

Western Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (WUPCAC)
Meeting Minutes – APPROVED 9/6/23
Monday, July 10, 2023
5:00-7:30pm Central / 6:00-8:30pm Eastern
Baraga Lakeside Inn Conference Room, Baraga

Council Members Present

Erik Bessonon	Dave Johnson	Carol Mason Sherrill
Floyd Dropps	George Lindquist	Tom Solka, Chair
Barb Gajewski	Suzanne Petschke	Dwaine Starr
Dave Hall	Kirk Schott, Vice Chair	Warren Suchovsky
Mike Holmes	Skip Schulz	Faye Williams

Council Members Absent/Excused

Chauncey Moran	Jeff Sierpien	Lucas Vold
Horst Schmidt	Kelly Bennett Simon	

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff & Guests

Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette
Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy, Executive Division, Marquette
Dave Lemmien, Wildlife Division, Sault Ste. Marie
George Madison, Fisheries Division, Baraga
Sgt. Marc Pomroy, Law Enforcement Division, Baraga
Doug Rich, Parks & Recreation Division, Baraga
Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division, Marquette
Matt Torreano, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails, Marquette

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance

At 6:00pm Eastern, **Chair Solka** called the meeting to order and led the Pledge of Allegiance. He welcomed members of the public as well as DNR staff and fellow Council members.

Adoption of Agenda

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

Introductions of Council Members/DNR Staff/Public Attendees

All public attendees, DNR staff and Council members introduced themselves at the request of **Chair Solka**. He noted that all Council members volunteer to serve on this Council on their own time and expense.

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Chair Solka asked if there were any further changes to the May 17, 2023 meeting minutes, which were distributed to the Council via email for review. **Mr. Bessonon** motioned to accept the minutes as submitted; **Mr. Suchovsky** supported the motion. **After no discussion, Chair Solka called for a vote. The motion passed unanimously.**

DNR Reports from Division Staff

Written staff reports were provided to Council members on July 3, 2023. The following brief updates were added.

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

- Council members, staff and guests were thanked for attending. Past member Mr. Larry Heathman was also acknowledged.

- Those that attended the Michigamme Highlands project tour today were thanked. The tour was part of the outreach being conducted by the DNR and Lyme Great Lakes Timberlands on the project. Ms. Kerry Heckman is on the agenda to provide an update.
- A DNR staffing update was reviewed, indicating several acting positions amongst executive staff and new employees and retirements that have occurred in the western UP over the last quarter.
- An update from Mr. Tyler Petroelje, DNR wildlife research biologist, on the winter wolf track survey in the UP this past year was reviewed. Another survey will be this coming winter 2024. This ongoing study is being conducted to compare two alternative methods (a UP-wide camera survey and an occupancy track survey) to estimate wolf abundance in the UP. Preliminary results are not yet available. More information may be forthcoming at the Joint UPCAC meeting.

2. **Mr. George Madison, Fisheries Division**

- **Mr. Schulz** asked if the Rockland Pond had been stocked with fish in the past as a recent kids fishing tournament didn't do well. **Mr. Madison** indicated the pond is no longer being stocked due to lack of staffing. He added that fish can be obtained from a Watersmeet hatchery if the community is interested in that option.
- **Mr. Hall** asked about what spring and/or summer fish die off is caused from. **Mr. Madison** indicated long winters have an effect on oxygen levels as well as heavy pollen drop with no wind. However, there hasn't been much mortality reported in the western UP this year.

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

- The DNR has continued to see a depressed wood market for ongoing timber sales.
- The eastern UP and northern lower peninsula remain very dry. Fire indicators are still high despite recent rain.
- **Mr. Bessonen** asked if there has been any feedback from Billerud paper mill on their plans going forward. **Mr. Seablom** stated it looks like it will be the end of August before they will start to take wood. There currently is no open wood market for any of the producers. Cedar and red pine have seen a little movement.
- **Mr. Lindquist** noted on a drive through Champion and Michigamme that most of the spruce trees are dead. **Mr. Seablom** stated there are isolated pockets with spruce budworm, including Rapid River. It seems to be nearing the end of its large scale outbreaks. Upcoming aerial surveys will give staff a better understanding of those pockets. He noted that tent caterpillars and gypsy moths are making their climb and is especially heavy in the Iron River area. **Mr. Hall** asked if there is any kind of treatment to ward them off. **Mr. Seablom** noted tent caterpillars and spruce budworm are native pests and run in 10-15 year cycles; however, this seems to be about a 20-year outbreak. There is a spray that can be used on ornamentals, but it doesn't work on later stages of spongy moths.

4. **Sgt. Marc Pomroy, Law Enforcement Division**

- **Mr. Schulz** stated although two people cannot be riding on an ATV that is not designed for two people, cab seat attachments with seatbelts are hitting the markets and asked if these are allowed. **Sgt. Pomroy** stated the law covers only what the machine was manufactured in the factory to operate as. Changing those dynamics is not legal. The law would have to be rewritten for it to be legal.

5. **Mr. Doug Rich, Parks & Recreation Division**

- State parks in the western UP are operating at about 93.7% occupancy and 89.63% in the eastern UP, which is very good. The parks are very busy, but slightly less (2.6%) than last year to date.

6. **Mr. Matt Torreano, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails**

- No additional updates to the written report.

7. **Mr. Dave Lemmien, Wildlife Division**

- Several Wildlife Division staffing updates were mentioned, including the loss of the state veterinarian, which is felt locally in the control of nuisance animals and the lack of immobilization drugs that are under the control of the state veterinarian license. Alternative ways to deal with nuisance animals are being utilized until a new veterinarian is hired. **Ms. Petschke** asked about the requirements for the state vet position. **Mr. Lemmien** stated it is a state employee and is based out of Lansing. He noted recruitment is difficult when competing against the private sector. Additional questions were answered.
- Mr. Brad Johnson, a wildlife technician for 46 years with the last 38 years out of the Baraga DNR office, retired. His years of service were highlighted; he will be sorely missed.
- **Mr. Lindquist** asked about the status of a wolf management decision tree (when wolves are delisted) that NRC Chair Baird indicated he was developing. He also asked if the DNR was helping with it and if there would be UP input. **Mr. Lemmien** stated Chair Baird is working on this and he does not know the status of it. **Ms. Haughey** indicated she will seek an update when she is at the next NRC meeting.
- **Mr. Hall** asked about an update on White Nose Syndrome (WNS) and if there has been an increase in insects due to the syndrome, studies on whippoorwills, and a black pheasant sighting. **Mr. Lemmien** stated Mr. John DePue, wildlife biologist from the Baraga office, is an expert on WNS and may be able to provide an update at an upcoming meeting. It has been a bumper year for mosquitos and black flies, and perhaps there is a correlation. There has not been a DNR study on whippoorwills. It was noted someone has seen a black pheasant and harvested it.
- **Mr. Schulz** asked about how to deal with a beaver issue on his pond. **Mr. Lemmien** indicated the nuisance wildlife order recently changed to add beavers and if they are doing damage on your property, the animal can be removed with legal means without a permit, similar to racoons. The order does not include muskrats. **Mr. Dropps** asked what defines legal means. **Ms. Haughey**, with **Chair Solka's** agreement, indicated she will add a presentation on the recently changed nuisance regulations to an upcoming agenda for further explanation and discussion. **Sgt. Pomroy** added the legal means has not changed, only the paperwork was eliminated.
- **Ms. Gajewski** asked if the little brown bat, which is now threatened, will be escalated to endangered status; **Mr. Lemmien** replied yes.
- **Mr. Lindquist** stated he has heard of a lot of bear complaints this spring and asked if the number of tags will rise as a result. **Mr. Lemmien** stated the bear regulations were recently reviewed and a few bear management unit quotas will increase, but not by a lot. **Mr. Suchovsky** noted more people are living in bear country which can cause in increase in bear complaints. **Mr. Lemmien** reminded folks to take bird feeders down, put garbage cans in garages or sheds, and put the BBQ grills away.

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. DNR Response to Joint UPCAC Resolution-Cormorant Funding & Control (Ms. Haughey)

- **Ms. Haughey** indicated she and Fisheries Chief Randy Claramunt discussed the cormorant issue. Afterwards, she spoke with Mr. Dropps and left a message for Vice Chair Gorniak from the EUPCAC. When funding was granted in 2015-2016, it was through the legislature as a result of constituent requests. It was not a continual ask and the DNR has not previously asked the legislature to grant funding. Currently, the take is set at 10,000; however, current funding barely allows for a take of 2,000. Michigan is not the only state in this predicament. There is a plan to be more successful on asks for state and federal funding. The process and requirements have also changed for volunteers who provide control.
- **Mr. Holmes** indicated he has been hearing there are cormorants on the rock outcroppings on Pictured Rocks, although there has been no report of them in that location before. **Ms. Haughey** indicated federal and state studies both have conflicting information.

- **Mr. Dropps** spoke about a magazine article citing a population reduction program in Escanaba; however, the estimates were way below actual numbers. He'd like to see a population estimate survey done and asked if the DNR was planning to do one. **Ms. Haughey** indicated a lot needs to happen at the state and federal levels first. She will seek a written response to the Councils' resolution before the next meeting.
- Discussion ensued regarding supplies and private donations for control, volunteer standards, and Canada allowing broader control.

2. Michigamme Highlands Project Update (Ms. Kerry Heckman)

- **Ms. Heckman** introduced herself as the DNR's forest land administrator for the Forest Resources Division and she manages the forest legacy program for Michigan. She explained the program and its goals (Michigan DNR Forest Legacy Program).
- She thanked those Council members were able to attend the tour of a section of the project earlier today (July 10). There will be another tour tomorrow (July 11) and more later this fall for those who didn't get to attend.
- She indicated the DNR is looking to acquire a permanent working forest conservation easement in the Michigamme Highlands. This will prevent the property from being split—it would have to be sold as one property in the future and managed as a forest forever, no matter who is the owner. It will still be privately owned, but the public will always have access. Conservation easements ensure permanent access, biking, hiking, camping, ORV use, berry picking, etc. This property itself provides \$4 million to the local economy and 47 jobs.
- The DNR applied to the federal forest legacy program with this project last fall, and it currently ranks #2 in the country. It is a highly competitive program and is competing against nationwide projects. If approved, it would be 75% funded with additional funding sources being sought out to cover the remaining 25%.
- The landowner of this property is Lyme Great Lakes Timberlands. Together, they are working on a forest management plan which is reviewed by the state forester. Winter deer habitat, Mt. Arvon, the Yellow Dog River and moose habitat are four key areas that will be protected in this property. She provided the miles of rivers, lakes and wetlands on this property. She indicated there is a great amount of support for this project across the board.
- Questions:
 - **Mr. Lindquist** indicated the land is currently in the Commercial Forest Act and asked how that affects the project. **Ms. Heckman** indicated all forms of recreation will be allowed including camping and specific routes for non-motorized and motorized use. The land will still be taxed at the CFA rates because it will remain privately-owned land.
 - **Mr. Dropps** asked if the state forestry guidelines have to be followed and if deer management areas will be protected. **Ms. Heckman** stated the management plan has to be reviewed by the state forester. All local DNR staff have been involved in the discussions and will ensure the language for deer management areas is included in the management plan.
 - **Chair Solka** indicated he attended the tour today (July 10) and the orientation was well-done. He feels it is an excellent opportunity and thanked Ms. Heckman.

Michigamme Highlands Conservation Easement Project

Marquette, Baraga, & Iron County, MI

FAST FACTS

Program: Forest Legacy Program (FLP)
 Total Private Forestland Protected by Conservation Easement: Approx. 73,000 acres
 Status: Grant Funding Requested

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

In partnership with Lyme Great Lakes Timberlands, the DNR is seeking to protect a large working forest landscape in the Upper Peninsula through the acquisition of a permanent working forest conservation easement. At approximately 73,000 acres, the Michigamme Highlands project encompasses arguably some of the most important natural geography in the Great Lakes including vast forests, remote lakes, trout streams, Michigan's highest natural point of elevation, moose-inhabited swamps, and the most climate resilient landscape in Michigan. The project includes:

- Permanent working forest conservation easement that ensures long-term sustainable forest management and sustained economic benefit in a rural area including an estimated annual economic impact to the three counties of approximately \$4 million from sustainable forest management activities and many jobs in the regional forest products industry. The lands will remain in private ownership and maintain local tax revenue.
- Full non-motorized recreational access and limited motorized recreational access include hunting, fishing, kayaking, biking, skiing, snowmobiling, and hiking to support the UP's vibrant tourism industry.
- Protection of wildlife habitat for a variety of game and non-game species such as moose, white-tailed deer (including over 4,800 acres of winter deeryard), black bear, pine marten, fisher, ruffed grouse, migrating song birds, eagles, hawks, and owls.
- Protection of and permanent public access to Mt. Arvon, Michigan's highest natural elevation.
- Protection and access to 37 miles of rivers, 220 miles of perennial streams, 96 lakes and ponds and over 13,600 acres of wetlands. Fish species include coaster brook trout, brook trout, brown trout, rainbow trout, northern pike, largemouth and smallmouth bass, Coho salmon, and pink salmon.
- A buffer to Craig Lake State Park and the federal McCormick Wilderness area, along with extension of the Wild & Scenic River protections on the Yellow Dog River for an additional 1.8 miles.
- The property must remain one large parcel of land and cannot be split or developed.

SUPPORTING PARTIES

- Senator Debbie Stabenow
- Ottawa National Forest
- Soudwan Bay Indian Community
- North Country Trail Association
- Trout Unlimited
- Michigan United Conservation Clubs
- Michigan Forest Association
- The Trust for Public Land
- US Fish & Wildlife Service

New Business

1. **Michigan State Parks & Recreation Division/West Upper Peninsula District (Mr. Rich)**

- **Mr. Rich** first provided an update specific to Houghton Douglass Falls. The falls was purchased through a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant several years ago, an additional trust fund grant was approved for development, and \$300,000 was added from capital outlay funds. UP Engineers of Houghton are in their phase 100 design, meaning they are surveying the site, working with EGLE on permitting, determining what kind of trails the project will include, working with MDOT on the right-of-way and putting the design on paper. Afterwards, there will be a public meeting in Lake Linden/Calumet area. Currently, there is an issue with MDOT regarding the 300-foot right-of-way and determining where the parking lot will go without impeding the creek.
- Next, **Mr. Rich** provided an extensive overview of the Parks & Recreation Division and the Western UP District, including boating, funding mechanisms, economic impact to the state, guiding principles, and proposed investment targets both statewide and in the western UP. Highlights of each state park, harbor, recreation area and other sites in the western UP were reviewed. See the entirety of the presentation here ([WUPCAC PRD Overview July 2023](#)).
- Questions from the Council were entertained and focused on campground reservation windows, weather events at parks with damage, opening more full hookups at state campgrounds, boating ramps/docks. **Mr. Dropps** discussed Bone Lake boating access site.

2. **Lake Linden Update & Other Trail Damage Status (Mr. Torreano)**

- In 2018, 8 inches of rain fell in a 3-hour period with another rain event occurring two weeks later. This weather event wreaked havoc on multiple trail systems in the northern western UP costing millions of dollars. Since that time, the DNR went through a process on how to address this issue, knowing how critical the trails were in connecting communities.
- The Lake Linden trail project is one of the largest trail projects in terms of cost (\$10 million) that the DNR has ever been involved with. Local folks worked with legislators to secure \$4 million in funding. There are 179 total damaged sites on this trail spread over 8 miles. The project has been divided into 6 packages due to the size of them. 5 of the 6 are currently being worked on now and the 6th package will begin soon. The entire project is currently 40% complete. After the May snowstorm this year, the weather has cooperated allowing contractors to make good progress. The goal is to have the project completed in time to open the snowmobile trail this year.
- A full scale evaluation was done to make sure the new drainages can handle 100-year storm events. Photos of the project were shown, although they don't do justice to the size of the project.
- **Ms. Haughey** stated the team that worked on this is handling this multi-million dollar project in addition to their normal jobs and have spent multiple hours getting it done.
- **Mr. Torreano** stated there is an extraordinary number of rail trails in the state and there will always be failures due to aging infrastructure and the unique geography and weather events. Massive failures are difficult to fix in a quick manner due to funding and lack of contractors. It's extremely challenging. A bridge on Sleeping River was recently washed out and there are failures on Trail 15. The DNR is working to address these.

3. **Moose Survey Results (Mr. Lemmien)**

- **Mr. Lemmien** reviewed the 2023 Moose Population Survey that was provided at the June 8th NRC Meeting by Mr. Chad Stewart. The presentation can be found here: [2023 Moose Population Survey Presentation at June NRC Meeting](#) (beginning on page 10).
- Questions:
 - **Mr. Lindquist** stated when comparing the moose core range population trends slide with a chart of wolf growth rates, they coincide with each other. He stated when wolf numbers reached 500, the moose population started to decline. He spoke about studies he reviewed regarding lack of twins and brain worm which affects the growth in population. Discussion ensued regarding wolf predation. **Mr. Lemmien** stated predators in general have an impact. However, moose prefer and thrive in deep snow country which wolves

do not prefer. He indicated the trail camera study that **Ms. Haughey** mentioned earlier in Mr. Petroelje's update on wolf management will be beneficial for moose reports as well.

- **Mr. Hall** noted the high amount of vehicle strikes ever recorded at 20.
- **Ms. Gajewski** asked about the ratio graphs which didn't seem to match. **Mr. Lemmien** stated confidence intervals are included and further explained.
- **Mr. Holmes** spoke about wolves forcing moose to move on Isle Royale and when the wolf population declined, the moose were found not to move.
- **Mr. Lemmien** added that observers for the moose survey noticed a large increase in the number of back country snowmobile tracks and with shed tracking becoming more popular, moose are being jumped from bedding sites by those looking for antlers. This uses up a lot of energy for moose and may play a factor in birth rates.

4. Approved Deer Regulations from June Natural Resources Commission Meeting (Mr. Lemmien/Ms. Haughey)

- A timeline of deer regulation discussion and public input was shown (April through June).
- At the June 8th NRC meeting, Wildlife Conservation Order #7 of 2023 (Deer Regulations) was up for action. In total, 9 commissioner amendments were offered to the proposed deer regulations and 28 members of the public provided testimony. For the UP, the baiting and feeding ban in the CWD core area of the UP was lifted.
- The Commission has focused on deer regulations the last several months with no time being spent on the wolf topic.
- **Mr. Lindquist** stated UP Whitetails of Marquette County is happy with how the regulations turned out. He added there were no regulations to improve the deer herd at this point.
- **Chair Solka** indicated the resolution the Council put forward regarding lifting the baiting and feeding ban in the UP CWD core area prevailed.
- **Mr. Starr** read a statement he prepared regarding the amendments that were proposed for crossbow hunting in December in the UP and the increase in antlerless harvest in the northern area. He agrees that management of wildlife in the state should not be painted with a broad brush. The DNR should do a better job of managing deer numbers in the UP. Deer numbers exceed 100 deer per square miles in some areas. He'd like to work with the Council's wildlife committee to have input in establishing crossbow regulations in December to protect the herd in the northern UP and open it up to other areas in the UP that could benefit.
- It was noted the UP Sportsman's Alliance supported the regulations behind the scenes and **Mr. Johnson** helped to support what UP hunters wanted.

Committee Activity

1. Fisheries (Mr. Dropps)

- **Mr. Dropps** reported he spoke with Mr. Darren Kramer, fisheries biologist, about the walleye take from the rearing ponds, with some ponds doing well and others didn't. The numbers will be available for the next meeting. He also spoke to Mr. Kramer about northern pike regulations and with a new chief on board, now may be a good time to bring forward a revised past resolution. He will schedule a committee meeting to discuss it. **Ms. Haughey** noted the NRC may be reviewing fisheries regulations over the next few NRC meetings.

2. Wildlife (Mr. Lindquist)

- **Mr. Lindquist** reported the committee did not meet since the last Council meeting. He did copy the committee and the Council what he sent to the NRC and DNR regarding deer regulation comments. He heard positive feedback and no disputes. He also shared a copy with a retired DNR deer researcher who agreed with everything he wrote and said there isn't any more deer in the UP than there was 100 years ago.

3. Other Committee Activity: None.

Next Meeting

1. **Next Meeting Date:** **Chair Solka** noted the next meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, September 6th beginning at 6:00pm ET/5:00pm CT in Houghton, with the venue to be determined.
2. **Items for Next WUPCAC Meeting Agenda:** **Chair Solka** indicated suggestions for topics, in addition to the themed topics forestry, trails, and search and rescue, for the next meeting can be submitted to him, Ms. Haughey or Ms. Dahlstrom. Topics will be discussed at a pre-meeting with the Chair and DNR staff in August.

Public Comments (On Any Topic)

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

1. *Paul Bylkas, Lake Linden-Hubbel Sportsman's Club:* Mr. Bylkas mentioned a tourist train that ran for a year or two to Houghton Douglass Falls. It is a beautiful site.
2. *Mike McMahon, Keweenaw ATV Club:* Mr. McMahon thanked Ms. Haughey and Mr. Torreano, stating DNR staff were with them from the beginning on the trail washouts. The trail serves 8 communities and the DNR came through wonderfully. He added Mr. Schulz was a big supporter and kept it in the news media. He appreciated all the hard work everyone has done and thanked Council members too.

Closing Comments from the Council

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

1. **Mr. Johnson** mentioned the National Trappers Convention being held at the UP State Fairgrounds in Escanaba July 27-29 and encouraged everyone to attend.
2. **Mr. Williams** indicated he brought his grandson who is attending NMU and majoring in wildlife biology to the meeting to see how the Council works. He got a job today at a ranch in Marquette. A round of applause was given.
3. **Mr. Lindquist**, in reference to the trail work, stated he remembers a Council meeting being held in Houghton after the storm and a huge unhappy crowd attended. He's happy to see it all worked out.
4. **Mr. Hall** encouraged folks to visit Copper Harbor and Copper Peak in the fall ak. It is a spectacular place to see with fall colors.

Adjournment

Chair Solka thanked everyone for attending the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 9:01pm ET.