

Western Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Council (WUPCAC)
Meeting Minutes-APPROVED 7/20/2022
Tuesday, May 17, 2022
5:00-7:30pm Central / 6:00-8:30pm Eastern
Marquette Township Community Center, Marquette

Council Members Present

Olivia Castles	Dave Hall	Kirk Schott
Floyd Dropps	Dave Johnson	Carol Mason Sherrill
Joan Duncan	George Lindquist	Travis Smith
Barb Gajewski	Horst Schmidt	Tom Solka

Council Members Absent/Excused

Erik Bessonon	Chauncey Moran	Warren Suchovsky-Vice Chairman
Mike Holmes	Mary Peterson	
Jim Lorenson-Chairman	Skip Schulz	

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff & Guests

Dave Anthony, Natural Resources Commissioner
Sgt. Brian Bacon, Law Enforcement Division, Dickinson/Iron/Menominee Counties
Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette
Brian Roell, Wildlife Division, Marquette
Stacy Haughey, UP Field Deputy, Executive Division, Marquette
Dan Sampson, Fisheries Division, Baraga
Doug Rich, Parks & Recreation Division, Baraga
Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division, Marquette
Ron Yesney, UP Trails-Parks & Recreation Division, Marquette

Call to Order/Pledge of Allegiance/Introduction of Council Members

At 6:03pm Eastern, **Mr. Tom Solka** called the meeting to order in the absences of Chair Jim Lorenson and Vice Chair Warren Suchovsky who were both unable to attend. **Mr. Solka** welcomed everyone in attendance and led the Pledge of Allegiance. Introductions of Council members and DNR staff took place. **Ms. Haughey** also welcomed Mr. Rich Rossway from Congressman Bergman's office, NRC Commissioner Dave Anthony, and WMAC members and staff who had a meeting earlier today.

Adoption of Agenda

Mr. Solka asked the Council if there were any further additions or revisions to the agenda; none were brought forth. **Mr. Johnson motioned to accept the agenda as presented; Mr. Hall supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See page 1. No further discussion. Motion carried.**

Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

Mr. Solka noted the last meeting was very lengthy with several public comments. He asked if there were any further changes to the minutes which were distributed to the Council via email for review. **Mr. Johnson motioned to accept the minutes as submitted; Mr. Lindquist supported the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See page 1. No further discussion. Motion carried.**

DNR Reports from Division Staff & Follow-Up from Last Meeting

Written staff reports were provided to Council members on May 10, 2022. The following brief updates were added.

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

- Mr. Jim Baker from MTU and representing Houghton County on the Council submitted his resignation due to work commitments. Former Council member Mr. Bob Stinson from Chassell has passed; a copy of his obituary was email to current and past members. Mr. Stinson, a former geologist, was an avid participant in the Council and regretfully had to retire in 2019 due to health reasons.
- Mr. Dan Sampson, manager of the Marquette State Fish Hatchery, was thanked for providing a thorough tour of the hatchery prior to the meeting for Council members and DNR staff.
- WMAC Update: WMAC members Amy Trotter and Bee Friedlander were welcomed to the WUPCAC meeting. The WMAC had their final meeting earlier today. Finalized motions and recommendations will be summarized into their final report and will be submitted to the Legislature and DNR.
- Keweenaw County Land Acquisition: In response to Mr. Horst's question at the last meeting, a two-slide overview of 10 items summarizing the current status of this project was shown. Staff have attended several meetings on this topic.
- Marquette Shooting Range Update: The anticipated timeline was displayed on screen. A possible timber sale and site clearing may commence this summer and an approximately project completion date is June 2023.
- Porcupine Mountains Concessions: Staff have dedicated a lot of time responding to multiple requests and a lengthy public comment section to hear concerns took place at the last meeting. An additional inquiry regarding year-round food options was received for this meeting; however, it was in the process of being responded to by the Parks and Recreation Division Chief. The new legally binding contract is currently active and the DNR's Parks and Recreation Division has responded to all written inquiries that have been received.
- Groveland Mine Solar Project: A response to a question from the previous meeting regarding the location being a wildlife area was shown on screen. The wildlife management area had been retired prior to the lease and the public notice process that took place was explained.
- Superior Solar Land Modification Agreement: In response to Mr. Lindquist's question at the last meeting regarding the process in which the DNR evaluates solar projects, a written response (shown on screen) indicated a process has not yet been established since these are considered pilot projects.

2. **Mr. Doug Rich, Parks & Recreation Division:**

- Some of the American Recovery Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funding has been released to the division to begin work on the Porkies' historical buildings including the lodge, staff quarters and mechanics shop as well as infrastructure improvements at Lake Gogebic, Bewabic, Twin Lakes, and Fort Wilkins State Parks. Current prices of construction will require a great deal of flexibility and patience.
- After years of planning and with the help of a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant, Parks & Recreation Division funds, and the Lake Superior Sportsman's Club and community member donations, a statewide federal range grant was secured, enabling the funding of a \$4 million project in Ontonagon County. A groundbreaking ceremony was held on May 6. This facility (Porcupine Mountains Shooting Sports Complex) will house a state of the art indoor shooting range, provide the Lake Superior Sportsman's Club with a new meeting facility/clubhouse, and provide a perfect location for a variety of outdoor recreation skills classes and/or meetings. The existing outdoor ranges are not being improved at this stage of the project but remain available for use/programming.
- **Ms. Mason Sherrill** asked for a map of Craig Lake State Park and the surrounding land being added to the park that was announced recently in press release. **Mr. Rich** stated he will forward a copy of the map and the land exchange memo to the Council.

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

- Last week was the first official week of fire season. In Marquette County alone, there were 6 fires. In the western UP, there were 13 fires as well as a dozen others the DNR didn't have to act on because local fire departments took care of them. On Friday, the Blue Lakes Fire (about 2500 acres) in northeastern Lower Peninsula near Atlanta was about 98% contained.
- **Mr. Lindquist** asked about the 320 open timber sales mentioned in the division reports. **Mr. Seablom** stated open contracts are sales that were sold up to four years ago and are waiting to be cut; some involve winter work. These are open sales in the western UP to date.

4. **Sgt. Brian Bacon, Law Enforcement Division:**

- A total of 152 search and rescues were responded to by officers in the western UP during the past winter season.
- **Mr. Solka** indicated when he reads the law reports, it's remarkable to see how DNR officers participate with other law enforcement agencies over and above typical CO duties. DNR COs are full law enforcement officers in the field abiding with all the laws in the state of Michigan in addition to natural resource laws.
- **Mr. Dropps** asked about the status of the recent fishing opener. **Sgt. Bacon** stated all law staff were out for the opener. Most officers seen about 1-2 fish per boat on average with a mix bag of fish species. There didn't seem to be much luck with northern and walleye. **Mr. Dropps** stated he doesn't see many citations given for northers under size when reading the Michigan Outdoor News publication and asked if he could receive that type of information. **Sgt. Bacon** stated citations are given; however, statistics specific to fish species are not tracked.

5. **Mr. Brian Roell, Wildlife Division:**

- There were no additional updates to the Wildlife Division written report.

6. **Mr. Ron Yesney, Parks & Recreation Division-UP Trails:**

- The major storms of last week damaged the Bill Nichols trail which is now closed. Engineers and EGLE will be on site to evaluate it soon. This trail includes the Pilgrim River bridge. A major washout also took place near Crystal Falls and that grade is closed as well for a month or two. Culvert repairs and fill will be required to fix that grade.
- In response to questions regarding the Lake Linden grade at the last meeting, staff are working to open it for next season. It would require 2-3 temporary bridges before opening.

Mr. Solka thanked all the staff for participating and their willingness to take questions from the Council.

Public Comment on Agenda Items Only

Mr. Solka opened the floor for public comments on agenda items only. He noted another public comment section is available at the end of the meeting for all other topics. There were no registered public comments requests received.

1. Mr. Rich Rossway, UP representative for Congressman Jack Bergman, took this time to introduce himself to the Council. He indicated the Congressman is currently focusing on the Ukraine issue. The Congressman also collaborates with Senator McBroom, and Representatives Cambensy, Markkanen, and LaFave. He mentioned federal legislation signed by Congressman Bergman and 23 other members of Congress was introduced yesterday; it is titled, "*Trust the Science Act*" to remove the gray wolf from the endangered species list. He said HR 286 was stopped and now this approach is being considered. Other projects noted: a) the Copperwood project in Gogebic County and the Keweenaw Land and mineral rights permits have been accepted and approved, except for the Army Corps of Engineers and work continues with Highland to secure it, b) the Back

Forty Mine Project is being watched; c) work on veteran issues continues including the VA vaccine requirement opt out issue for staff, d) cyber security issues, e) suicide prevention projects, and f) IRS or social security casework. He offered to answer any questions.

- **Mr. Lindquist** asked if the Trust the Science bill will be successful or if it will just help get votes. Mr. Rossway stated the bill will need bipartisan support; all the Congressmen who signed the bill are from the Republican party.
- **Ms. Mason Sherrill** asked for a brief recap of the Trust the Science bill. Mr. Rossway stated he will email her and other interested members a link to the bill.
- **Mr. Schmidt** asked if the Congressman has talked with the Save the Menominee Coalition who has been fighting Aquilla Resources (now Gold Resources) in terms of why a mine wouldn't be good on the Menominee River. Mr. Rossway stated the Congressman has not met with the group but he has been in contact with them; he will meet with both sides this summer as he is aware there are a lot of concerns.

Old Business

1. Benefits of Carbon Credits (Mr. David Price via slide)

- A written response from Mr. David Price and Mr. Scott Whitcomb to Ms. Mason Sherrill's questions at the previous meeting regarding transparency requirements and how the public directly benefits from the sale of carbon credits on public land was shown on screen.
- If there are any further questions, please email them to Ms. Haughey. She will email a copy of the slides to Council members.

2. Clarification of Game Purchased Lands (Mr. Seablom & Mr. Roell)

- In response to a request by **Mr. Lindquist** at the previous meeting, information regarding game purchased lands at Little Presque Isle was further explained.
- **Mr. Seablom** explained the game purchased lands are currently on the east side of County Road 550. The DNR is working collaboratively amongst the various divisions to move those lands to an area that is better suited for wildlife management. It is currently co-managed by Wildlife, Forest Resources and Parks and Recreation Divisions. The deer wintering complexes has a large influence on this decision, which needs to meet the requirements of the USFWS.
- **Mr. Lindquist** indicated he is very concerned with the high use and expansion of trails in that area where the deer wintering complex is located.
- **Mr. Seablom** indicated in 2016, when the trails already established for snowshoeing and x-country skiing were formalized, a land use order was put into effect that prohibits winter biking on mountain bike trails in that area, thereby protecting the deer complexes. The information about this area noted at the last meeting is to repair the trails that were already there; there are no new trails or expansion of any trails being done.
- **Ms. Haughey** added this same topic was discussed five years ago and the land use order of the Director was the results of those discussions.

Meeting Break

Mr. Solka & Ms. Haughey announced a 5-minute break to allow a photo opportunity in an effort to provide outreach and education to address suicide in the area, similar to what other agencies in the county are doing. Council members and staff took time to take photos holding the message *"Our most important natural resource is YOU"*.

New Business

1. Hemlock Status (Mr. Seablom & Mr. Roell)

- This topic was added to the agenda as a result of **Mr. Lindquist's** request at the last meeting regarding the landowner incentive program (LIP) that Wildlife Division offered in the mid-2000s.
- **Mr. Roell** indicated the LIP program ran out of funding and was not renewed. Hemlock is a big concern and could be classified as an endangered species when looking at its decline. It grows slow and is an important food resource for deer.
- Hemlock is a concern of both Wildlife and Forest Resources Divisions and is protected in land management by being set at a higher stumpage price to discourage cutting. However, the DNR has no control of cutting on private or corporate lands.
- **Mr. Seablom** indicated after a review of past management practices, there have been only 200 cords of hemlock cut over the course of 10 years, mostly incidental take. Staff have looked into conservation easements to encourage corporations not to cut it as well as other similar partnerships, however, corporate forest landowners (large or small) don't want to always deal with those restrictions.
- **Mr. Lindquist** stated the LIP was a great program and he had great survival success from his planting in 2008. **Mr. Seablom** stated he is located in a better environment with high snow depth to keep seedlings moist. Lot of other areas are too rich and other items are competing for nutrients.
- **Mr. Lindquist** asked if the DNR can work with the national forest service through the Good Neighbor Authority to grow hemlock. **Mr. Seablom** stated the competing factors make this long-term investment of 50 years not feasible. He also noted hemlock woolly adelgid is a bigger threat than cutting. **Ms. Gajewski** asked about hemlock survival near coastal areas. **Mr. Seablom** explained staff frequently review habitat types based on county soil surveys and hemlock is generally located on corporate lands.
- **Ms. Duncan** indicated education can go a long way with something like this; **Ms. Gajewski** feels there may be an opportunity that may not have been thought of. **Mr. Seablom** indicated the UP Habitat Workgroup is working with private landowners but on a small scale. **Ms. Haughey** added this topic can be discussed at upcoming UP Habitat Workgroup and CFA Partnership Meetings to see if there is any interest among the corporate partners who attend. **Mr. Roell** noted thermal cover for deer wintering complexes are addressed at those meetings as well.
- **Mr. Solka** recapped the Council now has a better understanding of the complexities involving the importance of hemlock for wildlife habitat and cover and the challenges and difficulties the DNR has with private/corporate landowners.

2. Sportfishing Regulation Change Proposals (For 2023 Fishing Season/For Information) (Mr. Madison via slide)

- Although **Mr. Madison** was not able to be present at the meeting, he provided several slides highlighting two proposed sportfishing regulation change proposals affecting the western UP: Cisco Chain of Lakes and Redboat Lake. These proposals are for the 2023 fishing season, are for information only, and will be reviewed by the NRC at a future meeting.
- Cisco Chain of Lakes: The proposal is to make a boundary waters change on the size limit of Muskie. **Mr. Dropps** relayed the concerns of **Mr. Holmes**, who was not able to attend this evening. He said **Mr. Holmes** feels its an unfair regulation, to only be able to catch one fish a year. He also said they were not made aware of this change. **Ms. Haughey** indicated in a previous email from **Mr. Madison** that the proposed change was reviewed at various meetings. **Mr. Dropps** asked if this topic can be on the agenda for the next meeting; **Ms. Haughey** will check the NRC schedule to see when it will be up for information.
- Redboat Lake: The proposal is to change Type-D trout regulations (15" minimum size, possession 1) to a Type-C trout regulation (8" minimum size, possession 5).

3. 2021 UP Deer Camp Survey Results (Mr. Roell)

- *Distribution of Participants in 2021 (Map):* The UP is well-represented by camps or hunting locations from participating hunters.
- *Deer Sighting Rate:* The number of deer observed per hunter day during the 16-day firearm season. In 2021, on average hunters saw three deer per hunter day, which is up slightly from last year. Hunters saw more deer on the landscape.
- *Hunter Success:* The percent of hunters that harvested a buck or antlerless deer. 26% of hunters reported harvesting a buck, which is up from 22% last year and near the long-term average.
- *Fawn-to-Doe Ratio:* Fawns observed per 100 does during the firearm season. Hunters reported seeing 56 fawns per 100 does on average, which is up from the last two years and above the long-term average.
- *Herd & Season Ratings:* Hunters were asked to rate whether there were fewer, the same, or more deer around their camp or hunting location this year. 44% of hunters indicated they felt there were fewer deer, 34% said the same, and 22% felt there were more. Hunters were also asked to rate the firearm season. 38% rated the season as poor, 33% as fair, 23% as good, and 6% as excellent.
- *Season Ratings:* Percent of participating camps rating the season as good to excellent. This information is only from deer camp survey participants. 2021 was rated as average and was an increase from 2020.
- *Snow Conditions in the UP:* Snow conditions are not part of the deer camp survey, but staff do assess and monitor conditions. The graph shown goes back to 2003-2004 and shows the number of days the average UP snow depth was 12 inches or more on the landscape based on SNODAS data. Deer lose fat reserves when they have to move around in higher snow depth conditions; what biologists look for was explained.
- *Summary of 2021 UP Deer Camp Survey:* Most UP regional rates increased compared to the 2020 season (deer sightings per hunter day, buck hunter success, fawns observed per 100 does, season rating); 2021 UP regional rates were near or above the average since 2012; rates increased in most DMUs but there was variation by DMU.
- *How to Participate in Future Years:* Contact the local wildlife biologist to be added to the participant list; they are always looking for more people. Survey materials are sent out just prior to the firearm deer season (around November 1).

Reports from Committee Meetings Held

Acting Chair Solka opened the floor for reports from the following Committees:

1. Fisheries (Mr. Dropps):

- The resolution regarding enhancing walleye rearing through extra funding in the Fisheries Division budget (if approved by the Governor and legislature) was shared with the EUPCAC by Mr. Gary Gorniak, vice chair of that Council. After a minor wording change adding UP instead of just the western UP, the EUPCAC passed the resolution. It will now be sent to the Director as a Joint UPCAC resolution.
- **Mr. Dropps** indicated **Mr. Madison** will provide a presentation at a committee meeting in the future regarding trout lake designation changes.
- Issues with Smoky Lake will also be discussed at a future committee meeting.

2. Forestry: No report at this time.

3. Trails/Recreation/Law (Chair Lorenson): No report at this time.

4. Wildlife (Mr. Lindquist):

- The committee has not met. If there are any interests to discuss, please contact Mr. Lindquist.

- In response to information regarding virtual options for elk hunt orientation from **Mr. Smith, Ms. Haughey** indicated it will be offered again this year, but that no decision has been made for future years.
- **Mr. Smith** indicated a virtual option is important to folks in the western UP. As an educator, he stated people can be educated online and it can be done with great success (as has been discovered due to the pandemic). From locations downstate, the in-person orientation is a 3-hour drive. For anyone in the western UP, it's at least a 6-hour drive. Add extra days off from work, money for hotels and gas and it's an expensive venture. He is asking for the conversation to continue and to consider how well it can be done virtually without overwhelming folks with extra costs.
- **Mr. Johnson** reminded the group now is the time to apply for elk and bear permits.

Next Meeting

1. **Next Meeting Date:** **Mr. Solka** noted the next meeting will be on Wednesday, July 20, 2022, beginning at 6:00pm Eastern / 5:00pm Central. The meeting will be held in person at Michigan Tech University's Memorial Union Building in Houghton.
2. **Items for Next WUPCAC Meeting Agenda:** **Mr. Solka** asked for any suggested topics for the next meeting be sent to Chair Lorenson, Ms. Haughey or to Ms. Dahlstrom.

Public Comments (On Any Topic)

Mr. Solka opened the floor for public comments on any topic; none were brought forth.

Council Closing Comments

Mr. Solka opened the floor for closing comments from the Council:

1. **Mr. Hall** stated he has belonged to various committees throughout the years and although he likes Zoom meetings, he enjoys having the Council meetings in person and seeking/talking with everyone before and after the meetings.
2. The Council thanked Mr. Dan Sampson again for providing the fish hatchery tour. Everyone enjoyed it.
3. **Ms. Duncan** stated it is very nice to see everyone in person; however, due to health conditions, she is resigning from the Council. She stated she feels she has gone as far as she can with horse trail work. A round of applause was given to her for her service.

Adjournment

Mr. Solka thanked everyone for attending the meeting. The meeting adjourned at 8:05pm Eastern/ 7:05pm Central.