

**Eastern (EUPCAC) & Western (WUPCAC) Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Councils
Annual Joint Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, September 11, 2019
5:30-8:00 pm EST
NMU's Northern Center, Ballroom I, Marquette**

Western Council Members Present

Jim Baker	Mary Peterson
Floyd Dropps	Jake Putala
Joan Duncan	Kirk Schott
Barb Gajewski	Robert "Skip" Schulz
Dave Hall	Travis Smith
Dave Johnson	Tom Solka
George Lindquist	Trevor St. John
Chauncey Moran	Phil Wirtanen, Chair

Western Council Members Absent

Mike Holmes	Horst Schmidt
Jim Lorensen	Warren Suchovsky, Vice Chair

Guests

Keith Creagh, NRC Commissioner
Louise Klarr, NRC Commissioner
John Matonich, Former NRC Commissioner
Dave Nyberg, NRC Commissioner

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Staff Liaisons

Lt. Ryan Aho, Law Enforcement Division-D1, Marquette
Jacklin Blodgett, Asst. Chief of Parks & Recreation Division
Steve Burton, Asst. Chief of Law Enforcement Division, Lansing
Eric Cowing, Parks & Recreation Division, Newberry
Kristi Dahlstrom, Executive Division, Marquette
Jim Dexter, Chief of Fisheries Division, Lansing
Acting Lt. Jerry Fitzgibbon, Law Enforcement Division-D2, Newberry
Gary Hagler, Chief of Law Enforcement Division, Lansing
Stacy Haughey, Upper Peninsula Regional Coordinator, Mqt

Eastern Council Members Present

Allan Augustyn, Secretary	Bernard Hubbard
Tom Buckingham, Chair	Glenn Moll
Ken Collier	Tom Paquin
Jeff Cox	Angel Abbs Portice
Jim Duke	Mark Spencer
Allan Garavaglia	Tony Wright
Gary Gorniak, Vice Chair	

Eastern Council Members Absent

Kristy Beyer	Tim Hass
Grant Dewitt	Travis Kangas

Vicki Pontz, NRC Commissioner, Chair
JR Richardson, Former NRC Commissioner
Rex Schlaybaugh, NRC Commissioner
John Walters, NRC Commissioner

Seth Herbst, Fisheries Division, Lansing
Cory Kovacs, Fisheries Division, Newberry
George Madison, Fisheries Division, Baraga
Russ Mason, Chief of Wildlife Division, Lansing
Doug Rich, Parks & Recreation Division, Baraga
Phil Schneeberger, Fisheries Division, Marquette
Bill Scullon, Wildlife Division, Norway
Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division, Marquette
Lt. Terry Short, Law Enforcement Division, Great Lakes
Jay Wesley, Fisheries Division, Plainwell
Michelle Zellar, Facilities & Operations Division, Newberry

Call to Order

WUPCAC **Chair Wirtanen** called the Annual Joint Meeting between the Western (EUPCAC) & Eastern (EUPCAC) Upper Peninsula Citizen Advisory Councils to order at 3:04 pm Eastern. A moment of silence was held in memory of those who died in on 9/11. The Pledge of Allegiance was then recited.

Welcome & Introductions

Chair Wirtanen welcomed everyone in attendance on behalf of the DNR and the East and West Council members. He welcomed both current and former NRC Commissioners in attendance as well as Mr. Tom McNamee, representative for Senator Ed McBroom and thanked them for attending. **Chair Wirtanen** asked Council members to introduce themselves; Council members indicated the county and interest they represent.

Chair Wirtanen explained the chairmanship of the Joint UPCAC meeting is rotated each year and this year it lands with the WUPCAC. He started by thanking the DNR staff for their involvement in the CAC. He noted the Councils are beginning their 12th year and have made a positive difference. He explained the Councils'

role and purpose in bringing the citizens' influence back to the DNR and discussed the types of issues the Council hears. He thanked the public's involvement and the interests of the members, all of whom love the UP's natural resources.

Chair Buckingham noted as a new chairman, he understands the immense task the DNR has in considering everyone's interests and perspectives when establishing processes and policies. He also recognized the efforts of both staff and Council members to be in attendance for the joint meeting.

Approval of Agenda

Chair Wirtanen asked if there were any additions or revisions to the agenda. **Mr. Lindquist motioned to adopt the agenda as presented; Mr. Augustyn seconded the motion. Ayes: All. Nays: None. Absent: See page 1. Motion carried.**

Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Updates

1. **Stacy Haughey, UP Regional Coordinator:** **Ms. Haughey** welcome everyone to the meeting including the NRC commissioners in attendance, Ms. Katelyn Raider from Sen. Peters office, and acknowledged Ms. Dahlstrom for her work with the Councils. She noted the Natural Resources Commission meeting will be held in this same location tomorrow beginning at 10:30am. She stated in the last few months, there has been differing statements released by the DNR and the Attorney General regarding the wolf delisting, and she has copies of both statements if anyone is interested in seeing them.
2. **Michelle Zellar, Finance and Operations Division:** **Ms. Zellar** reported her division held a customer service meeting on September 4th in which staff reviewed new regulations and facility preparations for the upcoming season. Much of the conversation centered around the new licensing system that will be coming in the next year or so, which includes enhancements with sports cards and interactions between the new online system and the new retail sales system. **Mr. Lindquist** asked about the rumors in which there will be cuts to law enforcement and wildlife staff; **Ms. Zellar** stated she will have to refer those questions to the specific divisions for a response.
3. **Cory Kovacs & George Madison, Fisheries Division:** **Mr. Kovacs** indicated there were no additions to his report other than coho is getting ready to make an appearance. **Mr. Madison** introduced additional fisheries staff including Mr. Phil Schneeberger, Lake Superior basin coordinator and Mr. Jay Wesley, Lake Michigan basin coordinator. He indicated the Lake Michigan committee has agreed to increase stocking of chinook in Lake Michigan for the first time since 1999 as bait is making a comeback. Mr. Wesley also spoke about walleye stocking in the UP. He stated the Bays de Noc Sportsman's Club has been instrumental in raising walleye fingerlings in the rearing ponds and have helped the DNR reach their walleye stocking goals this year. **Mr. Dropps** stated it was a good year, better than it has been in a long time, however, it was still about 100,000 fingerlings short of the stocking goal. He stated he applauds the efforts, but it still needs to get better to meet current prescriptions. **Mr. Augustyn** asked how many walleye fingerlings were stocked specific to the Bays de Noc; **Mr. Madison** replied 500,000 fingerlings and 2 million fry. Discussion continued.
4. **Tom Seablom, Forest Resources Division:** **Mr. Seablom** reported the division is moving ahead to fill the assistant chief position by November.
5. **Lt. Ryan Aho & Acting Lt. Jerry Fitzgibbon, Law Enforcement Division:** **Lt. Aho**, reporting for District 1, indicated his report shows how many different activities the CO's are involved in (domestic, conservation, suicides, etc.) and how busy they have been. The coming months are yet some of the busiest of the year. **Acting Lt. Fitzgibbon**, reporting for District 2, stated officers are responding to a lot of calls and many times are the first officer on the scene. He described a recent case in which two

suspects were obtained. **Mr. Augustyn** asked about the district's staffing; **Acting Lt. Fitzgibbon** stated they received five new CO's from the last academy which brings the district's total to 16. However, one is transferring and two more can retire in the next six months. The district is very young right now. There is a constant change in staffing levels. **Mr. Augustyn** stated he heard Lansing is looking at cutting back CO's and he is very supportive of law enforcement. **Asst. Chief Steve Burton** stated the division is 15 CO's short (statewide) of a cap at 252 officers statewide. Another school will be held soon to fill vacancies. As soon as some are hired, others retire. **Asst. Chief Burton** also responded to **Mr. Lindquist's** earlier question, stating the state budget was short on the law enforcement/CO side of things, indicating there is only so much the division can do. He added it is very important and urged everyone with a natural resources passion to talk to their legislators about it.

6. **Eric Cowing & Doug Rich, Parks and Recreation Division:** **Mr. Cowing** provided a season wrap-up indicating that Palms Book has seen numbers increase in the last few years and Tahquamenon Falls has had a record-breaking year. Staff are looking forward to seeing fall colors and activity to slow down a bit so they can begin their fall preparations. **Mr. Hall** asked what the difficulties are in hiring summer workers. **Mr. Cowing** responded some locations such as Straits State Park and Mackinac Island offer housing and higher wages so there is competition, some parks are in remote locations, and some are near small communities with little to no prospects. The current wage is under \$10 and may be going up next year. He stated some increases were offered mid-season, but it is still difficult. **Mr. Smith** asked about the increase in numbers at the parks previously mentioned, what is the draw. **Mr. Cowing** indicated social media, Instagram and Facebook are enticing people to visit. However, the parks weren't built for large amounts of tourism. Seasons have also started earlier, goes later, and Tahquamenon Falls now offers winter activities. **Mr. Rich** stated there are multiple forms of competition for state workers. Fast food restaurants are offering \$2-\$3 more an hour. The budget presentation later on in the agenda may help explain why it's difficult to offer more. He also noted there was a public meeting in Eagle Harbor on August 21st to receive input on development concepts being considered to replace the aging infrastructure at the state harbor.
7. **Bill Scullon, Wildlife Division:** **Mr. Scullon** mentioned the division will be hiring seasonal workers to help with deer checks and at \$17/hour, it still is difficult to find state workers for a short-term position. **Mr. Wright** asked if the area by the Thompson Fish Hatchery was mapped as a winter deer habitat area and if not, he encouraged it's use. **Mr. Scullon** stated the Shingleton crew has done quite a bit of work in that area. **Mr. St. John** stated he noticed a change to a recent compartment management in the Stephenson area in a stand that was scheduled for management as deer were observed there in the winter. He asked where he could find more information about how the deer wintering complex decisions are being made and whether they are appropriate to be taking timber stands out of the picture. **Mr. Scullon** explained the management plan process stating they try to represent all values, not only timber but wildlife too, and indicated he would be glad to discuss it with him, along with Mr. Seablom from the Forest Resources Division. **Mr. Lindquist** asked if there will be any modifications in the CWD testing numbers, being that 55 deer were tested in the core area and the goal is 2,600. **Mr. Scullon** stated it is a goal they will try to reach. As hunting season progresses, more testing will be done.

Special Recognition to Former NRC Commissioner JR Richardson

Chair Wirtanen called former NRC Commissioner and Chair JR Richardson to the front of the room to recognize his contributions to the Councils. **Chair Wirtanen** recited the Council's resolution that was presented to him. **Commissioner Richardson** stated the Councils have meant a lot to the NRC, Ms. Haughey, and the DNR Director, adding this type of input and mechanism to bring issues back downstate works very well. He applauded the Councils—handshakes and a round of applause was given. **Ms. Haughey** displayed some photos of Commissioner Richardson's tenure on the NRC and stated he has meant

a great deal to the Councils as well. She acknowledged the time he put in as a commissioner, adding it is 509 miles from Ontonagon to Lansing one way so he has many miles under his belt. She reviewed several initiatives and accomplishments he was involved in including the UP Habitat Workgroup, the CWD Workgroup, the Timber Advisory Council, etc. She thanked him on behalf of her and the Councils for his support. Another round of applause was given.

Commercial Fishing Regulations/Statute

Chair Wirtanen introduced Fisheries Chief Jim Dexter who is here to discuss the review of the current commercial fishing regulations and the related legislative bills that have been introduced.

- **Chief Dexter** provided an overview on the history of the commercial fishing statute, which was first written in 1929—90 years old. The Great Lakes historically was a commercial fishing grounds, not a recreational fishery. With so many commercial fishermen in those days, the state determined regulatory framework was needed. As time progressed, sea lamprey and ale wives became issues. The feds managed the Great Lakes until the 20th century. The state took control from the feds in the 1960's and managed it as a recreational fishery, creating a huge change. In the 1960's salmon was going in and all commercial fishermen were using gill nets. Due to a variety of reasons and changes, the legislature gave the authority to manage the fisheries to the DNR. Throughout the 70's and 80's, many changes were made by many DNR directors. It became very complicated over time. The existing statute is over 80 pages long. Managers have a difficult time because of so many layers built over decades, creating contradicting layers of regulations. Chief Dexter stated the current statute doesn't allow for good reporting or enforcement and industry has had a hard time understanding it.
- **Chief Dexter** indicated they have been working on the rewrite for 9 years. Currently there are five legislative bills in play, some of which are more recreationally friendly, and others, including Rep. Cambensy's bill, are industry friendly, creating two very different viewpoints. He is working to get them to come together. He also noted consent decree negotiations started earlier this year.
- **Lt. Short** touched on the law enforcement side of things. He stated Michigan ranks as the largest producer of fish on the Great Lakes on the US side and second in the basin behind Ontario. Both Wisconsin and Ohio rewrote their statutes in the last 14 – 15 years, and they are very good. Michigan is trying to catch up. He indicated he represents the State on the Great Lakes law enforcement committee and stated the statute is archaic and confusing, it has resulted in a huge fish laundering problem. Michigan is often referred to as the laundering hole of the Great Lakes. The current maximum fine is only \$100. He provided a few examples of cases in which there was little restitution for the size of the crime. Loss of licenses, revocation, and stepped up fines are included in the rewrites. A question and answer period with the Council ensued.
- **Chair Wirtanen** indicated that Mr. Dropps had previously provided a short presentation on the proposed bills at the last Council meeting and asked him to speak from the Council's fisheries committee perspective. **Mr. Dropps** provided an overview of what he presented to the Council at the July meeting and indicated he did not understand how a proposed commercial advisory committee, included in one of the opposing bills, could take power away from the NRC who regulates sport fishing. He encouraged people to talk to their legislators to make sure items of concern are addressed.
- **Chair Wirtanen** thanked Chief Dexter, Lt. Short, and Mr. Dropps for their commentary on this subject. He stated in lieu of time, any public comments will be referred to the public comment portion later on in the meeting. Those wishing to talk with Chief Dexter or Lt. Short can do so individually after the meeting.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) Regulations Overview

Ms. Haughey indicated the WUPCAC received a brief presentation at their July meeting on the latest CWD regulations passed by the NRC, but the EUPCAC has not yet received it. A handout has been placed in the meeting packets and at the entry table providing an overview of that information. She asked if there were any questions related to the new regulations; none were brought forth.

Parks & Recreation Division (PRD) Funding & Budget

Chair Wirtanen introduced Assistant Chief Jacklin Blodgett of the Parks & Recreation Division. **Asst. Chief Blodgett** indicated she is an avid outdoors woman, partaking in hunting, fishing, snowmobiling, and riding ORVs, and asked the Council how many do the same. She encouraged questions while she presented an update on the Parks and Recreation Division funding.

- *State Parks & Recreation Opportunities:* There are 103 state parks and recreation areas and 138 state forest campgrounds, hosting 28 million visitors annually with over 1 million camp nights, which is second in the nation. State park facilities need to be competitive with the private sector. There currently is an 89% satisfaction rating from 103,000 respondents/users. There are 19 state owned harbors, 12,500 miles of dedicated trails, including motorized and non-motorized, over 2,600 miles of rail trails (first in the nation), 1,300 boating access sites, 80 public harbors and over 300,000 acres managed for recreation. It's a big business.
- *State Parks, Recreational Boating & Trails FY 2019 Appropriations:* The total revenue is \$167 million. \$101 million is from state parks alone. \$75 million represents salaries for staffing. Funding comes from the Park Improvement Fund (58%), Park Endowment Fund (24%), Recreation Passport (12%), General Fund (4%), and Other (2%). Most of the funding comes from camping. Recreational Boating is a \$32 million business. The RAM Center, which costs \$1.2 million to operate, is self-sufficient through use fees. Funding for state forest recreation and trails comes from ORV permits and licenses (19%), forest recreation (6%), Snowmobile Trail Improvement Fund (32%), General Fund (used for non-motorized) (20%), National Recreational Trail grants (13%), Recreation Improvement (2%), and Other (5%). The Iron Belle Trail comes out of General Fund.
- *State Parks Capital Outlay Appropriations:* A chart presented showed what the state has been able to invest in the state parks over the years. This year \$33 million has been put towards capital outlay due to the Park Improvement Fund, Park Endowment Fund and Recreation Passport Fund.
- *Recreation Passport Fund:* A chart presented shows the revenue for the Recreation Passport, with over \$30 million this past FY2018. Another chart was shown displaying the growth of the passport revenue. Non-resident recreation passport purchases were up in both daily and annual passes for August; the reason is not quite known.
- *Waterways Funding Distribution:* A chart presented showed watercraft registrations (49% to marine safety and 51% to waterways) and 2% gas tax revenue (80% to waterways, 6% to Recreation Improvement Fund and 14% to Snowmobile Trail Improvement Fund).
- *ORV Fund Distribution:* This fund is legislatively set and legislators receive a report on how these funds are being spent. Of the ORV license fee and trail permit of \$36.25, \$1.00 goes to the Safety Education Fund, \$35.00 goes to the ORV Trail Improvement Fund, and \$0.25 goes to the Agent/Dealer Commission. Of the \$35.00 that goes to the ORV Trail Improvement Fund, the following is distributed: Trail Improvement and Maintenance Grants-not less than 50%, Damage Restoration Grants-not less than 12 ½%, Law Enforcement-not less than 31¼ %, Administration of the Act-not more than 3 1/3%, and Trail Improvement Grants-remaining 3 1/8%.
- *ORV License Sales through August:* ORV license sales are growing, from \$225,668 in 2018 to \$236,596 in 2019 through August.
- *Snowmobile Fund Distribution:* Distribution of the snowmobile program revenue is much more detailed and complicated. A flow chart was shown indicating the many facets of distribution.
- *Snowmobile Permit Sales through August:* Permit sales were 141,850 in 2018 and are at 139,056 so far this year. ORV permits and snowmobile permits are running at about \$8 million a year. The snowmobile program, however, relies on snow, so sales are difficult to predict.
- *100% Recreation Passport Participation:* With the amount of potential revenue the passport could bring in, it could cover a lot of what the Parks & Recreation Division needs to do. If all eligible vehicles participated, revenue would be \$89 million versus the current \$31 million received today. Work continues to get the word out to folks.

Asst. Chief Blodgett opened the floor for Council questions.

- **Mr. Augustyn** asked if parking lots are included in the trail improvement and maintenance funds. **Asst. Chief Blodgett** replied it would include all expenses related to a trail. If the recreation passport was required at a trailhead, it is legislated and would be broken down in this way (under Tier 2 revenue distribution per statute).
- **Ms. Abbs Portice** indicated the explorer guides come out of the Parks & Recreation Division.
- **Mr. Schulz** asked how much revenue is received from boating. **Asst. Chief Blodgett** indicated boating is decreasing, with only 800,000 vessels current registered. The overall boating budget is about \$30 million. The formula for revenue distribution is also legislatively set.
- **Chair Wirtanen** asked about an opt out versus an opt in for the recreation passport. **Asst. Chief Blodgett** stated they are still having conversations legislatively. Ultimately, a 50% participation level overall would be ideal.
- **Mr. Moll** stated the downside to an opt out versus and opt in is that some folks see it as an additional tax.
- **Mr. Augustyn** asked about treated or dried firewood for state parks. **Asst. Chief Blodgett** stated they are still working to educate the public. They know preventing campers from bringing in firewood to state parks needs to happen, but it is a hard conversation with them.

Chair Wirtanen thanked Asst. Chief Blodgett for her insightful presentation. A round of applause was given.

Public Comments

Chair Wirtanen explained this portion of the meeting and opened the floor for public comments.

- *Mr. Frank Pearson of the audience* stated he applauded the efforts made to address the commercial fishing regulations and feels it's long overdue. He added that as sports fishermen, they fund those fish for the most part and the only negative thing, from a sport fisherman's point of view, is he would've hoped the discussions occurred earlier than where they are at now. He supports the improvement in commercial fishing bills but would like to tweak a few things and include GPS location reporting on nets from a safety perspective. He indicated he read each of the 5 bills at 65 pages each and it can be confusing. He added he feels the NRC should be authority over commercial fishing.
- *Mr. Mark Pelosa, President of the Great Lakes Sportsmen's Club*, said he is looking forward to better law enforcement in tribal fishing areas.

Council Comments

- **Mr. Lindquist** stated MUCC will be working on the sportsmen supported commercial fishing bills so that it's more equal, indicating its 7:2 as far as commercial fishermen versus sports fishermen on how those groups are made up.
- **Mr. Schulz** noted that in the Parks & Recreation Division presentation, it clearly indicated snowmobiles only receive 14% of the gas tax revenue, whereas the waterways program receives 80%, and biking, hiking and kayaking gets 6%. ORV users keep increasing but they have to beg for a culvert or a sign and yet it is the segment that is growing and bringing in the revenue whereas boaters are decreasing. He'd like to see the revenue distribution changed.
- **Mr. Moran** stated he recently attended a meeting regarding Kirkland warbler habitat, which brings in a lot of revenue by viewing. He indicated there has been an ongoing collaborative conflict between Forest Resources Division and the Wildlife Division for many years and he's hoping going forward, the Council will recognize there are places to be more diligent in cutting for enhancements in wildlife habitat. There is a long way to go but getting there. He thanked Ms. Haughey and Chief Dexter and encouraged Council members to do the ride along program with law enforcement to see what's going on out in the field.

- **Mr. Duke** stated on Monday, he attended the dedication of a new trail, Trail 440 in Seney, which will tie Trail 431 to 41 and it will work to eliminate a lot of the traffic in Seney and making snowmobiling and ORV use a little better in that area. This project is about 15 years old, so perseverance does pay off. The Sunken Lake project is also finally completed and will be brushed, signed, and ready for action as soon as the snow arrives.

Adjourn

Chair Wirtanen stated this was the 11th annual joint meeting between the two Councils. He thanked them for their commitment and contributions. He looks forward to more joint meetings in the future. **Chair Buckingham** stated he appreciates the Council as well, along with guests, staff, and the public who attended the meeting today. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:55pm Eastern.

Approved 1/15/2020