

Official Minutes
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE
December 7, 2017

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee (PRCEC) was held on December 7, 2017 at the Roscommon DNR office. Chairperson, Barb Curtis called the meeting to order at 1:00

MEMBERS PRESENT: Barb Curtis, Dick Kleinhardt, Kerry Mase, Chuck Fanslow, Carol Clute, Bonnie Cornelius, Darlene Alexander and Kim Ross.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Don Horrocks, Norma Laine, Vicki Reinhardt

PRESENT:

Wildlife Division: Brian Mastenbrook – Fields Operations Manager.

Parks and Recreation Division: Anna Sylvester - Northern Fields Operations Chief, Kelly Kinser – Supervisor of Otsego Lake State Park and PRCSF Campgrounds and Trails, Paige Perry, DNR Recreational Trail Specialist

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT: Forest Division: Scott Whitcomb - PRCSF Manager

Parks and Recreation Division: Richard Hill – Gaylord District Supervisor

Law Enforcement Division: Nick Torsky – Corrections Officer

OTHERS PRESENT: Chad Williamson

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: **Motion** was made by Carol Clute, seconded by Barb Curtis, to approve the September 30, 2017 Minutes. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: Barb Curtis added to the New Business of the Agenda: fall public information meeting. **Motion** to accept the Revised Agenda was made by Dick Kleinhardt, seconded by Darlene Alexander. Motion carried.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS:

Elk Research Up Date

Chad Williamson, graduate student Department of Fisheries and Wildlife, Michigan State University, presented an update on the Elk Research project. He is almost finished with compiling the data for the studies first objective. An inventory was made of the cover types present on private and public lands in the study areas. By tracking the movements of elk within the study areas they determined how suitable the elk found these cover types for spring and winter food and also winter thermal cover. Young aspen were preferred for food and low land conifers for winter thermal cover. Areas with potential for future development of desirable elk habitat will also be identified. The second

objective was to gather and analyze data regarding recreational activity of equestrian riding and mountain bikes in the study areas. The next phase of the research will be to analyze the data on elk movement and habitat selection in response to recreational activity (type of activity, time of day, day of the week, and time of year). Movements of the elk were obtained by radio collars and recreational activity was obtained by collecting photo images from numerous cameras placed on designated hiking, biking and equestrian trails, and county and forest roads. Analysis of these images (type of activity, time and place) and the elk movement will take place this winter. The interactive pattern will be further studied in the final phase of the study in 2018 which will measure elk response to experimentally controlled equestrian and mountain bike activity. The final report on the research is projected for May of 2019.

Equine Access and Pavilion

Dick Kleinhardt shared that he recently had an opportunity to have a phone conversation with Director Creagh and Deputy Director O'Neill. The topics included equestrian access to Inspiration Point and seeking permission to build a pavilion in the Group equestrian campground at PRCSF. Dick also voiced concern regarding PA 288 giving ORV expanded use in the Big Oaks area.

Brian Mastenbrook, Wildlife Division, said he would be willing to meet with equestrians at the Inspiration Point site next spring to walk the area looking over possible trail locations that would be separate from the trail used by people. A trail request would have to be submitted and proceed through the DNR trail approval process. Additionally, Inspiration Point is on License Fee land and any proposal for an equestrian trail there would need to have input from USFWS.

In regard to increased ORV access in Big Oaks, Kim Ross said that it is very dangerous to mix any motorized vehicles and equestrians. At a minimum, signs should be posted altering ORV users to presence of equestrians and reminding ORV users to yield to equestrians. Anna Sylvester, PRD Northern Fields Operations Chief, said that she and Cody Stevens, Atlanta Forest Manager, and Dave Dekett, Supervisor for Clear Lake and Big Oaks, met with Jinjyr Miller at the Big Oaks location and looked over how ORV access to the County and Forest Roads would impact the equestrian riding trails. The DNR does not have any jurisdiction over the County roads but they did recommend changing some Forest Roads from open to closed to ORVs. These recommendations have gone to the Director. The ORV Forest Road Access plan will be finalized at the December 14 NRC meeting. Anna suggested that a letter be sent to the Director from the PRCEC in support of the recommended changes at Big Oaks and also support for continuing to not allowing ORV access on Forest Roads within the PRCSF. The committee agreed and a letter will be sent.

In regard to the pavilion request, Anna said that the Parks and Recreation Division are still working on a Recreational Management Plan for PRCSF. They anticipate that it will take another 18 months to complete. Anna recommended that an application to build a pavilion should wait until this management plan is completed. Darlene Alexander has compiled all the needed information for application. Paige Perry, Recreational Trail

Specialist, reminded the group that there were no guarantees that even after completion of the recreational management plan the pavilion may still not be approved. Several committee members spoke up that there is very high interest and support from the equestrian community for a pavilion.

PRD Equestrian Camping Policy

Anna Sylvester, PRD Northern Fields Operations Chief, reported that Parks and Recreation Division has been working on updating their equestrian camping policy. The policy is not yet finalized but one change already put in place is an increase in the camping fee for the forest campgrounds to \$15. Additional changes that may be in the policy not yet finalized: Reservations for the PRCSF Group Equestrian campground will require a minimum of five camps (before it was a minimum of six people). A camp is defined as one sleeping unit with no more than 6 people per camp. A camp will be required to have at least one horse, so no longer will a camp without horses be allowed. The policy will be finalized before the beginning of the spring camping season.

Status of Proposed Stoney Creek Equestrian Trails

Paige Perry, Recreational Trail Specialist, reported that the final steps for approval of the looped trail system in the Stoney Creek area are taking place and these trails will be open, signed and mapped for the 2018 riding season. The higher level of Stoney Creek campground will be mixed use and the lower level will be equestrian use. The only exception is for scheduled MTRA rides when the entire campground will be equestrian use only. Stoney Creek is underused. It is hoped that more people will take advantage of this equestrian campground with the addition of these mapped and signed trails. This is part of the Elk range in northern Michigan.

Trail Hanky

Darlene Alexander reported that she has not been able to locate a source that would charge less than \$5 per hanky with a minimum purchase of 100 hankies. She questioned what club would be willing to put that kind of money forward. She will continue to search for a supplier and speak to others clubs about shared costs.

Craft Property

The Craft Property is a small parcel of land on the Black River purchased with Natural Resource Trust monies. A group from the PRCEC will visit the site in the spring to see if it would be feasible to submit a request for equestrian access.

Campground Fire Rings

Bonnie Cornelius said that some of the fire rings are very poorly placed within the campground and the rings are not popular because they do not give off good heat for people who just want to sit around a fire in the evening. Kelly Kinser said that at the spring work bee Bonnie can work with Ranger Thompson to relocate the fire rings. The rings were designed by the Department to meet ADA guidelines. The Department went with the larger size for safety concerns as a number of children have been injured by campfires. The rings also have to be user friendly for people in wheelchairs. The Department will be reviewing the design next year.

USFWS Input on Requested Equine Connector Trails.

Brian Mastenbrook, Field Operation Manager Wildlife Division, was asked what the status was for three trails and portions of three trails that lay within the License Fee land that the Director did not open because he wanted to first obtain input from USFWS. Brian said that as far as he knew MDNR has not received any input from the USFWS.

NEW BUSINESS:

Election of Officers for 2018

Chuck Fanslow – Chair

Barb Curtis- Vice Chair

Kerry Mase - Secretary

Report on the October Pigeon River Country Advisory Council Meeting

Chuck Fanslow gave the Committee a summary of business before the Advisory Council in October. While equestrian related issues were not on the agenda, at this meeting, Nick Torsky, Conservation Officer reported that this year was the best he has seen for equestrians staying on legal trails. In regard to Public Act 288, Scott Whitcomb reported that it is recommended that the PRCSF continue to stay closed to ORV use. Parks and Recreation Division have completed one section of the Recreational Management Plan for PRCSF. It is hoped that the plan will be finalized in approximately 18 months. Scott Whitcomb reported that two grants for land purchase have been applied for. The grand opening of the Discovery Center will be the Memorial Day Weekend May 26 - 28.

The schedule for Pigeon River Country Advisory Council meetings is:

January 19, April 20, July 19 and October 12. The January meeting will be held at the Corwith Township Hall in Vanderbilt. The July 19th meeting coincides with the annual Forestry Open House.

Spring Work Bee

Dick Kleinhardt will be speaking to Back Country Horsemen – Pigeon River & Beyond about the Spring Work Bee which will focus on equestrian trail maintenance. The first and third weekends of May were suggested by the committee as the tentative dates for the spring work bee. Kerry Mase will check with Forest Division and Wildlife Division to see if those two weekends would be acceptable.

Public Information Meeting

Barb Curtis requested that this topic be tabled until next meeting.

Next Meeting: March 15, 2018 1:00 Roscommon

Other business:

Kelly Kinser reported that they did not receive a single applicant for campground host at the Elk Hill Trail camp. PRD will continue to offer a host position for fall portion of the 2018 season.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Spring Work bee planning- Dick Kleinhardt and Kelly Kinser

Public Information Meeting- Barb Curtis

Solar pump – Anna Sylvester

ADJOURN: Meeting was adjourned at 4:30

Respectfully Submitted,

Kerry K. Mase

Secretary