



# Pigeon River Country Advisory Council

## Meeting Minutes

Location: Otsego County Library, 700 S. Otsego Ave., Gaylord, MI

Date: Thursday, January 19, 2023

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Thursday, January 19, 2023 at the Otsego County Library in Gaylord. 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, Ty Ratliff, Don Horrocks, Doug Reeves, Bill Loney, Barb Curtis, Paul Rose, Ryan Boyer, Mitchell Beach, Lance Cottrell, Greg Walz, Sandy Franz and Matt Hall.

### **MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Conan Smith, Bill Wood, Rique Campa, Jon Steigerwaldt

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

Mark Monroe, Madeline Jazdyk, Shelby Adams, Kerry Heckman, C.O. Tom Oberg, Jeff Clarke, Logan Graff, Tim Cwalinski, Matt Fry, and Karen Chapman.

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

Susanne Biteman

### **OTHERS PRESENT:**

Ashton Bieri, Rob Pallarito, Mindy Koch, Guy Lovelace, Stewart Smith, Gary Isaman, Michael Breazeale, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki and Andrew Martin.

### **CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS – LISHA RAMSDELL:**

Chair Lisha Ramsdell welcomed all to the January 2023 meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council; she thanked all for attending in spite of the inclement weather.

## **AGENDA:**

*Don Horrocks made the motion to accept the meeting agenda for January 19, 2023 as presented, seconded by Paul Rose. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, all members present voted in favor to approve the agenda as presented.*

## **MINUTES:**

*Doug Reeves made the motion to accept the October 20, 2022 meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Gary Walz. There being no additions, deletions or corrections offered, all members present voted in favor to approve the minutes as presented.*

## **CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR YEAR TWO CONFIRMATION – PAUL ROSE:**

Paul – As a reminder, there were amendments made to the P.R.C.A.C. Articles of Organization which implemented a policy and procedure for term limits for office of the Chair, while still recognizing the original provisions of those articles which require annual approval and election of the Chair. Since that time, the council has elected Chairs for two-year terms, with an annual confirmation of the second year. One year ago, Lisha Ramsdell was elected Chair and Doug Reeves as Vice-Chair, which leaves another year remaining in their terms.

*Paul Rose made the motion for the Advisory Council to confirm the second year of service under the terms of the original election, seconded by Sandy Franz. All members present voted in favor of confirming the second year of the two-year term for Chair Lisha Ramsdell and Vice-Chair Doug Reeves.*

## **PUBLIC COMMENT (5-minute limit):**

Chair Lisha Ramsdell opened the floor for public comment. Rob Pallarito commented that he was attending on behalf of Senator Michelle Hoitenga, an avid outdoors person, who has been named to the Senate Natural Resources Committee. If there is anything legislatively that her office can do to help, please ask.

## **PRC FIVE MINUTE SHORT:**

Lisha reported on this new addition to the agenda, adopted pursuant to discussion in the Education and Engagement Committee meeting, in an effort to incorporate more

information about the Pigeon River Country in council meetings. This will be an opportunity for folks on a rotating basis to share history, or something they care deeply about as it relates to Pigeon River Country. Bill Wood, Chair of the Education and Engagement Committee will present the inaugural ‘Five Minute Short’ at the upcoming April 2023 P.R.C.A.C. meeting.

## **STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

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

Greg reported that the committee has not met since their fall 2022 meeting, he is planning on scheduling a meeting and will have an update at the April P.R.C.A.C. meeting. Lisha commented that the committee will be taking a close look at the Sinkhole lakes, and the continuing erosion happening around the lakes.

### **FOREST COVER & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT – DOUG REEVES:**

Doug reported that the committee has not met, however, there will be a meeting planned.

### **RESOURCE USE & EXTRACTION/OIL AND GAS POLICY UPDATE – SANDY FRANZ/MATT FRY/MARK MONROE:**

Mark Monroe, on behalf of the group, expressed thanks to Matt Fry for all the work on developing and bringing to completion the DNR Policy and Procedure 32.22-02 “Conclusion of Hydrocarbon Operations within the Pigeon River Country State Forest” which was signed by Director Eichinger on 12/21/2022. Matt Fry then went on to describe the approval process via the Natural Resource Bureau, which supported the policy as written – no substantive changes were made. The policy was then signed by Director Eichinger so it would be in place before transitioning to his new position, as acting Director of EGLE (Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy). Sandy Franz also expressed thanks to Matt Fry on behalf of the P.R.C.A. for the development and successful completion of the policy. Sandy noted that there is a lot of “historical satisfaction” derived by P.R.C.A. members in the completion of this document, and it is appreciated. Discussion ensued on implementation of the policy.

### **RECREATION & ACCESS – PAUL ROSE:**

Paul reported that the committee was tentatively planning on meeting pending the outcome of trail discussions that took place at the last meeting. Depending on what is

learned tonight, they will decide to convene a meeting and will report at the next P.R.C.A.C. meeting.

#### EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT – BILL WOOD/LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha reported on behalf of Bill Wood that the committee met and reviewed the Education & Engagement plan presented and adopted by the council in 2014, noting that it was intended to be a ten-year plan. The plan has not been reviewed, evaluated and updated much since 2014, and things have changed since that time. We now have the Discovery Center, which is a fantastic platform for education, and outreach, and we also have social media usage increasing over the past 10 years. Needs were outlined to make the case for Pigeon River Country, communicating its special and unique characteristics. Connect better with local leaders and local decision makers, and be a stronger conduit to the general public. Create stronger bonds with PRCSF “gateway” communities of Vanderbilt, Wolverine and Atlanta. There are opportunities out there, for example, the kiosk in Vanderbilt. The 2014 Education and Education plan was laid out in 5 different strategies – 1) Creating a branding packet, that goal is shifting as the DNR has its own brand and style, 2) Establish an online presence – we have a big boost from the Discovery Center website, 3) Developing print materials – will review for content , 4) Presentation & Tours and 5) Create/strengthen connections to other non-government organizations (NGO’s) and community partners.

The next steps are to collect data on what has already been done. Need to know what went well and what did not. Will convene a committee meeting again at least once or twice before the P.R.C.A.C. April meeting. For updates to the existing plan, we will need input from all council members – communication may be via a survey for all members to complete. Would like to add some type of annual project for all council members to participate in. Lastly, there is the process of updating the plan and having a good course forward charted. Will accomplish the bulk of that work through the committee and bring it back to the full council.

#### **SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

##### DISCOVERY CENTER – SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy reported that the Discovery Center steering committee has been working with help from Huron Pines, their partner on developing educational classes for Summer 2023. Discussions are ongoing. Part of the improvements to classes will be an upgraded class participant registration system. In addition, within the next week or so the new joint website for the Pigeon River Country Association and Discovery Center should be ready to

launch. They have also been working with Sandra Clark of the Michigan History Center to prioritize their next expenditures under the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant. Lastly, P.R.C.A. volunteers have been busy working on creating the “theater in the woods” exhibit, where an area in the D.C. has been transformed into a theater, where visitors can watch short videos about the history of the Pigeon River Country.

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

Barb reported that the committee met on October 25, 2022. She noted that this past season there were a lot less ORV / horse encounters, and the additional communication to ORV users as to where they should and should not be is appreciated. They also found that people who use the river camp are not as aware of rules and where the trails are as they should be. The committee discussed better ways to communicate that information to users of that camp site.

#### **OLD BUSINESS:**

#### CORNWALL DAM UPDATE – TIM CWALINSKI/LISHA RAMSDELL:

Tim reported on the Cornwall Dam DNR press release that was issued on January 18, 2023. The DNR plans to begin to draw down water levels at Cornwall Flooding in Cheboygan County in 2023. Tim went on to explain the history of Cornwall Flooding dam; it is one of five or six dams that Fisheries Division owns in this region. The infrastructure of the dam is old and failing. Because it is a high-hazard dam, it is inspected by EGLE engineers every three years, and is approaching the end of the lifespan of the structure. Tim co-authored an internal document on the economic value of the recreation use of the area, as it is a popular spot in the PRC. He worked with Lisha, and Huron Pines to help facilitate a process to renovate the entire dam. Funding was put in place to renovate the whole structure, while satisfying the requirements of EGLE to address the safety concerns. The contract bids for the project were much, much higher than anyone anticipated. Huron Pines applied for 4 other grants to try and find additional funding, none have been successful. Because of lack of funding for full restoration of the structure, the owners (DNR), are requiring drawdown of the dam to be in compliance with EGLE’s safety inspection. There is no firm timeline for the drawdown nor are their plans in place for the site after the drawdown is complete. Down the road, phase two may be to obtain funds to remove all of the remaining dam structure. Discussion ensued regarding the project and council members would like to know and inform what happens to the site once drawdown in complete.

## UPDATE ON PRC LAND TRANSACTIONS – KERRY HECKMAN:

Kerry opened with an update on the Black River Ranch, which is 8,850 acres, with 14 miles of East branch of Black River and Stewart Creek frontage. Funding has been secured through the Natural Resources Trust Fund, and an over \$10.6 million grant through the Federal Forest Legacy program. There is also a private donor assisting with funds and more information about the appraisal review will be available in April – a possible offer to purchase on behalf of the DNR could be made shortly thereafter.

The next update is on the Camp Pishtining (Hoobler property) in which Kerry has been working with Ray's daughter, there is a conservation easement held by Headwaters Land Conservancy on the property and a Natural Resources Trust Fund grant has been approved for this acquisition. This property contains one mile of Pigeon River frontage, and it is just over 400 acres. There has been an offer made by the Department and hopefully it will be accepted.

The final transaction is the Hartyl property, which has about three-quarters mile of Sturgeon River corridor and is 440 acres in size. In 2021 a Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant application was submitted, however the property was sold to a private individual, and the grant application was withdrawn. This year, the new owner has decided to sell, so another Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant application has been submitted, and the grant funding was approved. The DNR is waiting for a bill to be introduced in the legislature to appropriate the money, once this is approved, moved through the legislative process and is signed by Governor Whitmer, we can continue with the acquisition process.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

### CAMP GRAYLING AIR SPACE EXPANSION – MARK MONROE:

Mark reported that the Department recently had the opportunity to comment on the National Guard's "Draft Environmental Assessment and Draft Finding of no Significant Impact for Modification and Addition of Airspace at the Alpena Special Use Airspace (SUA) Complex, Alpena Combat Readiness and Training Center (CRTC), Alpena, Michigan." Mark reviewed the document to ensure it was in compliance with the current Pigeon River Country Quiet Airspace Agreement (QAA) with the Michigan Air National Guard, and in light of the proposed Camp Grayling expansion there was some concern and confusion. The conclusion is that after his research and reading, there are no significant concerns, and the document complies with the existing Pigeon River Country QAA.

## **EX-OFFICIO REPORTS:**

### **P.R.C. UNIT REPORT – MARK MONROE:**

Mark opened with the popular “Where’s Cole in the PRC” segment. He then went on to introduce Ashton Bieri, Huron Pines AmeriCorps member serving at the PRC for 2023. Ashton will be tasked with assisting with outreach via the Discovery Center, Education & Engagement committee items, among other things. Staff are working on the 2023 timber plan of work, for a total of 1,374 acres and have gotten a good start because of the low snow load. The YOE 2025 compartment review is coming up, the pre-review will be on May 25, the YOE 2025 open house is on July 19, 2023, and all are encouraged to come in and comment on the plan.

Building removals– the McIntire property building removal is moving along again, with an April completion date. Stevens property – the building is currently up for sale but there has been no interest from anyone to purchase and move the cabin. If no one buys it, it will likely be demolished. For the Castle property, the building was burned as a training exercise for a local fire department. There was a contractor hired to come in and clean and smooth out the area. We have teamed with the DC to get the exterior logs of the PRC HQ refinished. Also, a contract has been awarded for new furnaces in the small residence and bunkhouse. Partnering with the DC and using efficiencies to hire the same contractor for both projects work well for all concerned.

### **WILDLIFE REPORT – SHELBY ADAMS:**

Shelby reported that there were 160 elk licenses issued for the December 2022 elk hunt, there were 45 bulls and 69 antlerless tags were filled, she has no tribal numbers to report to date. The draft Elk Plan was distributed to members for review via email, if council members have any further comments, please let Shelby know.

### **FISHERIES –TIM CWALINSKI:**

Tim reported that the sinkhole lakes will be stocked on a rotation. Starting to get some pressure to stock a couple of the sinkhole lakes with Arctic grayling, Tim is concerned that the sinkholes will get overuse if stock they are stocked with Arctic grayling. Pickerel Lake is still stocked every year with rainbows. There will be surveys and in-stream habitat work that will be done on the East Branch of the Black River this year.

## RECREATION REPORT – JEFF CLARKE:

Jeff Clarke introduced himself as the new DNR Parks Supervisor, acting for Kelly Kinser. Kelly has taken on another position within the Parks Division. Jeff reported that camping has been slow this winter, and staff has been working on getting equipment ready for the spring season.

Jeff went on to share Paige Perry's update on the equestrian trail connector proposals. Scott Whitcomb and the Director reviewed the 5 equestrian trail connectors and Inspiration Point trail proposals which lie on Fish & Game purchased lands and, as a result, these lands have certain use restrictions and would need U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) approval which is facilitated through the Director. Except for trail connector number 5, which goes by Hardwood Lake and was approved for safety reasons, the Director was not inclined to pursue the balance of the proposals with the U.S.F.W.S., reason being that the equine riding on existing trails and forest roads provide sufficient recreation in line with management of the PRCSF.

The next update from Paige was on the four PRC pathway bridge replacements. The Black River bridge was removed in 2016 due to safety and environmental concerns, a reroute has been established and the new bridge has designed. Funding is being lined up in order to bid out the bridge replacement for 2023 construction at the new bridge site which is located at the pipeline crossing. Work needs to be done to connect the High Country Pathway to the new bridge site. The Pigeon River Bridge was removed in 2021 due to similar safety and environmental concerns as the Black River Bridge; to date there has been no final decision on replacing this bridge. Lastly, both Pickerel Creek and Tubbs Creek bridges were designed, funding and planning will be incorporated in upcoming projects request for Trails.

## EGLE UPDATE –MADELINE JAZDZYK:

Madeline reported that over the last year that they have been working with Lambda on their plugging plans. To date nothing has been finalized, there may be 1 to 3 wells plugged in the PRCSF in 2023. More updates at the next meeting.

## LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – C.O. TOM OBERG:

C.O. Tom Oberg reported that there were a couple of incidents during elk season, for which reports were compiled and submitted to the respective prosecutor's office. As for deer season there is not too much to report, there were less deer camps noticed while driving through the PRCSF. Some illegal snowmobile activity was noted.



## **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS – LISHA RAMSDELL:**

Lisha reminded everyone that the next meeting is scheduled for Thursday, April 20, 2023. One of the things that came up today was because of the snow, there were inquiries on a virtual meeting option. As it stands right now, the PRCAC governing documents do not address the issue, there will be an ad hoc committee to review this subject. Preference is in-person meetings to engage with one another, however it was prohibitive for some people to travel and attend the meeting this evening because of the bad weather. We will convene the committee chairs and come back to the April meeting with ideas to address virtual and hybrid meeting options.

Greg Walz suggested a future agenda item to hear from the state archaeologist, Stacy Tchorczynski, about how cultural and archaeological resources are considered in planning and decision making. Lisha asked Greg to invite Stacy to an upcoming meeting.

Sandy Franz requested that an update on Cornwall Flooding would be helpful.

Lisha did a quick straw poll on member interest in a tour before the July or October meeting– she asked for a show of hands. She and Mark will discuss a likely date and the tour will be added to front end of existing meeting. One of the ideas was a tour of the sinkhole lakes to review the erosion issue. Contact Mark or Lisha if you have any specific areas you would like to tour.

Please forward any other future agenda items to Lisha Ramsdell or Mark Monroe, copy to Karen Chapman.

The next meeting is scheduled for 5 p.m., Thursday, April 20, 2023 at the DNR Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters.

## **ADJOURN:**

Meeting adjourned at 7:24 pm.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,  
MARK MONROE, DNR