



# Pigeon River Country Advisory Council

## Meeting Minutes

Location: DNR Pigeon River Headquarters, Vanderbilt, MI

Date: Thursday, July 20, 2023

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Thursday, July 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, Doug Reeves, Larry Partridge, Paul Rose, Barb Curtis, Bill Loney, Don Horrocks, Sandy Franz, Bill Wood, Lance Cottrell, Rique Campa, Ty Ratliff, Mitchell Beach, Greg Walz and Ryan Boyer.

### **MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Conan Smith, Kyle Yohe and Matt Hall.

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

Mark Monroe, Susanne Biteman, Steve Buyze, Jeff Clarke, Sam Black, C.O. Matt Theunik, C.O. Tom Oberg, Dan Heckman, Scott Eggeman and Scott Whitcomb.

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

Shelby Adams, Neal Godby, Tim Cwalinski.

### **OTHERS PRESENT:**

Sandy Schmidt, Dan Peck, Dan Sullivan, Linda Hunt, Rob Pallarito, Curtis Goldsborough, Judy Jarecki and Guy Lovelace.

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

Chair Lisha Ramsdell welcomed all to the July 2023 meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council and expressed appreciation to all for attending. Prior to the meeting, a small group gathered to participate in a tour of the Walled Lake property. Lisha

encourages council member to take advantage of these tours and take the time to get to know the Pigeon River Country.

## **AGENDA:**

Lisha noted that as Neal Godby, DNR Fisheries was not able to attend tonight, she will give the Cornwall Dam Update under Old Business.

*Don Horrocks made the motion to accept the meeting agenda for July 20, 2023, as amended, seconded by Greg Walz. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, agenda approved as presented.*

## **MINUTES:**

*Paul Rose made the motion to accept the April 20, 2023, meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Doug Reeves. There being no additions, deletions or corrections offered, the minutes were approved as presented.*

## **P.R.C. FIVE MINUTE SHORT – DOUG REEVES:**

Doug shared that his earliest memory of the PRCSF is from about 1962, when his family piled in a canoe, put in at the goose pond, and traversed to the mainstream, where his dad dropped them off to fish for suckers. While his dad went off fishing for trout, Doug caught a 17-inch brown trout, he recalls he was about 7 years old at the time. The PRCSF is where he shot his first duck, first goose, first deer, and bobcats. As an adult, while visiting the PRCSF from Iowa, he went out with Doug Whitcomb and released pine martens along Fisherman Road. He fished Cornwall Flooding after it was first filled. One of his favorite recollections is beaver trapping with his dad. He loved that time of year along the river because you would see elk, deer, mink, otter, raccoons, eagles, and no humans. He views Pigeon River Country as his home and is worth fighting for.

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

Chair Lisha Ramsdell opened the floor for public comment.

Linda Hunt asked if the building is still standing at Walled Lake and is there going to be an update on the status of the purchase of Black River Ranch. Mark Monroe answered that the structure is still standing at Walled Lake, and he is working with the purchaser of the structure to disassemble it, unfortunately it is taking longer than expected due to the purchaser's work commitments. With regards to the purchase of Black River Ranch, Mark reported that, per Kerry Heckman, DNR Land Specialist, there are no updates to report at

this time.

Curtis Goldsborough of the Save Cornwall campaign commented that things are going well, they continue to stay in close contact with northern Michigan legislators, who have been supportive of the Save Cornwall campaign. Several different funding sources are being researched with more details given under tonight's agenda item. Through the Save Cornwall Facebook group, they have identified a member of the Meade brothers crew that constructed the dam and are working with the family on a history project of the dam construction. On a personal note, he and his son have been spending a lot of time on PRC lakes, the fishing has been great.

## **CORNWALL DAM UPDATE – LISHA RAMSDELL:**

Lisha opened by extending thanks to Curtis Goldsborough for getting the Michigan Out-of-Doors crew out to the PRCSF to film a segment on the Cornwall Flooding. Last week, Huron Pines and DNR staff met with the engineers to discuss their findings to date. While conducting the geotechnical analysis a videographer was hired to send a camera down the pipe, the engineers are currently reviewing the image data and comparing it to 2013 data to identify the urgency in doing the drawdown. All the issues identified in the original engineering survey continue to hold true, including seepage in the berm. The DNR has been clearing brush along the dam in order to get better views of the aging structure. There are joints in the outflow culvert that are cracking, and the mechanism is not functioning. It is very difficult to determine a timeline on a possible structure failure. Discussed different levels of drawdown that will eventually be required, however, there will not be a major draw down this fall. Some good news is that the Great Lakes Fish Commission has entered into an agreement with the DNR to provide \$350,000 towards renovation of the site. The funding is from their sea lamprey control program as Cornwall is considered a first barrier for sea lamprey. Randy Claramunt, DNR Fisheries Chief is in the process of submitting a supplemental agreement request for additional funding for Cornwall, and is expecting a response by October of this year. One of the major concerns right now is the slope stability. The berm is going to determine how much drawdown is going to be required even if funds are obtained for replacement. The goal is to do a minimal amount of drawdown to preserve the fishery because it is only about 12 feet deep, however, slope stability and integrity of berm is going to be a deciding factor.

## **STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

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

Greg reported that the committee has not met since the last PRCAC meeting. The top agenda item from the last committee meeting is the erosion problem at Lost Lake. Mark Monroe and staff have completed significant remediation work at Lost Lake, which is a

good stop-gap solution to slow the erosion down.

Mark Monroe added that with help from the Otsego County Jail work crew, dead timber was cut down to fill in erosion gaps and install a split rail fence to help steer people down to the lake. Also doing the same work for South and North Twin Lakes. Austin Corbin and Ashton Bieri are working on Section 4 Lake right now. Sam Black met with the National Guard to view boardwalks on the North Country Pathway and will try to meet with their engineer crew out of Grayling to determine if they can help engineer some better pathways down the switchbacks.

Greg plans to have a committee meeting prior to the next council meeting in October.

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

Doug reported that the committee met on Tuesday, July 11, 2023, and referred all to the report contained in their meeting packet. Committee discussed aspen cover type and acknowledged that it is close to the desired condition. Reviewed 4 stands that are over the Concept of Management 40-acre guideline. If small clear cuts are done, and the elk decide to browse you will not get the desired type of timber to come back in its place. There has been a movement to allow larger clear-cut areas for aspen regeneration. In committee a motion was made to support all 4 stands over 40 acres and recommend that the council as a whole approve all 4 clear cuts. *Motion made by Doug Reeves to support the 4 clear cuts that are over 40 acres as recommended by the Department. Sandy Franz seconded the motion, all present voted in favor, with no further discussion, motion carried.*

Also discussed Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and deer and elk management in the PRCSF. In committee, a motion regarding same passed. On behalf of the Forest Cover & Wildlife Management Committee, the following motion was made by Doug Reeves: *"It is the understanding of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (Department) will be embarking upon an update of the current Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Response Plan. As the Department updates the CWD plan, and per the charge to the PRCAC to advise the Department with regard to wildlife related matters in the PRCSF, the PRCAC requests that the Department considers the ecology of white-tailed deer and elk as well as the management goals for those species to help conserve their populations."*

*Paul Rose seconded the motion, after discussion concluded, all present voted in favor, motion carried.*

Lastly, Larry Partridge and Kevin Stewart shared that the Ruffed Grouse Society has approved \$100,000 for habitat work in the PRCSF.

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

Sandy Franz reported that the committee has not met since the last PRCAC meeting, Mark Monroe and Susanne Biteman will cover updates in their ex-officio reports.

#### RECREATION & ACCESS – Paul Rose:

Paul reported that at the last council meeting, PRD staff gave a presentation on the statewide campground policy regarding the use of fuel powered noise producing generators in campgrounds. PRD advised that this would be a blanket policy for designated campgrounds throughout the state, including those within the PRSCF. After discussion, questions arose regarding campgrounds in the PRCSF that would merit exception from the policy, locations where generator use would not be appropriate at any time. Mark Monroe commented that as the LUOD is about to be closed, and this was brought to our attention, there is not time to get PRC specific generator language in the LUOD. On behalf of the Recreation and Access Committee, Paul made the following motion: *"The Pigeon River Advisory Council requests that the DNR review the management implications and feasibility of prohibiting use of fuel-powered (noise producing) generators at three locations in the PRCSF and report those findings to the PRCAC at, or in advance of the fall council meeting. These three locations are as follows: Round Lake Campground, Pine Grove Campground and Town Corner Lake Campground."*

Discussion ensued regarding opening the LUOD again to add this language. The council is requesting that the Department report on the feasibility of this by the October council meeting. *With no further discussion, motion seconded by Sandy Franz, all present voted in favor, motion carried.*

#### EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT – BILL WOOD:

Bill Wood reported that the committee has not met since the last meeting, will meet prior to the fall meeting.

#### NOMINATION COMMITTEE – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha reminded council members that the nomination committee is made up of standing committee chairs. The charge of the nomination committee is to select the chair and vice-chair of the PRCAC, each term is a two-year term, to be confirmed annually, with a two-term limit. In the past the nominating committee has been engaged in October; however, it will be initiated early in order to vote at the October meeting so the chair and vice chair can start their roles at the January meeting. Lisha has asked Sandy Franz, Greg Walz and Bill Wood to serve as the nominating committee. Please forward your recommendations for chair and vice-chair to them for discussion and review.

Lisha also noted that the committee roster has been updated and are in the meeting packets for your review.

## **SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORTS:**

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

Sandy Franz reported that the Discovery Center is in the midst of the summer educational series, classes have been very well attended. Thanks for the strong support of Ashton Bieri, Huron Pines AmeriCorps member serving at PRC and Austin Corbin, PRCA intern in putting these classes on. The Discovery Center continues to benefit as the recipient of a Michigan Natural Resources Trust fund grant, those funds have purchased a new roof, heat pump, fire alarm, security system, as well as new educational exhibits.

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

Barb reported that at the last meeting, Chuck Fanslow was elected as the new committee chair, however Barb will continue to represent the Equestrian committee on the PRCAC. They discussed a solar well for the Elk Hill group horse camp, more research is required. Discussed the negative interactions that can occur between e-bikes and horses, the e-bikes scare the horses, which is not conducive to riding. The next PRCEC meeting is scheduled for September.

## **NEW BUSINESS:**

### **STATE FOREST MANAGEMENT PLAN – DAN HECKMAN:**

Dan gave an in-depth review on the status of the new state forest management plan process. The Pigeon River Country State Forest served as a pilot to generate a model and test the Remsoft/Woodstock software. More public engagement is planned for this fall and early winter. The team is working hard on objectives and actions. Discussion ensued.

### **CONCEPT OF MANAGEMENT 50<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY – LISHA RAMSDELL**

Lisha asked for ideas on how to commemorate the Concept of Management 50th anniversary, and to please forward your ideas to Bill Wood, chair of the Education and Engagement committee. She recommended that the Education and Engagement committee convene and discuss ideas and make plans for a celebration to take place at the October meeting. The budget available for a celebration was briefly discussed.

## **EX-OFFICIO REPORTS:**

## P.R.C. UNIT REPORT – MARK MONROE:

Mark reported that staff is busy putting up 2023 YOE timber which amounts to 1,374 acres by October 1. The 2025 Year of Entry Compartment Open house took place on July 19, 2023, with 5 people attending. The period of May 1 to June 30 was one of the driest periods seen in the area over the last 20 years, and there were several wildfires. As mentioned at the previous council meeting, there was a wildfire by Pine Grove Campground prior to the April meeting, and another small wildfire in mid-May on Road 57. That fire, which started just before dark, was caused by a mushroom hunter trying to cook a meal in a hollow beach log. There were prescribed burns accomplished before the drought hit, one was to facilitate wildlife opening maintenance in Green Timbers North which was 175 acres in size and the Hare Trail South burn was 100 acres. If weather conditions allow, may accomplish the Cant Hook Landing burn and Bobcat Trail burn this summer.

In late April, there was a tree planting in partnership with the Roger Moore Chapter of the Ruffed Grouse Society, with Larry Partridge attending. Planted 50 soft mast shrubs in the Hackett Lake area, with the project being funded by the RGS.

Shelby Adams and Mark Monroe put on a fire program at the Discovery Center discussing past fire history in the Pigeon River Country from forestry and wildlife perspectives, and the one-year anniversary of the Blue Lakes Fire. This project was in partnership with the Detroit Zoo. Melissa Theume, Detroit Zoo Mammal Supervisor wrote a grant (Melissa has ties in the Pigeon River area) to fund the program and purchase the oaks and crabapples that were planted in the Blue Lakes fire area. Mark and Shelby developed the program, and brought fire equipment to show what is needed to suppress wildland fires, and what is needed for prescribed fires.

The PRC complex facility upgrades continue with all the PRC buildings exterior logs being refinished, and the window replacement contract is in place to repair all the windows.

## WILDLIFE REPORT – MARK MONROE / SHELBY ADAMS:

Mark reported on behalf of Shelby this evening. Ashton Bieri and Austin Corbin were monitoring 10 sites with bear hair snares in the PRCFSF, the goal being a mark or capture population estimate. Bear hair gets sent to the Wildlife disease lab in Lansing, where it is genetically checked and marked. All bears that are harvested in Michigan are required to be registered, a tooth is pulled and sent to the lab for another genetic test, the results are entered into a computer program that is used to develop a population estimate.

The invasive removal crew has been working at Inspiration Point. The focus this year has been Stand 17, Stand 18 along with the parking lot and the area across from it.

#### FISHERIES REPORT – MARK MONROE / ~~NEAL GODBY~~:

Mark reported on behalf of Neal Godby and Tim Cwalinski. There is a big lake sturgeon survey taking place at Burt and Mullett Lakes, Ashton Bieri and Austin Corbin were able to assist and handle some baby sturgeon. Ashton and Austin will be working with Fish Division to remove brush from Cornwall Dam. There will be some stream habitat restoration on the Black River, and work will continue on the sinkhole lakes erosion issues.

#### RECREATION REPORT – JEFF CLARKE:

Jeff Clarke reported that staff has been busy with campers, the campgrounds are being well-maintained. PRD is in very early discussions with the National Guard on the possibility of completing some trail work, mainly boardwalks, more to come. Logan Graff, lead worker at PRCSF was promoted and took another position as a supervisor at the North Higgins Lake State Park, please reach out to Sam Black if any questions.

#### EGLE UPDATE – SUSANNE BITEMAN / STEVE BUYZE:

Susanne reported that Oil, Gas and Minerals Division is a small division within EGLE, there are about 65 employees spread out over the whole state. Steve Buyze is the new supervisor for the Gaylord District, and Susanne is the supervisor for the Cadillac District. From an oil and gas perspective, they regulate from the beginning, permitting, initial well site selection, soil erosion sedimentation control, drilling and completion, oversee production, conduct routine inspections, and plugging. Oil, Gas and Minerals write the plugging instructions, oversee the abandonment of flowline, site restorations, and more. Oil, Gas and Minerals has a set of rules that must be followed, and DNR has additional requirements that must be followed on state land. Meet with DNR in advance at the site to review needs. There are wells slated to be plugged in the PRCSF in 2023, will give a review at next meeting on the status of the plugging process. This will be Susanne's last meeting, as Steve will be assigned as the ex-officio member on behalf of EGLE-Oil, Gas and Mineral Division. The council extends thanks to Susanne on behalf of her work and participation.

#### LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – C.O. MATT THEUNIK:

C.O. Matt Theunik reported that activity has been up in the PRCSF and folks are asking about Cornwall Flooding. Bear dog training season is currently going on. Otsego County Road Commission is working on installing DNR ORV signage as to what is and is not allowed in the Otsego County portion of the PRCSF.

#### **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. Please forward ideas for celebrating the Concept of Management 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary to the Education & Engagement committee. The celebration will take place at the October 19<sup>th</sup> meeting.

The next meeting is scheduled for 5 p.m., Thursday, October 19 at the DNR Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters.

**ADJOURN:**

The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:15 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,  
MARK MONROE, DNR