

**Western Upper Peninsula Citizens' Advisory Council (WUPCAC)**  
**Meeting Minutes - APPROVED 8/5/25 via email**  
**Thursday, May 1, 2025**  
**5:00-7:30pm Central / 6:00-8:30pm Eastern**  
**Island Convention Center, Wolf Room, Harris**

**Council Members Present**

Erik Bessonon	George Lindquist, <b>Vice Chair</b>	Tom Solka, <b>Chair</b>
Brian Driscoll	Gordon Maclean	Ryan Tanner
Barb Gajewski	Chris Peterson	Lucas Vold
Dave Hall	Suzanne Petschke	
Dave Johnson	Carol Mason Sherrill	

**Council Members Absent/Excused**

Floyd Dropps	Skip Schulz	Faye Williams
Chauncey Moran	Kelly Bennett Simon	
Horst Schmidt	Warren Suchovsky	

**Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff & Guests**

Dave Caroffino, Fisheries Division, Charlevoix  
Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette  
Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy-Executive Division, Marquette  
Bill Scullon, Wildlife Division, Norway  
Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division, Marquette  
Lt. Ryan Aho, Law Enforcement Division, District 1  
Sean Sundholm, Finance & Operations Division, Marquette  
Carly Graff, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails Section, Crystal Falls  
Cory Luoto, Forest Resources Division, Newberry

**Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance**

At 6:03pm Eastern/5:03pm Central, **Chair Solka** called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. **Chair Solka** welcomed members of the public as well as DNR staff and fellow Council members. **Ms. Dahlstrom** confirmed a quorum (13 of 20) for the purpose of conducting Council business. **Chair Solka** noted the Council's purpose.

**Introduction of All Meeting Attendees**

All public attendees, DNR staff and council members introduced themselves at the request of **Chair Solka**. Also welcomed were members of the public in attendance, including Emma Woelkers from Senator Peters' office and Jodi Ouellette from Congressman Bergman's office.

**Adoption of Agenda**

**Chair Solka** asked the Council if there were any additions or revisions to the agenda. **Mr. Johnson** motioned to accept the agenda as presented; **Mr. Bessonon** supported the motion. After no discussion, **Chair Solka** called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

**Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes**

**Chair Solka** asked if there were any changes to the WUPCAC March 18, 2025 draft meeting minutes, which were distributed to the Council via email previously for review. **Mr. Bessonon** motioned to approve the minutes as submitted; **Mr. Tanner** supported the motion. After no discussion, **Chair Solka** called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.

## **Reports from DNR Division Staff**

Written staff reports were provided to Council members on April 24, 2025. The following brief updates were added.

### **1. *Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy***

- Rebecca (Becky) Humphries was recently appointed by the Governor to the Natural Resource Commission. Commissioner Humphries previously held the roles of wildlife chief and director of the DNR. In addition, a recently appointed commissioner and chair of the NRC stepped down today (5/1/25) due to an unexpected commitment.
- A UP Wildlife Habitat Workgroup meeting was held April 29. Council members who attended were thanked.

### **2. *Dave Caroffino, Fisheries Division***

- The first creel survey for Isle Royale since 1988 that had been put on hold pending logistical support from the National Park Service will go on as planned this summer.
- Preparation for the first arctic grayling spawn mentioned in the division reports took place on April 29. 200 pairs of grayling were spawned. It was a long day and involved partners from tribal organizations. An arctic grayling reintroduction ceremony will be held at the Oden Fish Hatchery on May 12; former Fisheries Division Chief Jim Dexter will provide a presentation on grayling at that event. Two more grayling egg takes are planned for next week.
- The Bay de Noc egg takes for walleye have occurred and are in the hatchery. Egg quality is a concern and staff are monitoring.
- **Ms. Gajewski** asked about a reference in the reports to a May 1 meeting to discuss regulation proposals being facilitated by the Michigan Sea Grant. She could not locate anything on their website about it, and she couldn't find anything about the proposed regulation changes on the DNR's website as she wanted to share them with contacts who couldn't attend the meeting. **Mr. Caroffino** stated the meeting was held this afternoon (5/1/25). He will follow-up afterwards to make sure Ms. Gajewski is on the Sea Grant's email list. He added the proposed regulations are in the internal review stage and have only been shared with public stakeholders to date. The information was presented previously at the last Council meeting in March and is detailed well in the minutes. If there are any questions or interest, please refer them to him or Mr. Kovacs.

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

- An update for prescribed burns was shared. All prescribed burns statewide have been put on hold due to the ice storm damage in the lower peninsula. Recovery efforts have taken priority over any other activity indefinitely. 890,000 acres of state forest land, about a quarter of forest land statewide, has been impacted to date. Several thousands of acres are still being assessed. Salvage sales are underway, primarily in red pine stands currently, and moving into other coverage types. Thousands of miles of state forest roads have been negatively impacted as well. Forestry staff from the northern lower peninsula and eastern UP are helping out. It is close to a century-worth of damage.
- **Mr. Bessonon** asked if there would be a market for the damaged timber. **Mr. Seablom** stated the first few sales sold yesterday. The market flooding is a known issue as private land has been impacted as well and has started to sell off. Most mills have supplies already from spring breakup. Time is limited for this wood, especially the red pine. After 60 days, insects could impact the wood (red pine) greatly, so time is of the essence to get as much done as quickly as possible.

### **4. *Lt. Ryan Aho, Law Enforcement Division***

- Two recruits from the DNR conservation officer training academy have been assigned to Baraga and Ontonagon Counties upon graduation.

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

- **Ms. Graff** attended on behalf of Ron Yesney. She introduced herself as the new western UP trails specialist based out of Crystal Falls. Her background includes working in forestry with the conservation district as well as having other forestry and trails experience.
- A variety of updates were provided, including working with the local club to ensure Trail 15 is open for next year and expanding the shoulder on US 2 in Wakefield for the snowmobile trail.
- **Vice Chair Lindquist** stated it is helpful to have a trails specialist with a forestry background. **Chair Solka** welcomed Ms. Graff to the DNR.

6. **Bill Scullon, Wildlife Division**

- Due to a slight restructuring in the division, **Mr. Scullon** will be attending more Council meetings as Mr. Lemmien has moved into a regional manager role.
- Bat surveys are just wrapping up. A brief update was provided. John DePue, lead biologist, is planning to provide a thorough update to the Council at a future meeting.
- **Vice Chair Lindquist** asked if data on snow depths, bird counts, etc. will be impacted by recent government cuts to NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration). **Mr. Scullon** stated the DNR has inquired but has not heard back whether that information will be affected. Snow depth reporting is a helpful tool with regards to deer management.

**Public Comment on Agenda Items Only**

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

**Old Business**

1. Follow-Up from March Meeting

- **COMPLETED:** Send date of proposed fisheries regulations meeting in Marquette – *Kovacs: The meeting date (April 14) was forwarded to all Council members on March 26.*
- **COMPLETED:** List of walleye survey lakes included in data presented (Droppis) – *Kovacs: The listing was forwarded to **Mr. Droppis** by **Mr. Kovacs** shortly after the last meeting.*
- **UPDATE:** Deer Season Opening Date History (Bessonon) – *Haughey:* In response to a request by **Mr. Bessonon** regarding the history of the deer season opening date, **Ms. Haughey** shared the slides from a presentation by Chad Stewart at the April 2023 Natural Resources Commission (NRC) meeting relating to this topic:
  - History of November 15 Opening Day: Legislature established a November 1-25 season in 1895. The season was changed to November 15-30 in 1925. Experiments occurred in the 1960s with split seasons and openers. The opening day returned to November 15 in 1968 where it has remained since.
  - Presentation slides indicated that after analysis of total firearms harvest by opener day, firearms season participation, success rates, average firearm days hunted, hunter opinion, a review of Pennsylvania’s date change, etc., there was no evidence that moving the November 15 firearms opener would increase harvest, increase participation, or retain hunters.
  - **Mr. Bessonon** stated he realizes deer numbers in the lower peninsula are at high levels but in the UP they are not. He asked if the DNR would consider shortening season dates to limit take in the UP because deer numbers are down considerably in many areas. **Mr. Scullon** explained processes to limit the number of hunters or decrease take can get complicated very quickly and is not as easy as shortening season dates. Discussion ensued.

- **Mr. Tanner** asked if the statewide statistics in the presentation were available for the UP only. **Ms. Haughey** stated it was not peninsula-specific when it was prepared in 2023.

2. Approve Revisions to WUPCAC Bylaws (Chair Solka)

- Revisions were made to the Council bylaws by a small group of members at the Chair’s request and were presented to the Council for information at the March meeting. The revisions clarified several confusing sections pertaining to online meetings, quorums, voting and resolutions. After the Council’s review at that meeting, one minor wording change was made.
- **Chair Solka** asked for the Council for a motion to approve the bylaws as revised. **Mr. Johnson motioned to approve the bylaws as submitted; Mr. Bessonon supported the motion. After no discussion, Chair Solka called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.**
- **Chair Solka** thanked the ad hoc committee for their work on the revisions.

3. Woodland Wildlife Management Workshop for Private Landowners (Ms. Mason-Sherrill)

- The workshop is a Wisconsin Coverts Project, A Woodland Wildlife Management Program for Private Landowners sponsored by the Ruffed Grouse Society/American Woodcock Society and is open to everyone (in the U.S.). It is held at Kemps Natural Resource Station in Woodruff, Wisconsin. This is an ongoing program held every year in August. Participants become coverts cooperators and are encouraged to share their experience and information regarding the program with others.
- The 3-day workshop, held August 21-24 this year, is limited to 25 individuals, is free of charge, and requires an application to be submitted in order to be accepted. The deadline for applications is June 15. The workshop includes indoor and outdoor field trips, comradery, sharing of ideas involving habitat management, accommodations and meals. A brochure was provided to all members.
- **Ms. Mason-Sherrill** stated she attended the program in 2023 and found it to be one of the best programs she has been involved with.

**New Business**

1. Resolution Considerations

▪ Wildlife Committee (Vice Chair Lindquist)

**Vice Chair Lindquist** stated both resolutions below were prepared and supported by the EUPAC and WUPCAC wildlife committees. They were presented at the EUPCAC meeting on April 15 and were both passed (#1 unanimously and #2 by majority).

- Resolution #1: Support of Ongoing Moose Research Efforts
  - **Vice Chair Lindquist** indicated this resolution expresses strong support for the ongoing moose research efforts conducted by the Michigan DNR; recognizing the importance of this study in guiding future management decisions for the Upper Peninsula's moose population; for the planned 2026 capture and collaring of 40 moose to track their movements further; and provide critical scientific data for moose research in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.
  - **Chair Solka called for a motion. Mr. Hall motioned to approve the resolution as submitted; Mr. Peterson supported the motion. Chair Solka called for discussion.**
  - Discussion involved the Councils being instrumental in this effort coming to fruition, the majority of funding coming from grants, and the importance of vital statistics for the future of the UP herd.
  - **After no further discussion, Chair Solka called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.**
- Resolution #2: Recommend the Development of a Framework for a Regulated Wolf Hunting & Trapping Season Across the UP & Allocation of Resources for Ongoing Management Program

- **Vice Chair Lindquist** indicated this resolution recommends the DNR and Natural Resources Commission (NRC) develop a framework for a regulated wolf hunting and trapping season across the entire Upper Peninsula to be implemented during the first hunting and trapping seasons upon federal delisting of the species; and that the DNR allocates necessary resources to study, plan, and prepare for a science-based wolf management program, ensuring sustainable wildlife, deer in particular, population levels, and also minimizing conflicts with humans, pets, and livestock.
  - **Chair Solka called for a motion. Vice Chair Lindquist motioned to approve the resolution as submitted; Mr. Tanner supported the motion. Chair Solka called for discussion.**
  - Discussion included the removal of a duplicate phrase, comparison to Wisconsin’s legislative statute, presentation at a recent UPSA meeting regarding timelines once a delisting occurs, having a framework similar to deer hunting, vagueness of the term “science-based wolf management”, inability to accurately compare other states’ wolf hunting and trapping seasons to Michigan, and the need for accurate wolf population counts from trail camera surveys.
  - **After no further discussion, Chair Solka called for a vote. The motion passed by majority (with a minor correction to the language).**
- **Fisheries Committee (Mr. Dropps)**
- Mr. Johnson** noted he will report on this resolution in Mr. Dropps’ absence.
- **Resolution #1:** Walleye 18-to-23-inch Protective Slot Limits (PSLs) for Dickinson, Iron, and Gogebic Counties
    - **Mr. Johnson** indicated this resolution recommends the Council oppose any changes to size and possession limits, including the 18 to 23-inch slot limit, on Antoine, Emily, Hagerman, Mary and Ottawa lakes. It also recommends the Council oppose a 3-fish possession limit and oppose a 10-year experimental program on seven lakes in one area.
    - **Chair Solka** indicated the Fisheries Division requested to provide commentary on this topic before consideration by the Council.
    - **Mr. Caroffino** thanked the group for allowing him to provide background on this resolution, which is nearly the same resolution that was passed at the UPSA meeting in February. The purpose of PSLs is to enhance and protect natural reproduction of walleye to reduce stocking dependency. He discussed the rationale behind the proposed regulations, including the decline in natural reproduction which has been well-documented in Minnesota and Wisconsin, and the coordinated and strategic approach to how the DNR wishes to regulate fisheries. He also explained the feedback on the initial proposal that was received at public meetings, online submissions, and by targeted creel surveys resulted in roughly three quarters of those surveyed/spoken to were in support of this regulation. However, in response to the concern of having so many lakes in one area, the proposal was amended to exclude three of the 10 lakes initially included. He provided strong rationale on why two lakes, Hagerman and Mary, were kept on the list.
    - Further group discussion focused on the opposition to a 10-year review of these lakes. **Mr. Caroffino** stated the 10-year survey timeline is conditional; however, the Fisheries Division will survey for reproduction every year and will be doing spring population estimates which will help provide information needed for size structure. He suggested adding a clause into the regulation for annual reporting on the effectiveness of the regulations, which the Council supported.
    - **Chair Solka called for a motion. Mr. Johnson motioned to approve the resolution as submitted; Mr. Hall supported the motion. Chair Solka called for discussion.**
    - Discussion involved the timing of regulations which will be presented to the NRC in the fall and if approved, will become effective in 2026. Several members felt the resolution needed additional revisions based on discussion and changes before further consideration.

- **After no further discussion, Chair Solka motioned to table the resolution, subject to further evaluation and revision by the Fisheries Committee, until the July meeting. Vice Chair Lindquist supported the motion. Chair Solka called for a vote to table. The motion passed unanimously.**

## 2. Michigan DNR Drone Program Overview (Mr. Luoto)

- **Mr. Luoto** provided a brief background of his experience with the use of drones in the DNR. He is a GIS (Geographic Information System) analyst, has been a drone pilot for 4 years, and has been with the DNR for 29 years.
- An overview of the DNR's drone program including the types of drones used, their capabilities, and their applications in various departments were detailed. The program has been operational since 2017 and has 15 pilots statewide. **Mr. Luoto** brought one of the drones for the Council to see.
- DNR drones are used for mapping, fire management (fire progression mapping), prescribed burns, wildlife studies (monitoring) and habitat evaluations. They are capable of providing thermal imaging, zoom capabilities, and the ability to map and measure areas with precision.
- An internal website allows employees to request drone flights and track the status of ongoing flights. The drone program is managed by coordinators who assign pilots based on their expertise and the specific needs of requests. After flights are completed, pilots are required to submit reports.
- The FAA certification and authorization process for drone operations were explained, including the ability to fly out of line of sight in emergency situations, such as mapping fires or identifying hot spots. The high resolution imagery captured by drones is crucial for accurate assessments and effective management of emergency situations. The drone program is expected to expand due to new technologies and increased demand for drone services.
- The Council asked a variety of questions including various use applications, search and rescue, moose locations, night flying, fire hotspot detection and the ability to live stream flight data to fire managers.
- **Vice Chair Lindquist** asked how the program is funded. **Mr. Luoto** explained a vast majority of the drones, which are very expensive, were purchased with federal fire management grants. **Mr. Peterson** mentioned the cost for the program is much less than the costs of a helicopter and pilot. The personnel hours saved is one of the true benefits.
- **Mr. Tanner** asked about cross utilization benefits for other natural resource applications. **Mr. Luoto** stated requests for information and recognition have greatly increased.
- **Ms. Mason Sherrill** asked if there are any restrictions of drone use in wilderness areas and if the DNR has utilized drones for search and rescue. **Mr. Luoto** indicated the applications they utilize indicate where drones can and can't be flown according to FAA rules. He is not familiar with wilderness areas; however, locations such as Mackinac Island are banned. He noted the DNR drones were utilized in a search and rescue training in the Porkies and are utilized when needed for that purpose. He added Michigan's state police have a very robust drone program with infrared.
- **Chair Solka** and the Council thanked **Mr. Luoto** for his presentation and expressed their support for the drone program and its contributions to various departments within the DNR.

## 3. UP Deer Camp Survey Results (Mr. Scullon)

- Results of the U.P. Deer Camp survey were presented. The results were prepared by Dave Jentoft, wildlife biologist and Colter Lubben, wildlife technician. The survey has been conducted for many years and the data gathered is considered a good snapshot of hunter observations, although it is not sound science.
- The survey overall shows a decline in the number of camps and hunters participating making statistical analysis challenging. Recruitment of new camps to participate is always encouraged.
- Survey participant information, herd trend and season ratings, results by deer management unit (DMU), and snow conditions were reviewed.

- Key observations include an increase in the number of deer observed per 100 days and a higher success rate for buck harvest. Fawn-to-doe ratios increased, most likely due to a warmer winter.
- The survey also includes data on other wildlife sightings, such as turkeys, bears, coyotes, wolves, and bobcats.
- The survey data is compared to the new online harvest reporting system, which could replace the survey in the future, although hunter observations would be lost.
- **Vice Chair Lindquist** noted he has participated in the survey for the last 15-20 years and thinks it is a great program which is not done anywhere else in the state. He finds the results very interesting. He encouraged everyone to recruit new participants.
- A copy of the full results will be emailed to Council members.

### **Committee Activity**

#### 1. Fisheries (Mr. Dropps)

- No report.

#### 2. Forestry (Mr. Vold)

- No report. Any suggestions on topics for the committee to discuss are welcome.

#### 3. Trails/Recreation/Law (Ms. Gajewski)

- No report.

#### 4. Wildlife (Vice Chair Lindquist)

- **Mr. Hall** requested to be added to the committee.
- **Vice Chair Lindquist** stated he will schedule a meeting soon to consider the development of a possible resolution.

### **Next Meeting**

#### 1. Next WUPCAC Meeting

- **Chair Solka** noted the next Council meeting will be held on Thursday, July 24, in person, beginning at 6:00pm Eastern/5:00pm Central at the Lake Superior Sportsman's Club in Ontonagon.

#### 2. Topic Suggestions for July & Future Meetings

- **Ms. Petschke** suggested an update on securing funding for cormorant control. **Mr. Caroffino** added the Fisheries Division is moving forward with the program that allows for lethal control at stocking sites performed by trained individuals (not the public). He will check on site locations and frequency for the next meeting.
- Future topic suggestions made to date include updates on white nose syndrome, wolf abundance trail camera survey, arctic grayling, guiding process on the Great Lakes and inland lakes, and DNR land transactions. These topics will be added to agendas as presenters become available.
- Any other topic suggestions can be sent to the Chair, Vice Chair, or Ms. Dahlstrom.

### **Public Comments (On Any Topic)**

**Chair Solka** opened the floor for public comments on any topic.

1. Jordan Hoover, Baraga: **Ms. Haughey** indicated that Mr. Hoover cancelled his comment earlier in the week and indicated he would send a letter instead.

### **Closing Comments from the Council**

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

1. **Ms. Petschke** raised concerns about corporate land ownership changing hands and the impact on wildlife within those lands. **Mr. Seablom** indicated the DNR will try to enter into a conservation easement or land exchange to protect those lands that have a high forestry or wildlife value. The Michigamme Highlands project is an example of this. **Mr. Scullon** added the DNR holds routine conversations and meetings with corporate landowners and when a possible opportunity arises, they will look into it for any possibilities; however, the high volume and high marketability can make it difficult for the DNR to be a contender against private buyers. **Chair Solka** suggested this topic be a future agenda item; **Mr. Vold** recommended it be narrowed to general land transactions over the last five years and to what extent the DNR can impact private land transactions that involve wildlife.

### **Adjournment**

**Chair Solka** thanked everyone for attending the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 8:34pm Eastern/ 7:34pm Central.