



Pigeon River Country Advisory Council

Meeting Minutes

Location: Pigeon River Headquarters, 9966 Twin Lakes Rd., Vanderbilt, MI

Date: Thursday, October 20, 2022

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (P.R.C.A.C.) was held on Thursday, October 20, 2022 at the Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters in Vanderbilt. Chair Lisha Ramsdell called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m., then led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Lisha Ramsdell, Matt Hall, Paul Rose, Barb Curtis, Doug Reeves, Sandy Franz, Mitchell Beach, Lance Cottrell, Rique Campa, Bill Wood, Ken Glasser, Greg Walz and Don Horrocks.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Bill Loney, Jon Steigerwaldt, Ryan Boyer, Ty Ratliff and Conan Smith.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:

Mark Monroe, Susanne Biteman, Madeline Jazdyk, Jessica Greenwald, C.O. Matt Theunik, Kelly Kinser, Karen Chapman and Scott Thompson.

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:

Tim Cwalinski

OTHERS PRESENT:

Andrew Knapp, Gary Waldo, Kevin Stewart, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki and Stewart Smith.

CHAIR'S OPENING REMARKS – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Chair Lisha Ramsdell welcomed all to the October 2022 meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council; and hoped that everyone had a chance to enjoy the forest during the fall season.

AGENDA:

Lisha added the agenda item "Cornwall Update" under "Old Business". There were no other additions, deletions or corrections offered.

Paul Rose made the motion to accept the agenda as presented, seconded by Greg Walz. There being no further additions, deletions or corrections offered, the agenda for tonight's meeting was approved.

MINUTES:

Doug Reeves made the motion to accept the minutes as presented, seconded by Barb Curtis. There being no additions, deletions or corrections offered, all members present voted in favor to approve the minutes as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT (5-minute limit):

Chair Lisha Ramsdell opened the floor for public comment. Gary Waldo commented that he volunteers at the PRC HQ on weekends (about 80 people stopped at the PRC HQ during his shift last weekend), and the most common question from visitors is where they can best view elk. CO Matt Theunik answered that the colder it gets, the more the elk move around. The best chance to see elk is at the elk viewing areas (food plots) at dusk or dawn.

STANDING COMMITTEE REPORTS:

AQUATIC RESOURCES & FISHERIES MANAGEMENT – GREG WALZ:

Greg reported that they have not met since June 2022, he is planning on scheduling a meeting yet this fall. Lisha and Greg commented that the committee will be taking a close look at the Sinkhole lakes, and the continuing erosion happening around the lakes. Greg said this would be a priority.

EDUCATION & ENGAGEMENT – BILL WOOD:

Bill reported that the committee met on October 11, 2022; and noted this was the first meeting since 2020 due to the Covid outbreak. They reviewed the 2014 Education and Engagement plan, and assessed what has been accomplished, and what needs more focus. Bill asked that the council as a whole review the original Education and Engagement Plan (copies of “Making the Case for the PRC: A Proposed Education and Engagement Plan – Pigeon River Country State Forest” were provided to council members via email and hardcopies). Before the next council meeting, Bill would like the council to review the document and consider what it would like the Education & Engagement committee to be focused on. Ten years of the plan are coming up soon, the committee would like to explore how to revise and refocus on it.

Doug Reeves shared that outreach to people in local communities should not be overlooked – even though they live locally, they may not understand why the P.R.C.S.F. has certain regulations in place, for example, why they can’t ride their ORV’s in the forest.

FOREST COVER & WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT – DOUG REEVES:

Doug reported that the committee has not met since the last P.R.C.A.C. meeting. At the last meeting, they discussed having something put together on Cornwall, but will wait for more news on that. Doug commented he had heard a few years ago that the P.R.C.S.F. was underutilized, his recent experiences show that it is not. Noted a lot of activity in the forest - hunters, elk viewing, etc. It is important that we work together to have forest cover to support wildlife.

RESOURCE USE & EXTRACTION/OIL AND GAS POLICY UPDATE – SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy deferred to Mark Monroe’s report on the “Hydrocarbon Policy & Procedure Update” under “Old Business” and will speak up during his report if necessary.

RECREATION & ACCESS – PAUL ROSE:

Paul reported that the committee has not met since the last P.R.C.A.C. meeting. There will be a few items of note discussed during Kelly Kinser’s report. Thanks to Bill Wood for reviewing the Education and Engagement issues – after reviewing the 2014 Education & Engagement document there were a lot of areas, especially for emerging recreation like trails, that were touched on. Now with more of the P.R.C.S.F. being picked up on by social media users – it is a reality we must be aware of and how it fits in. Also in terms of emerging trail uses, for example e-bike users. Paul is planning on having a meeting

before the next P.R.C.A.C. meeting and will work with Bill to coordinate the Education & Engagement document with recreation and access.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORTS:

DISCOVERY CENTER – SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy reported that the Discovery Center will be open on weekends through the end of October. They will close out the season with the Volunteer Appreciation Dinner being held on Friday, November 4, 2022. The last Discovery Center educational class was held last Sunday – “Life of an Elk”. Jordan Hurst and Sam Black did a remarkable job organizing the class. There is a new exhibit in the D.C. called the “Balance Interactive”. It is a visitor interactive exhibit that gives people a chance to try out their management ideas for the P.R.C.S.F. on a scale – they place stones representing certain elements of forest management to see if they can keep it in balance. Lisha shared that the D.C. had close to 900 visitors this season.

PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE – BARB CURTIS:

Barb reported that the committee met in late May of 2022, and the main discussion was on getting some connector trails approved, and more ORV usage on roads where they shouldn't be. Riders appreciated the maps at the kiosks, especially the larger views provided. The committee will meet again next week.

OLD BUSINESS:

HYDROCARBON POLICY & PROCEDURE UPDATE – MARK MONROE:

Mark reviewed the DNR policy and procedure approval process; per Matt Fry the policy will hopefully be in place by the end of the year. Sandy Franz reported that the policy will be presented at the November 2022 Resource Bureau meeting for review and comment – the Resource Bureau consists of all the division chiefs of the DNR. The policy will then go back to the Resource Bureau in December 2022, where it will be signed by the Director and division chiefs, at that point the policy will be official.

CORNWALL DAM UPDATE – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha reported that she had a conversation with Jim Dexter, DNR Fisheries Chief, and at this point there are no plans for dewatering of the Cornwall Flooding in 2023. DNR

Fisheries will discuss the dam status with E.G.L.E. to determine next steps. Lisha is concerned that through inaction, there is no plan in place to take care of the site. She feels that the council needs to be concerned with the question if drawdown were to happen, what is the Department's plan for the site. More discussion ensued on this subject.

NEW BUSINESS:

ELK MANAGEMENT ADVISORY TEAM UPDATE – PAUL ROSE:

Paul reported that the draft Elk Management plan has been released for public review and comment. He reminded all that this is an update of the 2010 plan. There were a variety of stakeholders represented on the advisory team. Paul noted his surprise at the interest in a possible expansion of the elk range expressed at the initial meeting. However, at the second meeting, Director Eichinger made it clear the Department would not expand on the current elk range. There are no significant changes from the 2010 plan. Paul noted that on Tuesday, October 25, there will be an open house public meeting at BJ's Restaurant in Gaylord regarding the draft plan. Lisha will circulate the draft plan to council members for review.

STATE FOREST PLAN INPUT – MARK MONROE:

Mark reported that he spoke with Dan Heckman this week, the plan is still being developed. Dan will reach out to the P.R.C.A.C. in January 2023, Mark suggested to Doug Reeves that Dan will meet with the Forest Cover & Wildlife committee in January 2023 for a more in-depth discussion, then report to the council as whole at the April 2023 meeting. Dan is planning for the draft plan to be available in June 2023 for public comment and review.

PROPOSED 2023 SCHEDULE – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Lisha proposed the following meeting schedule for 2023:

Thursday, January 19, 2023 - Otsego County Library second floor conference room

Thursday, April 20, 2023 - PRC Headquarters

Thursday, July 20, 2023 – PRC Headquarters

Thursday, October 19, 2023 – PRC Headquarters

Lisha shared that tours to various P.R.C.S.F. sites will be scheduled prior to some of the meetings, council members please let Mark or Lisha know of any sites you would like to visit. One of the next tours will be at the Sinkhole lakes.

EX-OFFICIO REPORTS:

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – C.O. MATT THEUNICK:

C.O. Matt Theunick reported that last weekend about 150 ORV's came through on Webb Rd, to Osmun, to Clark Bridge, then on Clute, back up to Indian River. This is a yearly organized group ORV ride. Seeing more and more ORV activity on the county roads in Cheboygan County. The early elk season went well, there was one accident where a cow hunter shot a bull. There has been a lot of traffic noted in the P.R.C.S.F. recently.

P.R.C. UNIT REPORT – MARK MONROE:

Mark gave an update on the Blue Lakes Fire, reporting that the salvage timber sale was sold and approximately 151 acres are being cut right now. The logger is working in conjunction with the timber harvest on Black River Ranch. The fiscal year 2022 plan of work was completed, there was a total of 91 treatments, for a total of 1,516 acres completed. The fiscal year 2023 plan of work consists of a total of 1,280 acres. Getting ready to inventory the YOE (year of entry) 2025 compartments. A couple of weeks ago, we partnered with Wildlife Division and the Roger Moore Chapter of the Ruffed Grouse Society (Kevin Stewart, President who is present tonight) to plant 30 trees at a project that has been in the works for 8 years, located near Road 39. Still working with Lambda and Core Energy on some well site restorations. Worked on three road projects this year, Road 1 is still in progress, Road 24 is complete, and Compartment 18 forest access road is complete. The removal of structure is still in progress at the McIntyre house. Two people have expressed an interest in the Stevens cabin on Sawdust Pile Road. For the Castle property the structure was burned down as part of a fire training exercise. With regards to the Hoobler property we were awarded a M.N.R.T.F. grant to purchase – in process. The Hartyl property (440 acres) is back up for sale again, the Department is seeking approval for a M.N.R.T.F. grant to purchase. We hosted the DNR Resource Bureau meeting at the PRC HQ last week, they lunched at the Discovery Center, with an overview of the D.C. given by Sandra Clark, then after lunch they toured the Walled Lake property, the Blue Lakes Fire and the Sinkhole lakes.

New roofs were installed on the small residence and the bunkhouse and the chimneys were repaired. With help from Sandra Clark, bids were put in place to have all the PRC buildings exterior logs refinished. Mark has requested funding for new furnaces to be installed in the small residence and the bunkhouse. We may offer forestry student interns housing in these buildings in the spring of 2023.

WILDLIFE REPORT – JESSICA GREENWALD FOR SHELBY ADAMS:

Jessica reported on the ongoing project in Compartment 17, which is in the Osmun Rd. and Tin Bridge Rd. area. It is an invasive species removal project, partnering with Huron Pines. The first elk hunt was a success with 78 state hunters harvesting an elk, the boundaries of the first hunt did not include much of the P.R.C.S.F., however Green Timbers and an area west of Fishermen's Rd. were open to hunting. To summarize the first hunt, state hunters harvested 26 bulls, 46 cows and 6 calves; tribal hunters harvested 3 bulls, and 1 calf. The second elk hunt will be December 10-18 and will include the P.R.C.SF. Jessica reminded all deer hunters that they are required to report their harvest online within 72 hours this year. Please reach out via phone, or stop at a check station if you have any questions or need help reporting.

FISHERIES – LISHA RAMSDELL FOR TIM CWALINSKI:

Tim was not present tonight, and Lisha had no updates at this time.

RECREATION REPORT –KELLY KINSER:

Kelly reported that attendance at campgrounds was high this year, not quite as high as last year. It also seems that trail use is high as well. She noted that it seems a lot of trail users are not as prepared as they should be when heading out, sees an opportunity to educate people on being prepared. Equestrian use has remained stable, and there has been a tremendous improvement on legal riding in the forest. Regarding equestrian trail connectors proposed in 2015 to facilitate loop riding, the proposed connectors are still being considered by the Director. Paul Rose asked for clarification on the number of connectors and if this included the connector at Inspiration Point. Kelly reported that the proposed connector at Inspiration Point did not go through vetting by the P.R.C.A.C. Recreation and Access committee. Currently, equestrians can ride as far as the Inspiration Point parking lot. Lisha expressed concern that the connector did not go through the appropriate vetting process, and could it be pulled off the Directors desk at this time so it can be properly reviewed in committee. Barb will do some research through some Equestrian committee meeting minutes, and Kelly will reach out to the involved parties to try to pull back the Inspiration Point connector proposal so it can go through the appropriate P.R.C.A.C. Recreation and Access committee review process.

Kelly then went on to review the status of the trail bridge replacements. The High Country Pathway bridge over the Black River is planned for installation in 2023. The trail reroute is still being worked on for the Pigeon River bridge, there is difficult terrain in the area. The Pickerel Lake crossing and Tubbs Creek bridges are on hold because funding is not available.

Staff has been working on replacing picnic tables and fire pits, replacing bulletin boards, and trail maintenance.

Lastly, Kelly has accepted another position, and will be working out of class for the next six months. Not sure who will be replacing her at this time, more to come.

EGLE UPDATE – SUSANNE BITEMAN:

Susanne reported that they did submit comments on the proposed Hydrocarbon Policy. Also at Charlton 4, there is a groundwater clean-up in process. Working on-site restoration in the Pigeon and elsewhere.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Education & Engagement – all members please review material before next meeting.

Forest Cover & Wildlife – Cornwall, State Forest Plan.

Resource Use & Extraction – Hydrocarbon Policy & Procedure update.

Recreation & Access – More discussion on the Inspiration Point connector and e-bike use on trail system.

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

The next meeting is scheduled for 5 p.m., Thursday, January 19, 2023 at the Otsego County Library - 2nd floor conference room.

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 7:38 pm.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,
MARK MONROE, DNR