed area in the P.R.C.S.F. If the well is productive, they plan to construct a pipeline from the well to a central processing facility, owned by V.C.P. (formerly Belden and Blake), on another piece of private land. In order to get from the well to the facility, they will need to cross state land (bore underneath a wetland) in the annexed area of the P.R.C.S.F. with a pipeline. Lastly, oil and gas companies that run central processing facilities and brine disposal wells in the P.R.C.S.F must obtain legal permission from the DNR to use the land for that purpose. In the past, those permissions have taken the form of easements, land swaps, special use permits or surface use agreements all of which are temporary, and some of which have expired before the use of the land is completed. There is an initiative going forward in the DNR to replace those temporary legal documents with 15 to 20-year leases that would ensure that the land is protected. There are three of these sites (all are Lambda) within the consent area of the P.R.C.S.F. that are currently under DNR review to obtain long term leases.

EX-OFFICIO REPORT:

FISHERIES – DREW YOUNGEDYKE FOR TIM CWALINSKI:

Sinkhole lakes are scheduled to be stocked with yearling trout. Pickerel Lake is also slated to be stocked with rainbow trout. A brook trout population estimate with electrofishing on a reach of the Black River near the Tubbs Creek confluence is planned for this summer. Also conducting a trout population estimate at the Pigeon River Elk Hill fixed site. Last year, temperature and dissolved oxygen profiles were completed at all 7 sinkhole lakes. Heavy use and erosion can lead to degraded thermoclines over time, which leads to the inability of a water to hold trout in the summer. In a continuing collaboration between the DNR, the Upper Black River Council and Headwaters Trout Unlimited, temperature monitoring will be conducted between the Pigeon and Black rivers. Black River in-stream habitat work continues in the upper Black River in the Saunders/Tyrolean reach. With regards to the Tubes, Cornwall flooding dam replacement and the lake boating restrictions, the DNR Fisheries division has been closely involved in these projects.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORTS:

DISCOVERY CENTER – SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy reported that the Discovery Center (D.C.) remains closed due to COVID restrictions. They are working with the tribal historian (Eric Hemenway) of the Odawa Tribe in Harbor Springs to develop a new exhibit about the Odawa people and how they used the P.R.C.S.F. region. The D.C. is now in possession of a 14-foot long dugout canoe which has been conveyed from the owners of Black River Ranch. It was believed to be excavated from the Black River sometime in the 1950's and is estimated to be anywhere between 300 to 1,000 years old. With the help of Sandra Clark, Director, Michigan History center, notification has been sent to all 12 tribal historic preservation officers in the state. If it is a Native American artifact that any of the tribes wish to have returned to them, the canoe's proper place is with the tribes. To date, we have received no response from the tribes. If this remains the case, we have contacted a company to perform carbon dating on the canoe. A donor has provided funds to cover the cost of the carbon dating as well as the cost of displaying the canoe at the D.C. We have also reached out to the Gaylord Area Council for the Arts on a possible collaboration for an art display that is consistent with the themes in the D.C. Lisha Ramsdell shared that the D.C. is likely to host some education programming in the P.R.C.S.F. Sandy shared an update on the use of the Trust fund money – funds targeted for use on a new roof, period appropriate and energy efficient windows, log chinking and log preservation and restoration.

PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE – BARB CURTIS:

Barb reported that the P.R.C.E.C. has not met since the last advisory council meeting. They are in the process of filling open positions on the committee and scheduling a meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

UPDATE ON TUBES AND CORNWALL FLOODING PROJECTS – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha reported that in early December bids were accepted on the project, the lowest bid that was received was almost double the estimated project cost. Further review was necessary with the DNR and project partners because more funding is required. Submitted another application to the DNR Fisheries habitat grant and have been working to see if additional funding can be added to the original grant. The Cheboygan County

Road Commission is replacing the downstream crossing on Tin Bridge Road which is the first step in the Cornwall project. The Tubes project is moving forward, it is hoped to be finished on, or near the next meeting. Signage will be posted providing the public with information on the Tubes project.

NEW BUSINESS

LAND STRATEGY UPDATE AND PRC BOUNDARY UPDATE – KERRY WIEBER:

Kerry reported that the DNR's 2013 land strategy is required by statute to be updated and submitted to the legislature for review by July 2021. The public comment period is over; the draft land strategy document is still available on the DNR website, www.michigan.gov/publiclands. Additions and changes were made to the draft based on the valuable input received during the public comment period. An updated draft was submitted to Director Eichinger for his review and comment. It is hoped that the land strategy update will go through the legislative approval process quickly. With regards to the PRC boundary update, Kerry showed the newly dedicated boundary for the P.R.C.S.F. (also available for viewing on www.michigan.gov/publiclands). There were a few modifications made on the north end, just for ease of management purposes. Kerry noted that the land management strategy associated with the recent acquisitions (Storey Lake and Walled Lake properties) continue to be reviewed as a part of this process. The department is still working on holding a public engagement process on how those recently acquired parcels will be managed; the result of that process would be a change to or a new Land Use Order of the Director (L.U.O.D.) that would outline how those parcels could be used.

EX-OFFICIO REPORTS

PRC UNIT REPORT – MARK MONROE:

Mark reported that there will be a new forest technician hired to replace retiree Rick McDonald. The new hire is estimated to be in place early to mid-June. John St. Pierre, DNR roving forester has been helping with timber sales and forest inventory. With regards to forest inventory – there are 6 compartments up for review, those are 7, 19, 32, 59, 45 and 49. The compartment pre-review is scheduled for May 27th, the open house (virtual) is scheduled for July 20th, and the final compartment review is scheduled for August 17. There are two prescribed burns planned for this year, 410 acres in Green Timbers west area, and 83 acres in the C.C.C. fields. With the Public Act (P.A.) 288 forest roads planning process, approval was given for one road to be opened into the Walled Lake parcel and two roads into the Storey Lake parcel. The Tyrolean Hills gate matter is

still with the attorney general's office for review, no further update is available. There are 3 roads projects with approved funding, Road 1, Road 24 and Yellow Gate access road, and 1 O.R.V. restoration project approved for Sawyer Road.

Another priority is structure removal on recent acquisitions. Also working on an inventory and review of the buildings and equipment he is responsible for, and any maintenance needs. He is also working on P.R.C.A.C. appointment status. As regards to the letter requested by P.R.C.A.C. on the carbon credit project, he talked to Scott Whitcomb, and there should be a letter to the council from the Director shortly. In addition to his other duties, Mark will also be heading up the team to manage the P.A. 288 roads project.

WILDLIFE REPORT- BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

Brian reported that he was approved to hire a full-time wildlife biologist for the P.R.C.S.F., who will be housed at the PRC H.Q. He also reviewed the use of slash fences to reduce deer and elk browsing, and how the issue might be addressed in the P.R.C.S.F.

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – LED:

Tom Oberg, C.O. reported on the matter of 3 elk being poached last year in the PRC SF, after an investigation, 3 individuals were apprehended, charged and pled guilty in the matter. Will be busy with fishing seasons opening up soon. Also working on a complaint of a car dumped on Sturgeon Valley Road.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT, GREAT LAKES AND ENERGY (E.G.L.E.) UPDATE – ANDY STEMPKY:

Andy shared that Lambda would start on the site restoration at SF-122 soon. With regards to Charlton 4 – there is one monitoring well that keeps oscillating with contaminates above, then below, criteria. Lambda installed 3 sparge wells that pump air down into the aquifer, and it stimulates aerobic bacteria which will eat the hydrocarbons.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Lisha Ramsdell requested an update on the forest inventory that Blue Source is doing as part of the carbon credit pilot project in the P.R.C.S.F. Sandy Franz requested an update from Matt Fry on the oil and gas resolution and the proposal of longer-term lease documents for central processing facilities and brine disposal wells.

Please forward any future agenda items to Paul Rose.

The next meeting is scheduled for July 22, 2021 at 5p.m. The location and format are to be determined.

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 7:24 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,
KAREN CHAPMAN, DNR