



Western Upper Peninsula Citizens Advisory Council (WUPCAC)
Meeting Minutes – APPROVED 1/28/26
Thursday, December 18, 2025
5:00-7:30pm Central / 6:00-8:30pm Eastern
Virtual via Zoom

Council Members Present

Erik Bessonon	Dave Johnson	Carol Mason Sherrill
Brian Driscoll	George Lindquist, Vice Chair	Tom Solka, Chair
Floyd Dropps	Chauncey Moran	Ryan Tanner
Barb Gajewski	Chris Peterson	Lucas Vold
Dave Hall	Suzanne Petschke	

Council Members Absent/Excused

Gordon Maclean	Kelly Bennett Simon
Skip Schulz	Faye Williams

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff & Guests

Lt. Ryan Aho, Law Enforcement Division, District 1
Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette
Carly Graff, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails Section, Crystal Falls
Rob Katona, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails Section, Marquette
Darren Kramer, Fisheries Division, Escanaba
Doug Rich, Parks & Recreation Division, Baraga
Bill Scullon, Wildlife Division, Norway
Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division, Marquette
Sean Sundholm, Facilities & Operations Division, Marquette

I. **Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Moment of Remembrance**

At 6:00pm Eastern/5:00pm Central, **Chair Solka** called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chair Solka remembered long-serving Council member Warren Suchovsky, 85, who passed away on November 14 after a lengthy illness. Mr. Suchovsky served on the Council since its founding in 2008 and held many roles, including chair, vice chair, and committee lead. He was an all-around leader and a valued resource for the citizens of the Upper Peninsula. A moment of remembrance and reflection on Warren's life was observed. **Chair Solka** also noted that he received a thank-you note in the mail from Mr. Suchovsky's family, expressing their appreciation for the kind words and the floral arrangement sent on behalf of the Council.

II. **Roll Call of Virtual Attendees/Confirm Quorum**

At **Chair Solka's** request, **Ms. Dahlstrom** conducted a roll call of attendees from the Zoom participant list. She indicated a quorum was present for the purpose of conducting Council business and thanked **Mr. Rich** for leading the meeting in Mrs. Haughey's absence. **Chair Solka** welcomed members of the public who registered to attend: Emma Woelkers of Senator Peters' office, Jan VanAmberg of the Eastern UP, and Gina Nicholas of the Keweenaw.

Chair Solka noted the Council’s purpose and provided a brief overview of the Council’s advisory role as chartered by the DNR, public comment opportunities during the meeting and virtual meeting etiquette.

III. **Adoption of Agenda**

Chair Solka asked the Council if there were any additions or revisions to the agenda. There being none, **Mr. Johnson motioned to accept the agenda as presented; Vice Chair Lindquist supported the motion. After no discussion, Chair Solka called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.**

IV. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

Chair Solka asked if there were any changes to the WUPCAC July 24, 2025 draft meeting minutes, which were distributed to the Council via email previously for review. **Vice Chair Lindquist motioned to approve the minutes as submitted; Mr. Dropps supported the motion. After no discussion, Chair Solka called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.**

Chair Solka also asked if there were any changes to the Joint UPCAC October 8, 2025 draft meeting minutes, which were distributed to the Council via email previously for review. **Mr. Johnson motioned to approve the minutes as submitted; Vice Chair Lindquist supported the motion. After no discussion, Chair Solka called for a vote. The motioned passed unanimously.**

V. **Reports from DNR Division Staff**

Written staff reports were provided to Council members on December 11, 2025. The following brief updates were added.

1. **Doug Rich, Parks & Recreation Division**

- a. A Land and Water Conservation Grant for \$1 million was recently awarded to the Parks & Recreation Division for the Houghton Douglass Falls project. With a 50% match from the state park capital outlay, a total of \$1.5 million in funding will allow the project to move into phase two. Staff along with the Keweenaw Convention & Visitors Bureau are very excited to see this project moving forward.
- b. **Mr. Tanner** asked if the construction at Twin Lakes State Park will continue through winter. **Mr. Rich** noted some challenges; however, they are working with the partners involved to have the park open by July. The park will seem like a new park with a new toilet building, new paved roads, new sewer system, etc.
- c. **Mr. Moran** asked if the DNR acquired 30 acres of property southeast of Houghton Douglass Falls which provides access to the bottom of the falls. **Mr. Rich** clarified the DNR purchased only the core area at the top of the falls. Phase one of construction provided an ADA pathway, a parking lot, and a bridge across Hammel Creek. Phase two is to continue the project on the north and south sides with an ADA walkway and overlook decks.

2. **Darren Kramer, Fisheries Division**

- a. There were no additional updates to the report and no questions brought forward.

3. **Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division**

- a. There were no additional updates to the report.
- b. **Vice Chair Lindquist** asked how winter weather conditions are affecting loggers. **Mr. Seablom** stated timber sale activity is subdued because of the markets. However, the winter conditions with water underneath the snow can actually help create good winter roads for logging.

4. Lt. Ryan Aho, Law Enforcement Division

- a. Two recruits from the DNR conservation officer training academy are finishing up their final phases of training. They will be assigned as permanent officers in Baraga County and in Gogebic County.
- b. **Mr. Hall** asked if the two new officers are an increase to current CO staff in the U.P. or if they are replacements for retirements. **Lt. Aho** stated it is not an increase. One new officer will fill a retirement, and one will fill an open position from a transfer. There are currently 21 conservation officers in the western UP (District 1) with all available positions filled. **Lt. Aho** does not have the data for the eastern UP (District 2) but felt they were close to having all available positions filled. He further explained the ratio of COs across U.P. counties.

5. Carly Graff & Rob Katona, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails Section

- a. **Mr. Katona** indicated he and **Ms. Graff** were attending on behalf of Mr. Yesney. There were no additional updates to the report. A more detailed account of western U.P. trails will be provided later in the meeting.

6. Bill Scullon, Wildlife Division

- a. Information in the report regarding deer season was preliminary. **Mr. Lemmien** will provide an updated preliminary review later in the meeting.
- b. A meeting was held today with a team of staff who will be involved in the second moose collaring in February. The target this year is to collar 40 moose. Last year's event collared 20 moose. Although the number has doubled for this year, the operation is expected to be more efficient and effective.
- c. **Mr. Moran** asked if there was a movement to place elk in the U.P. in the future. **Mr. Scullon** indicated there has been dialog on and off over the years, but there is no plan in the immediate future. He noted there have been a few elk who visit the Bruce Crossing area occasionally from a herd in northwest Wisconsin.
- d. **Mr. Tanner** asked about the martin and fisher trapping seasons. **Mr. Scullon** indicated Dec. 18 is the last day of the season, so official numbers are not yet known. Trappers have reported seeing a lot of martins.

VII. Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

Chair Solka opened the floor for public comments on agenda items only; none were brought forward.

VIII. Old Business

1. Follow-Up from July Meeting - UPDATE: Thompson Hatchery Pond Stocking Update (**Dropps / Kramer**)

- a. In response to a request by **Mr. Dropps** for the final stocking numbers from the Thompson ponds at the July meeting, **Mr. Kramer** provided details on the 2025 walleye spring fingerling pond results at Thompson
- b. There as a total spring fingerling harvest production of 70,384, with a return rate of 23.5% across 5 out of 6 available ponds (one overwintered with muskies), resulting in inconsistent success across the ponds. The average size of fish across the 5 ponds measured 1.6 inches or so. Each pond initially receives about 60,000 fry the third or last week of May.
- c. **Mr. Dropps** noted the ponds have not been producing well for a number of years. **Mr. Kramer** discussed potential factors affecting production, including quality eggs, climate influence from nearby Lake Michigan (needing quick pond warm up and spring cool down) and the need for consistent plankton metabolism, though no definitive cause has been identified yet. Staff consistently monitor oxygen levels, temperatures, pH levels, and chemicals in the water and are extremely vested in these ponds to increase success levels.
- d. **Mr. Dropps** asked about heat exchangers to use in the spring. **Mr. Kramer** stated although it is a good idea, each pond is a half-acre in size and would be an expensive option. There is one solar

pond on site, but it is not large enough to raise fish in. Staff are exploring the use of solar covers to warm up the ponds in the spring.

- e. **Mr. Dropps** suggested exploring what Wisconsin's hatcheries are doing as they are achieving a consistent 94% return rate or possibly adjusting incubation temperatures to improve outcomes. **Mr. Kramer** noted staff have been engaging with Wisconsin, the American Fisheries Society, tribal entities, and researching literature reviews on possible solutions. He also indicated manipulating the egg process increases mortality.
- f. At **Mr. Dropps** request, **Mr. Kramer** will send the WUPCAC Fisheries Committee a copy of the stocking data from other ponds.
- g. **Mr. Johnson** indicated several tribal ponds in the region are very successful and asked if the DNR has compared what is being done differently at those ponds. **Mr. Kramer** explained how geology can have significant impacts on ponds (near farming land, soil profiles) in addition to climate, location and staffing and resources in the Fisheries Division. Tribal ponds have full-time staff that only handle the ponds, whereas DNR staff are also charged with other responsibilities such as surveys, dam maintenance, etc. He added the tribal ponds are also not immune to failures, noting a significant mortality event at the Souix ponds last year.
- h. Discussion ensued regarding funding issues the Fisheries Division is experiencing with increased fertilization supply costs and decreased staffing levels.
- i. At **Chair Solka's** suggestion, **Mr. Dropps** will have the Council's Fisheries Committee review the possibility of resubmitting a resolution to the Fisheries Division regarding this issue and also propose a recommendation to compare survival rates of eggs from different sources and possibly use them.

2. Additional Follow-Up Item

- a. **Vice Chair Lindquist** indicated a brief discussion was held at the July Council meeting regarding several steps that need to be completed before a wolf hunt were to be implemented, one of which is a public education plan on responsible wolf harvesting. With the potential for the delisting of wolves to occur after recent legislative action, it would be important to move forward with this education plan now versus waiting until a delisting occurs when reactions will be high. **Chair Solka** suggested placing this item on the next agenda would be appropriate.

IX. **New Business**

1. White Nose Syndrome Update (DePue)

- a. **Mr. DePue** had a last-minute conflict preventing his ability to provide a white nose syndrome presentation. However, a video recording of his presentation at the EUPCAC meeting two days ago was played for the Council as an alternative. The presentation covered bat conservation in Michigan, including the state's nine bat species, their ecological importance, and the impact of white nose syndrome, a fungal disease causing significant population declines in several bat species.
- b. Bats of Michigan:
 - 1) Nine species, all insectivores (primary nocturnal insect predator).
 - 2) Two federally endangered bat species: Indiana Bat, Northern long-eared bat, Tri-colored bats listing decision delayed.
 - 3) All have legal protection in Michigan.
 - 4) Long lived, big brown bats 30+ years in wild.
- c. Why Should We Care About Bats? Economic Importance.
 - 1) Pest control benefits \$3.7 – \$53 billion / year nationally.
 - 2) Michigan agriculture \$528 million to \$1.2 billion annually (2011). ~\$74 per farmed acre.

- 3) Increase in insecticide use increased infant mortality (F.G. Eyal. Science 385, eadog0344 (2024).
 - d. What is White Nose Syndrome (WNS)?
 - 1) Disease caused by a fungus.
 - 2) *Pseudogymnoascus destructans* (Pd).
 - 3) Causes energy depletion.
 - 4) Impacts whole suite of cave bat species: little brown, northern long-eared, tri-colored, and big brown bats.
 - e. WNS in Michigan
 - 1) Michigan in 12th year of infection.
 - 2) All hibernacula have presence of WNS.
 - f. WNS Impacts in Michigan
 - 1) Survey data indicates 89% decline of the sites surveyed post-WNS infection.
 - 2) Colder hibernacula continue to have higher survival.
 - g. Michigan DNR Bat Conservation Actions
 - 1) Statewide bat monitoring: disease, population.
 - 2) Protect critical hibernacula.
 - 3) WNS treatment trials.
 - 4) Outreach/ education.
 - 5) Bat Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP).
 - 6) Work with partners to accomplish conservation goals.
 - h. Hibernaculum Climate Manipulation
 - 1) Reduce internal temperatures to 36-38 degrees F.
 - i. If We Warm It, Will They Come?
 - j. Lake States HCP
 - 1) Covers; Indiana, northern long-eared, tri-colored, little brown bats.
 - 2) Necessary to obtain incidental take permit.
 - 3) Allows for continued forestry management practices while providing habitat conservation for federally listed species.
 - k. Lake States HCP Status
 - 1) HCP was approved in March 2023.
 - 2) Committed bat conservation measures (within-stand retention, bat surveys and WNS mitigation).
 - 3) Accepting applications from private landowners into the Landowner Enrollment Program.
 - l. *Questions:*
 - Several members had multiple questions after viewing the video recording related to position funding, research grant funding, etc. A suggestion was also made to develop a possible resolution to support grant funding for this important research.
 - **Ms. Dahlstrom** will email the recorded presentation to Council members, collect any questions, and ask Mr. DePue to attend the January meeting for a Q&A period.
2. Western UP Trails Update (Katona/Graff)
- a. Trail rangers have done an excellent job completing snowmobile trail inspections, and clubs are beginning to set up and groom trails. The warm-up and subsequent freezing have allowed trails to set up nicely for the season.
 - b. There are no new closure or development updates to report for the central U.P.
 - c. The impacts of the Thanksgiving storm on western U.P. trails caused several trail closures in Gogebic, Ontonagon and Baraga Counties, causing significant damage, including downed branches and trees across trails; however, efforts are underway to reopen trails by this weekend.

Parks & Recreation & Forest Resource Division staff provided significant assistance, running dozers and cutting branches. Volunteers have been working for 3-4 weeks to clear trails and maps will be updated soon to reflect the progress.

- d. One closure update, snowmobile trail UP-16 between Crystal Falls (near Michigamme River) and Sagola is closed for 6 miles due to private land access issues, breaking the direct link. The trail remains open west of the Michigamme River to Iron River/UP-111, with the DNR exploring reroutes.
- e. **Vice Chair Lindquist** commented trail 14 is the best he has seen in years, noting brush clearing and a good base.
- f. **Chair Solka** inquired about the status of the trail issues from Wakefield to Ironwood. **Mr. Katona** stated the reroute, utilizing a segment of US-2, is still in place and available for use. Trails staff are working on engineering plans to move the snowmobile trail off the paved road in the near future.

3. Preliminary Overview of 2025 Deer Season (Lemmien)

- a. An adapted presentation from the last NRC meeting by Mr. Brent Rudolph was presented to the Council, with U.P.-specific slides added for the U.P. deer season. **Mr. Lemmien** stressed this information is preliminary (summarized through Dec. 4) with a full season comparison planned for March.
- b. The 2025 deer season showed a 0.8% increase in statewide tag sales (1.3 million total), with 600,000 hunters purchasing those tags, maintaining a stable hunting population over the last five years. The need still exists to bring in new hunters.
- c. **Mr. Johnson** expressed concern about the reduction in U.P. harvest and the impact of predators, including bears, coyotes, and wolves.
- d. The reported harvest data is presented as “reported harvest” and is subject to change as reports are updated. “Reported harvest” underestimates “actual harvest” due to non-compliance in hunter reporting (20-25%). Historic “harvest estimates” from the mail survey overestimate “actual harvest” with a 30% difference over the past three years. Michigan “reported harvest” and “harvest estimates” track as closely or better than comparable states.
- e. The use of the harvest reporting app was highlighted, which has improved efficiency in completing harvest reports. Completion initially took 4 minutes and is now taking about 2.5 minutes.
- f. Through Dec. 4, opening day of firearm season saw almost a 5% decrease in the U.P., with an overall 13% decrease in harvest for the entire firearm season compared to the 2024 season. Percentages for the northern and southern lower peninsula were also shown for comparison.
- g. On opening day, a little over 38,000 deer were reported harvested statewide with 77% of those being antlered deer. 8,700 antlerless deer were reported harvested statewide on opening day compared to just over 48,000 for the entire firearm season.
- h. A heat check map indicated township-level harvest changes, with more variation in the U.P. compared to other regions.
- i. Michigan's year-to-date reported harvest is close to last year's, showing a slight decrease, with Minnesota and Missouri showing significant increases.
- j. U.P. early archery season numbers are slightly higher than last year, but the firearm season harvest is below the 2024 season.
- k. **Mr. Johnson** noted differences in harvesting 70,000 deer in the 2000s versus only 18-20,000 deer today. **Mr. Lemmien** discussed the historical impact of the timber industry and winter severity on deer populations over this same timeframe, with winter severity having the most effect on deer population. **Mr. Johnson** stated although he agrees with this, he emphasized the need for better predator management, particularly bears, coyotes and wolves, which has greatly increased since the 2000s. **Mr. Lemmien** provided historical context on the integration of bear hunting with deer licenses and noted a change in population goals is anticipated. He also noted the recent House vote to delist the gray wolf and the potential for state management if the Senate passes the bill.

- l. **Mr. Vold** noted the inability to properly correlate a decrease in the deer population with predator load based on harvest numbers (not total population). A decrease in hunters also has an effect. **Mr. Lemmien** discussed the number of U.P. residents purchasing a license and the historical harvest success rate.
 - m. **Vice Chair Lindquist** noted a 14% harvest success rate based on his assessment of several buck pools in the northern U.P.
4. Deer Advisory Team (DAT) General Overview (Scullon)
- a. The newly formed Deer Advisory Team (DAT) is under the operation of the Wildlife Division, led by Mr. Brent Rudolph, the DNR Wildlife Division’s deer, moose, and elk management specialist. **Mr. Scullon** is a member of the DAT as staff. The DAT derived from the original Deer Management Initiative that was created by the NRC and has since dissolved. Membership on the DAT was discussed.
 - b. The DAT aims to prioritize deer management and habitat, with separate recommendations provided to the Wildlife Division for the U.P. and lower peninsula.
 - c. A general overview of the DATs terms of reference (dated 8/2025) provided by Mr. Rudolph for this meeting was reviewed:
 - 1) Mission: Help ensure DNR deer management policy is based on the best available sound scientific evidence and informed by comprehensive, well informed stakeholder engagement.
 - 2) Core Values: Prioritize deer and deer habitat, rather than the needs and wants of individuals or organizations. We shall strive to maintain a conservation mindset, seeking to maximize the opportunity for the citizenry to utilize, enjoy, and hold overall positive views on deer and deer hunting well beyond our lifetime.
 - 3) Membership: The Upper Peninsula and Lower Peninsula shall be composed of approximately equal (10 seats each) unaffiliated members and organizational representatives with an interest in deer, farming, and forest management, or other relevant backgrounds or stakeholder categories as specified by the DNR.
 - 4) Member Duties: Solicit the opinions of deer hunters from their area or their organization, synthesize comments, and provide them to the DAT. DAT members’ input must include more than personal opinions and experiences. Members should contact hunters throughout the region and/or develop a network within their region/organization to get information.
 - d. **Vice Chair Lindquist** asked what the timeframe is for the group’s recommendations. **Mr. Scullon** indicated the goal is for the DNR to have their recommendations to the NRC in February or March. The NRC is scheduled to review them for information in April, with potential action in May.
 - e. **Vice Chair Lindquist** suggests the CACs be able to weight in and provide input on the recommendations before they are presented to the NRC. **Mr. Scullon** stated he will take this suggestion back to Mr. Rudolph and the DAT chair at their meeting tomorrow (Dec. 19) as the timeline is very condensed. **Mr. Scullon** also reminded the group of the opportunity to provide input directly to the NRC at the April and May meetings.
5. Status of Council Member Term Expirations & Absences Reminder (Dahlstrom)
- a. The term expiration cycle affecting half of the council every two years was reviewed. The next round of terms will expire on December 31, 2026. Members have the option to be considered for an additional four-year term at that time. A selection process will take place in the late fall of 2026 to fill any open positions.
 - b. Attendance at meetings, as outlined in the bylaws, was discussed. Members were encouraged to attend regularly to ensure a quorum for conducting Council business.

6. Reminder of Annual Officer Selection at January 2026 Meeting (Solka)
 - a. **Chair Solka** reminded the Council that the annual officer election, held every year at the first meeting of the year, will take place at the January meeting.

X. **Committee Activity**

1. Trails/Recreation/Law (Gajewski)
 - a. No updates to report.
2. Fisheries (Droppps)
 - a. Both the East and West Councils submitted resolutions in early to mid-2024 opposing any expansion of underwater spearing. However, at the November NRC meeting, the Commission approved Fisheries Order 219.26, which lifts the sunset date of March 31, 2026, on regulations that allow for underwater spearfishing of lake trout, northern pike and walleye in select waters of southern Lake Michigan and southern Lake Huron. The commission also approved an amendment by Commissioner John Walters that expands the area open to underwater spearfishing.
 - b. The Commission, also at its November meeting, did not accept the DNR Fisheries Division recommendations for Fisheries Order 206.26, part of which removed several UP county lakes from changes to the size, possession and protection slot limits of walleye based on recommendations from the WUPCAC Fisheries Committee.
 - c. The committee was very disappointed in both of these outcomes.
3. Wildlife (Vice Chair Lindquist)
 - a. A meeting will be scheduled before the January meeting to discuss a variety of wildlife topics as well as review a resolution drafted by **Vice Chair Lindquist** recommending a better balance of bear versus deer by allowing for more bear tags.
 - b. It is also hoped that both the East and West CAC wildlife committees will be able to review the recommendations from the U.P. Deer Advisory Team (DAT) before they are submitted to the NRC for information.
4. Forestry (Vold)
 - a. No updates to report.

XI. **Next Meeting**

1. Approval of 2026 Meeting Dates & Locations (Solka)
 - a. The Council reviewed the proposed 2026 meeting schedule, with several members noting conflicts with the proposed May 20, 2026 date. **Mr. Johnson motioned to approve the meeting schedule with the exception of the May 20, 2026 meeting date; Mr. Hall supported the motion. After no further discussion, Chair Solka called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.**
 - b. At **Chair Solka's** recommendation, the Council will be surveyed via email with an alternate May meeting date. Once a majority of responses are received, the May meeting will be set as chosen.
2. Next WUPCAC Meeting
 - a. **Chair Solka** noted the next regular Council meeting will be held on Wednesday, January 28 at 6pm Eastern/5pm Central, via Zoom.
3. Topic Suggestions for Next Meeting
 - a. Topic suggestions for the next meeting include officer selections, guiding process on the Great Lakes and inland lakes. Future meeting topics include the possibility of elk in the U.P., and an

update on the wolf count survey and moose collaring projects. These topics will be added to agendas as presenters become available.

- b. Any other topic suggestions can be sent to the Chair, Vice Chair, or Ms. Dahlstrom.

XII. **Public Comments (On Any Topic)**

Chair Solka opened the floor for public comments on any topic; none were brought forward.

XIII. **Closing Comments from the Council**

Chair Solka opened the floor for closing comments from the Council.

1. **Mr. Hall** supports the idea of grant funding for bat conservation and mentions his interest in joining the Wildlife Committee.
2. **Mr. Moran** shares personal observations on the deer population and the impact of predators and hunting practices.
3. **Mr. Dropps** suggests sending flowers and a card to Ms. Haughey who is on medical leave.

XIV. **Adjournment**

Chair Solka thanked everyone for attending the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 8:30pm Eastern/7:30pm Central.