



Pigeon River Country Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

Location: DNR Pigeon River Headquarters complex, Vanderbilt, MI

Date: Thursday, October 19, 2023

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Thursday, October 19, 2023, starting at the Pigeon River Discovery Center and concluding at the DNR Pigeon River Headquarters. There was a Meet and Greet social hour with the Concept of Management 50th Anniversary Panel Members held prior to the meeting. 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, Rique Campa, Sandy Franz, Lance Cottrell, Kyle Yohe, Mitchell Beach, Doug Reeves, Barb Curtis, Bill Loney, Greg Walz, Larry Partridge, Bill Wood, Matt Hall, Ty Ratliff, Paul Rose and Conan Smith.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Don Horrocks and Ryan Boyer.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:

Mark Monroe, Randy Claramunt, Tim Cwalinski, Steve Buyze, Jeff Clarke, Jacob Vallance, and Karen Chapman.

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:

Shelby Adams, Neal Godby, LED,

OTHERS PRESENT:

Brad Garmon, Ned Caveney, Pete Gustafson, Andrew Knapp, Guy Lovelace, John Walters, Joe Jarecki, Carl Saunders, Dan Peck, Sandy Schmidt, Rob Pallarito, Stewart Smith, Dale Franz, Doug Franz, Kevin Stewart, Jason Dowd, John Page, Michael Breazeale and Ashton Bieri.

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Chair Lisha Ramsdell welcomed all to the October 2023 meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. Lisha thanked the P.R.C.A for providing the refreshments and to Sandy Franz and Jan Kellogg for organizing and hosting the meet and greet held at the Discovery Center prior to the meeting. The event was held to welcome the Concept of Management 50th Anniversary discussion panel members Ned Caveney, Pete Gustafson, Rique Campa and Brad Garmon. Special thanks to Sandy for coordinating the panel members and discussion questions.

AGENDA:

Greg Walz made the motion to accept the meeting agenda for October 19, 2023, seconded by Lance Cottrell. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, the agenda was approved as presented.

MINUTES:

Paul Rose made the motion to accept the July 20, 2023 meeting minutes as presented, seconded by Sandy Franz. There being no additions, deletions or corrections offered, the minutes were approved as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT (3-minute limit):

Chair Lisha Ramsdell opened the floor for public comment; no public comment was offered.

CONCEPT OF MANAGEMENT 50TH ANNIVERSARY PANEL DISCUSSION– LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha welcomed the four panel members, Ned Caveny, Pete Gustafson, Rique Campa and Brad Garmon. The panel members introduced themselves, giving brief backgrounds of their history with the PRCSF. Lisha then opened the discussion, beginning with this excerpt from page 10 of the Concept of Management - "In July 1972, the newly formed Pigeon River Country Association requested the NRC designate 127 square miles of state forest as a special management area, they also asked for official designation of the Pigeon River Country State Forest, and a plan of management for the area as assurance against unexpected and undesirable changes." The discussion on the impact of the Concept of Management developed from there. Upon conclusion of the discussion, there was a short break and the meeting moved from the Pigeon River Discovery Center and reconvened at the DNR Pigeon River Headquarters.

OLD BUSINESS:

CORNWALL DAM UPDATE – RANDY CLARAMUNT & TIM CWALINSKI:

Tim Cwalinski, Northern Lake Huron Management Unit Supervisor, DNR Fisheries Division opened by introducing Randy Claramunt, Chief, DNR Fisheries Division to the group. Tim reported on the recent history of activity regarding the dam, which is owned by the DNR Fisheries Division. Multiple inspections completed by EGLE over the last decade have showed that the dam is in unsatisfactory condition and is considered a high hazard dam. In 2019, Fisheries Division started working with Huron Pines to plan dam renovations. A permit was obtained to renovate the dam, however, based on the high cost of the bids received on the project, there were not enough funds to complete renovation. A geotechnical study by the engineering firm Wade Trim (utilizing sub-contractors) was completed in summer 2023, showing that the results are the same, there is water seepage through the levee, among other issues, including general aging of infrastructure. EGLE engineers have recommended that if Cornwall Flooding could be drawn down by up to 7 feet, that would alleviate the slope stability concerns on the levee while allowing DNR and partners to continue searching for additional renovation funds. How to accomplish a drawdown up to 7 feet, while maintaining control of the drawdown, is currently under discussion.

Randy Claramunt reported that Fish Division has been hard at work trying to address the difference in funding between what is in hand and what is needed – the estimated cost to repair Cornwall Dam is approximately between \$1.5 million to \$2 million dollars. The issues with the dam must be addressed and an initial partial drawdown is the first step in the process. This is scheduled for 2024, but EGLE permits must be secured first and designs secured. But now, good news - thanks to Shannon Lott, DNR Deputy Director and her leadership, there is \$750,000.00 available for Cornwall. This represents about 80% of general fund money that was apportioned to the Department to address the most critical issues for DNR owned dams. This amount brings the funds available for Cornwall repair to about \$1.3 million dollars. However, this funding comes with caveats - understanding that bids for repair will probably be \$1.5 million dollars or higher (total costs are a big unknown at this point), the difference between what is now available and what is needed must come from the public stakeholders who utilize Cornwall Flooding. The difference must come from those who have a “Save Cornwall” sign on their lawn, those who participate in the “Save Cornwall” Facebook page – there must be a commitment from public stakeholders to contribute that difference. If, in a year from now, the Department does not get that commitment the restoration will not happen. The other funds that were appropriated were for dam restoration only. The \$750,000.00 can be used for restoration or removal, and if those who care about Cornwall don’t donate, the money will be used to address the issues by drawdown and removal. If there are zero matching funds, that will send a message, and

the \$750,000.00 will be in jeopardy, as its use is under the discretion of the DNR Director. Deputy Director Shannon Lott, and the Fisheries Chief have agreed to this, with the support of DNR Director Scott Bowen. But it comes with a commitment that there will be matching funds donated by stakeholders in Cornwall. If there are additional matching public funds, they can be used in three different ways: 1) to supplement needed funds for renovation, 2) to be held for DNR long term maintenance and inspection costs of the dam if current renovation grant dollars are already sufficient, or 3) to be returned to the public if eventual renovation costs of the dam are too lofty to achieve goals. Huron Pines will be working directly with the public to design a means for capturing supplemental public funds.

Group discussion then ensued regarding appropriate fund-raising methods, and more.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

AQUATIC RESOURCES & FISHERIES MANAGEMENT – GREG WALZ:

Greg reported that the committee will meet before the January 2024 meeting.

FOREST COVER & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT – DOUG REEVES:

Doug reported that the committee has not met, but he wanted to share a few things. First of all, he has never seen the amount of toilet paper in the woods as he has seen lately, and it is not acceptable. Secondly, he has been involved in a lot of elk events this fall, and it is getting difficult to view elk without somebody looking over your shoulder. Lastly, E-bikes are starting to go around the gates and get into places where they should not be, he just wants to get this on your radar screens for future discussions.

RESOURCE USE & EXTRACTION –SANDY FRANZ / MARK MONROE:

Sandy Franz – nothing new to report at this time.

RECREATION & ACCESS – Paul Rose:

Paul reported that the Recreation and Access Committee met on October 10, 2023, and council members were given a copy of the committee report in their meeting packets. Discussed was the access roads map update, most of which were links or connectors that were not properly mapped, and the Tucker Road abandonment. Paul went on to discuss the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee request made to the DNR for the installation of a horse picket at Inspiration Point.

Paul Rose, on behalf of the R & A committee made the following motion: Inspiration Point Horse Picket Installation – Subject to an appropriate location being identified near, but not within, the

existing parking lot, the Committee would recommend that the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council conditionally approve or support the installation of the Horse Picket railing, as was described, and presented at the meeting. This conditional recommendation is being made subject to the identification of a suitable site near but not within the existing vehicle parking area, and it is further recommended that Committee member Barb Curtis and other PRCAC members, as appropriate, be engaged in the on-site placement discussion. Barb Curtis seconded the motion, motion carried.

The High-Country pathway bridge installation over the Black River has been estimated to cost \$500,000. A Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant for \$300,000 is being sought. The R & A committee recommends that a letter of support from the PRCAC be sent to the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board.

Paul Rose, on behalf of the R & A committee made the following motion: Letter of Support from the Chair or the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council – As previously discussed, the Recreation and Access Committee recommends that a letter of support be provided to members of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Board regarding the application which has been submitted for funding associated with the construction of the High Country Pathway bridge at the crossing of the Black River. Doug Reeves seconded the motion, motion carried.

Lastly, with regards to DNR review of prohibiting fuel-powered (noise producing) generators at Round Lake Campground, Pine Grove Campground and Town Corner Lake Campground, which was adopted by the full council by motion at its July 2023 meeting. Department staff has requested that additional time be provided regarding this proposed policy review until the staff position most directly involved in this is filled, and to allow time for new staff member to review and report their findings to the Advisory Council at a future meeting. *The Recreation and Access Committee recommends that it be noted in the meeting meetings to allow for the filling of the PRD permanent staff position associated with this policy review process and said staff member will report their findings to the Advisory Council at a future meeting.*

EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT – BILL WOOD:

Bill Wood reported that the committee has been working on kick-starting the update to the 10-year Education and Engagement plan. They will try to meet in November, December, and January to have a workplan in place to present to the full council at the January 2024 meeting for approval. Hopefully, by the October 2024 meeting, the committee would like to have a completed plan for presentation to the full council.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORTS:

DISCOVERY CENTER – SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy Franz reported that the Discovery Center continues to receive tremendous benefits from the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant, which will be ending in the next couple of months. The most recent improvement was installation of a new porous paved pathway. The educational classes are concluded for the season, and the annual volunteer appreciation dinner is taking place this weekend.

PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE – BARB CURTIS:

Barb reported that she missed the last meeting as she was out of town, however, an item of note is the date chosen for annual trail maintenance, which will be in May of 2024. The committee was pleased with the progress of the Inspiration Point hitching post project.

NEW BUSINESS:

ELECTION OF CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha reported that at the last meeting, she asked Sandy Franz, Bill Wood, and Greg Walz to serve on the nominating committee for the Chair and Vice-Chair positions. Nominating committee spokesperson Sandy Franz reported that the committee's first step was to solicit nominations from the council as a whole. Nominations were received and discussed.

Upon recommendation of the nominating committee, Sandy Franz made the following motion: Doug Reeves shall be elected as Chair, and Larry Partridge shall be elected as Vice-Chair, and both shall serve a two-year term beginning January 2024.

Paul Rose moved that the nomination be closed, and a unanimous ballot be cast. Rique Campa seconded the motion, motion carried unanimously.

Lisha congratulated Doug and Larry on their new positions. A round of applause was given to Lisha for her tenure as chair. Sandy Franz noted that Lisha was the first female to serve as chair in the history of the Advisory Council.

EX-OFFICIO REPORTS:

P.R.C. UNIT REPORT – MARK MONROE:

Mark reported on the road changes within the PRCSF, what they are finding in the process of road reviews are minor mapping mistakes that are being corrected. Every year these proposed changes go out for public review in November, then to the NRC in January for review, with final approval by the DNR Director in February. On April 1, the maps are updated with the approved changes.

Mark introduced Ashton Bieri, AmeriCorps member serving at the PRC since January 2023,

has been doing a phenomenal job. Ashton then gave a presentation of his time at the PRC.

WILDLIFE REPORT – MARK MONROE:

Mark reported on behalf of Shelby Adams this evening. The fall elk hunt was successful, with consistently warm seasonal temperatures trending above average. Overall results were 70 harvested animals out of 97 eligible hunters, which translates into a 72% success rate. There were two partner tree plantings completed, one in the PRC, and one in adjacent lands. Lastly, as a reminder to all hunters it is mandatory to report your deer harvest within 72 hours.

FISHERIES REPORT – TIM CWALINSKI:

Tim reported that the sinkhole lakes were stocked, and stream restoration work has been ongoing.

RECREATION REPORT – JEFF CLARKE:

Jeff Clarke reported that summer camping was very busy, and things are winding down. PRCSF Lead worker Logan Graff left at the end of July to take a supervisor position at Higgins Lake State Park, and Sam Black left to take a position as Fire Officer for FRD. Jeff introduced Jacob Vallance as the new PRCSF lead worker. Jacob shared that he has always enjoyed camping at Round Lake.

EGLE UPDATE – STEVE BUYZE:

Steve reported that Lambda moved onto another of the Niagaran wells (Charlton 11-1), they just have the surface plug and site restoration to complete. EGLE has hired a new geologist to potentially cover this area, Tariku Negassa. More changes in staff and area assignments may be forthcoming.

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – LED Conservation Officer:

Mark Monroe reported on behalf of C.O. Matt Theunik. Everything went well during the elk hunt. There has been an uptick in illegal ORV usage in the PRCSF, and they plan to concentrate on enforcement action.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Before moving on to Future Agenda Items, John Walters, Natural Resource Commissioner (NRC) and past PRCAC chair and member, commented that the NRC would be interested

in hearing from the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council, possibly via meeting minutes.

Lisha would like to invite Paige Perry, DNR trails specialist to give an in-person update at the January 2024 meeting on the High-Country Pathway bridge replacement over the Black River and the Pigeon River Bridge replacement. Another item for further discussion is the use of E-bikes in the PRCSF. Bill Wood noted the Education & Engagement Plan update, and Sandy Franz noted a Cornwall Flooding update. Please forward any other future agenda items to her or Mark Monroe, with a copy to Karen Chapman.

The next meeting is scheduled for 5 p.m., Thursday, January 18, 2024.

ADJOURN:

The meeting adjourned at 8:15 p.m.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,
MARK MONROE, DNR