

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters, Vanderbilt, MI
Friday, October 18, 2019

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Friday, October 18, 2019 at the Pigeon River Country State Forest (PRCSF) Headquarters. Chair Paul Rose called the meeting to order at 5:40p.m., then led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Paul Rose, Brian Burroughs, Don Horrocks, Brian McPhail, Barb Curtis, Bill Loney, Heather Shaw, Rique Campa, Dave Smethurst, Rob Pallarito, Drew YoungeDyke, Pete Gustafson, Sandy Franz, and Lisha Ramsdell.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Brent Shank and Randy Keen

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT: Kelly Kinser, Brian Mastenbrook, Andy Stempky, Mike Shelton, Scott Whitcomb, Karen Chapman, Cody Stevens, CO Tom Oberg, CO Eric Bottorff and Director Dan Eichinger.

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT: Greg Rekowski and Tim Cwalinski.

OTHERS PRESENT: John Walters, Samantha Peterson, Amy Trotter, Andrew Knapp, Stewart Smith, Bill Wood, Janet Day, Steve Sharp, Judy Jarecki, Joe Jarecki, Lance Cottrell, Jessica Cain, Glenn Matthews, Pete Demos, Bill Wood, and Eugene Horan.

INTRODUCTIONS – PAUL ROSE:

Chair Paul Rose welcomed all to the meeting; introductions were made around the room. DNR Director Eichinger expressed appreciation for everyone being here today.

AGENDA:

Paul Rose stated that there will be a presentation on the Huron Pines AmeriCorps program by Samantha (Sam) Peterson, PRC AmeriCorps member as the last item under “New Business”. Under “Future Agenda Items”, Paul will review the proposed P.R.C.A.C. meeting schedule for 2020. With those updates, and no further revisions offered, the agenda was approved as amended.

CELEBRATION WRAP-UP:

In summary, the 100 years of the Pigeon River Country State Forest and the 45th Anniversary of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council celebration began at 3:00pm at the PRC Discovery Center; which opened its doors for exploration of exhibits and a meet and greet. The program started at 4:00 pm, with welcome and introductions by Paul Rose, remarks from DNR Director Dan Eichinger, followed by the P.S. Lovejoy Award presented to Dave Smethurst, recognition of Scott Whitcomb for his service as the PRC Unit Manager for the last 11 years, remarks from Sandy Franz, and lastly, revealing the new Witness Tree sign, made possible by donations from the Catt and Reinhardt family.

Paul Rose thanked everyone who organized the celebration, in particular Lisha Ramsdell and Sandy Franz who did most of the work to make it happen. Paul also thanked everyone who took the time to attend today's event. The weather cooperated, with a beautiful fall day in Pigeon River Country. Sandy commented how special it was to have folks like Dave Smethurst, Ned Caveny, Joe Jarecki and Jerry Myers children be in attendance today.

MINUTES:

After a review of the meeting minutes from July 25, 2019, Don Horrocks made the motion to approve, seconded by Rob Pallarito, all voted in favor, motion passed to approve minutes as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Glenn Matthews (DNR retiree) commented it had been a long time since he had been to a PRCAC meeting and was glad to attend today.

Andrew Knapp asked if there are any rules or regulations regarding electronic assist bike (e-bike) use in the PRCSF. Scott Whitcomb stated that he believes on the designated non-motorized pathways they are prohibited. They can use the roads, however, cross-country use in the PRCSF would be prohibited just like any other bike, as bikes are confined to the roadway or designated pathway, i.e. Shingle Mill, High Country Pathway, Pickerel Lake pathway - all 3 of those pathways would be closed to e-bikes. Paul Rose stated that this is an emerging issue that all land managers are struggling with.

Scott Whitcomb thanked everyone for a wonderful 11 years as PRC Unit Manager; and thanked the P.R.C.A.C. for its dedication to the PRCSF. Scott also thanked the council for the beautiful wildlife print presented to him at today's celebration.

John Walters commented that the celebration was spectacular; and appreciated listening to folks talk about their passion and what the PRCSF means to them, as he shares many of these same feelings. John also congratulated Dave Smethurst on receiving the first P.S. Lovejoy Award, it was very well deserved for his 45 years of service to the P.R.C.A.C.

COMMITTEE REPORTS

FOREST COVER & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT – HEATHER SHAW:

Heather reported on projects that occurred this past field season and on future projects. The Michigan United Conservation Clubs (MUCC) held an On The Ground (OTG) event in the PRCSF; partnering with Huron Pines AmeriCorps, DNR, Ruffed Grouse Society, Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation, Consumers Energy and other local conservationists, completing an oak release along Pickerel Lake Trail. The Roger Moore chapter of the Ruffed Grouse Society completed a trail planting along a hunter walking trail. For future and ongoing projects, they are working with Huron Pines and DNR in kicking off several projects this fall and winter within the PRCSF, and next spring. These projects revolve around wildlife habitat restoration – RGS has been able to do a few consults and field visits on woodcock habitat restoration and some non-commercial aspen work as well. They were awarded another wildlife habitat grant program in partnership with RGS, Safari Club International and DNR, for invasive removal (barberry), wildlife openings restoration, hunter walking trail improvements, hunter access improvements, and some shrub plantings. Heather also commented on the PRC forest compartment review public open house which took place on July 16; reminding members what a great opportunity the open house is for the public to comment on forest management in the PRCSF. With regards to disease surveillance,

specifically chronic wasting disease (CWD), and West Nile virus; Heather asked all to please participate in the surveys if you have the opportunity to do so.

RECREATION & ACCESS – RANDY KEEN:

No report.

EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha expressed sincere thanks to everyone who came together to organize today's event.

AQUATIC RESOURCES & FISHERIES MANAGEMENT – DAVE SMETHURST:

Dave stated that he plans to get together with the committee and the DNR fisheries biologist as the 2020 fisheries plan is being developed.

RESOURCE USE & EXTRACTION – SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy had nothing new to report since last meeting.

PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE – BARB CURTIS:

Barb reported on the work bee held with Back Country Horsemen in the spring, a great deal of trail maintenance was completed. The pavilion at Elk Hill group campground has been completed, and it blends in nicely with surrounding area. The perimeter fencing around the pavilion area will be completed next spring. The next P.R.C.E.C. meeting is November 1, 2019.

DISCOVERY CENTER – SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy reported that the Discovery Center received the 2019 Award of Excellence from the American Association of State and Local History. In August, she attended the awards ceremony in Philadelphia and accepted the award on behalf of the Discovery Center. Sandra Clark, Director of the Michigan History Center received a Lifetime Achievement award at the same ceremony. The DC fall fund raising campaign has been kicked-off through the Otsego County Community Foundation, the campaign ends December 31, 2019. The goal is to raise \$60,000.00; we have an anonymous donor who will match dollar for dollar any donations that are made through the Otsego County Community Foundation. In the process of developing educational programs for next year, one program that is confirmed is the MSU Extension Master Naturalist course next summer, which consists of 7 classes taught by conservation professionals. The Discovery Center visitor count is at over 2,000 visitors, also the DC has hosted 14 educational programs to date. Sandy noted that the new pavilion in Vanderbilt (located at the North Central Michigan trailhead) was dedicated earlier in the week, be sure to check out the Discovery Center kiosk at the site.

OLD BUSINESS

LAND TRANSACTION UPDATE – PAUL ROSE:

Nothing official to report at this time.

NEW BUSINESS

PR ADVISORY COUNCIL SERVICE AND APPOINTMENTS – PAUL ROSE:

Paul said that it is clear the PRCAC is going through a transitional time, with Scott Whitcomb's departure, and the number of vacancies currently existing on the council that remain unfilled. Paul has shared his concerns

with Director Eichinger with regards to the member appointments currently pending. Paul requested that existing members; even if you don't want to continue for another term, to please consider staying on another year. Currently, there is no timeline on Scott's replacement.

NOMINATION COMMITTEE ACTIVATION – PAUL ROSE:

Paul stated that the Nomination Committee will be formally convened to advance Chair and Vice-Chair candidates for member consideration at the January 2020 meeting. As a reminder, this is the 2nd year of Paul's first two-year term as Chair. The chairs of each of the standing committees are the members of the nomination committee. If one of those chairs are interested in the chair or vice-chair position, they can decline participation in the Nomination Committee, and request consideration for nomination for the Chair or Vice-chair position.

AMERICORPS PRESENTATION – SAMANTHA PETERSON:

Samantha (Sam) is the Huron Pines AmeriCorps member serving in the PRCSF as Conservation Program Developer. Sam gave an informative PowerPoint presentation on the Huron Pines AmeriCorps program, and gave an overview about her service and accomplishments in the PRCSF. Many of the projects she worked on were education based, such as giving a presentation on wildlife at the Gaylord Intermediate School, participated in the Otsego Family Fun Fair, organized the 3rd annual Owl Prowl held at the Discovery Center, gave a talk to a local girl scout troop for their wildlife habitat badges, organized the Sink Hole lake education program with Ty Black, and a Night Sky program. She coordinated volunteer events such as the High Country Pathway Clean-Up Day and the M.U.C.C. OTG Oak tree release at Pickerel Lake pathway. She helped on 3 prescribed burns within the PRCSF, for which she had to pass the Wildland firefighter online courses and a treadmill test. She performed invasive species removal and treatment - on purple loosestrife, mustard garlic, and phragmites. She assisted with habitat protection and restoration, working with Emily Aisthorpe, PRCA intern, they rerouted an area of the Shingle Mill Pathway along the Pigeon River which was experiencing severe bank erosion. Sam has doubled her resume' size with all of her work experiences here and signed up for a second term with Huron Pines AmeriCorps at the PRCSF.

EX-OFFICIO REPORTS

WILDLIFE REPORT – BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

Brian reviewed the results of the early elk hunt for 2019. 96 people came to orientation out of 100 permits issued, 4 no-shows is not unusual. Hunters took a total of 71 elk, 29 bulls and 42 antlerless; all 3 Pure Michigan hunters took bulls. Tribal hunters took 3 bulls and 3 cows. The December elk hunt is approaching fast, the same number of permits will be issued. 2020 is a hunting regulations year, recommendations developed by February 2020, will go before the NRC in March for review, and for final approval in April. Let Brian know if you have any recommendations for changes to hunting regulations. There is a lot of activity going on with staff movement within the Wildlife division, Brian is acting manager for Rex Ainslie, who is acting Wildlife Chief for Russ Mason. Also, Brian, along with Jennifer Kleitch, is working to cover the PRC wildlife technician duties, as Mark Monroe moved to FRD. Brian thanked to everyone for their patience as he manages these additional duties.

RECREATION REPORT – KELLY KINSER:

Kelly reported that camping numbers for this year are on par with last year, with Pickerel Lake and Pine Grove numbers up a little bit. Elk Hill numbers were about the same as last year. The new ranger, Jacob Vallance, has been doing a great job, Jacob is currently attending phase 1 of Parks Division ranger academy. Jacob will

be done with his work season at the end of November. All the PRC summer employees wrapped up this week. We are going to be getting another ranger that will be stationed at PRCFS, possibly for year-round, more to come. The Elk Hill pavilion construction is almost wrapped up and will be complete in the spring; if you get a chance go take a look at it, blends in very well.

OIL AND GAS UPDATE – MIKE SHELTON:

Mike thanked Paul Rose for meeting with him since the last meeting, and he looks forward to working with the PRCAC and committee members of the PRCAC. He noted the increase of interest around the perimeter of the PRCFS at the last meeting, EGLE staff has since met with DNR, to discuss and get clarification on some of the mineral leases. Clean-ups at some of the sites are constantly getting better.

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – CO TOM OBERG AND CO ERIC BOTTORFF:

CO Tom Oberg of Otsego County stated that he has been here almost a year now; he noted some ORV issues in the Pigeon this summer, not too bad from last year. This fall, he will be following up on a hunting blind and a camper parked on state land. CO Eric Bottorff of Cheboygan County reported that they are doing well on staffing levels in District 3, the district is almost fully staffed in all their counties. In addition, a special investigator has recently been assigned to District 3. Cornwall Flooding was very busy this summer; and this fall a good portion of their time will be spent on the new baiting ban.

PRC UNIT REPORT – GREG REKOWSKI:

Paul Rose reported for Greg - Timber sale preparation for fiscal year 2019 was completed on time with a total of 20 sales prepared, totaling 1,315 acres. Logging activity is normal for this time of year. The pending shut-down of the Hillman power plant is big news – local timber companies would provide chips to the plant, but with that option no longer available, the remaining chip markets are limited. This may impact timber sales where we require loggers to chip the top wood so that the area is clean enough to re-plant species like red pine and jack pine. Scott Thompson, Fire Officer out of Gaylord is scheduled to work on some road improvement projects next summer. Lastly, Camp Vanderbilt renovations should be completed in the next couple of weeks.

FISHERIES DIVISION REPORT – TIM CWALINSKI:

Paul Rose reported for Tim – Temperature loggers on the Black River and Pigeon River were removed in the past month, there was nothing unusual in temperature or behavior to report. Fishery population surveys were also completed for the Black River and the Pigeon River. In stream work on the Upper Black River continued this summer, with 75 new LWD structures, repair and replacement of old structures and many stream blockages removed to enhance fish passage. A great deal of work was completed clearing the upper reaches of the Black, including a section starting near Sparr Road easement and ending near Saunders Dam. Next year, work will continue on the Black River, also stream and bank manipulation on Song of the Morning and Tubes reaches of the Pigeon. Lisha Ramsdell reported on progress being made on the replacement of the Cornwall Flooding structure as well as the replacement of the bridge at the Tubes.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Paul reviewed the proposed meeting dates for 2020, those dates being Friday, January 24, Friday, April 24, Thursday, July 23, and Thursday, October 22. Motion was made, seconded and passed to adopt the proposed meeting schedule.

Contact Paul Rose or Greg Rekowski with any future agenda items.

Next meeting is scheduled for 5:00pm, January 24, 2020 at Corwith Township Hall.

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 7:20pm

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

**KAREN CHAPMAN reporting for
GREG REKOWSKI, ACTING SECRETARY**