

**OFFICIAL MINUTES**  
**PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL**  
Pigeon River Country Headquarters, Vanderbilt, MI  
Thursday, July 20, 2017

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Thursday, July 20, 2017 at the Pigeon River County Headquarters, Vanderbilt, Michigan. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and introductions around the room.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Walters, Paul Rose, Chuck Fanslow, Brent Shank, Don Horrocks, Sandy Franz, Brad Garmon, Rique Campa, Brian McPhail, Lisha Ramsdell, Drew YoungeDyke, Randy Keen, Pete Gustafson, Bill Loney, Dave Smethurst and Paul Beachnau.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Tom Deans, Heather Shaw.

**EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:** Scott Whitcomb, Nick Torsky, Rich Hill, Brian Mastenbrook.

**EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF ABSENT:** Tim Cwalinski, Steve Milford, Kelly Kinser.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Stewart Smith, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki, Eugene Horan, Dale Franz, Karen Chapman, Guy Lovelace, Steve Buyze, SOM DEQ Geologist.

**OPENING REMARKS – JOHN WALTERS:**

Chair John Walters informed all present that they were missing out if they haven't used the Pigeon River Country State Forest lately. Fishing has been phenomenal, and there are a tremendous amount of fawns out. Be sure to get outside and enjoy the PRCSF.

**AGENDA:**

Chair John Walters asked for any additions to the agenda, none were given. Don Horrocks motioned to approve the agenda, Sandy Franz seconded, motion carried; agenda approved.

**MINUTES:**

After review of the previous meeting minutes, some corrections were noted. Brad Garmon advised of a correction on page 2, the second from last paragraph should read as "the legislature's idea is to open...". Sandy Franz advised of two corrections, on page 4, last sentence of paragraph 2, spelling should be corrected to "assent", and on page 5, paragraph 2, spelling should be corrected to "Rupert Cutler's...". With those changes, minutes from the April 20, 2017 meeting were approved with a motion by Drew YoungeDyke, seconded by Chuck Fanslow.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Chair John Walters opened the floor to any public comments, no public comments were given.

**WILDLIFE COMMITTEE – SANDY FRANZ:**

The Wildlife Committee met on July 14 with Brian Mastenbrook to review YOE 2019 compartment treatments that exceed 40 acres, which consist of mostly aspen stands. Sandy Franz reviewed the compartments for the

council, and asked members to be sure to read the minutes provided from the July 14 Wildlife Committee meeting. The committee approved unanimously the department's treatment recommendations. Paul Rose questioned the necessity of continuing review of treatments over 40 acres if the DNR has professional staff making these recommendations. Discussion ensued, Brian Mastenbrook said it was of value to him, and Scott Whitcomb commented that the department has, in the past, modified prescriptions. Chairman John Walters noted that reviewing subject treatments is in the Concept of Management, and it's the Council's obligation to uphold, a review serves as an added check and balance. Sandy Franz made a motion on behalf of the Wildlife Committee that the PRCAC, upon the recommendation of the PRCAC Wildlife Committee, support the department's proposed timber harvest recommendations for larger than 40 acre parcels in YOE 2019. Motion seconded by Rique Campa, unanimous approval by member's present, motion passed.

#### **STANDARDS & LIMITATIONS COMMITTEE – PETE GUSTAFSON:**

The Standards & Limitations Committee met on May 16, 2017, (copies of committee report made available to members) at Otsego Lake State Park to review the draft Recreation Plan Supporting Analysis for the Pigeon River Country. The supporting analysis was addressed at the last PRCAC meeting; Kelly Kinser provided copies at that time. The Standards & Limitations Committee purpose was to review it and provide comments and recommendations appropriate in the drafting process. The supporting analysis is the first step in the PRD planning process that will lead to development of the Recreation plan. Standards & Limitations committee did provide comments to PRD – read them in Gustafson's report from meeting. The overriding comment that the committee passed along is to recommend that the supporting analysis reflect the primary role of the COM in setting goals and objectives, and management of the PRCSF.

Brad Garmon questioned the future role of PRD –clarity on who does what between FRD and PRD in the PRCSF. Chair Walters highly encourages that if members have questions on PRD role in PRCSF, send those questions to Pete Gustafson, and copy John Walter and Scott Whitcomb.

At Dave Smethhurst's request, Rich Hill explained concept of "zoning" in current state park planning process, basically what is permissible in certain areas and what is not. Chair John Walters envisioned the PRCAC could have its own "zone" and within that boundary, more unique zones. Discussion ensued.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

##### **PA 288 UPDATE – SCOTT WHITCOMB:**

Chair John Walters started the discussion on the two letters he sent to the DNR Director. Walters asked for any feedback from members on the letters.

Scott Whitcomb – The DNR went through the initial staff proposal on what roads would be open and remain closed to ORV use; as a reminder, the staff proposal for PRCSF was that everything remain as it is. The proposal went forward for public comment, and an online web viewer was available for 45 days, where the public could see the department staff proposal regarding roads that are opened / closed. There was a 45 day public comment period, which ended on July 15. There were over 60 groups invited for stakeholder meetings, including tribal engagement meetings; public meetings were held in Gaylord, Cadillac and West Branch. The department also collected email and traditional mail – we received over 1,000 public comments. DNR Department staff will review public comments, and will consider the current proposal in light of all the public comments received.

The next step takes place on August 9, in which final proposals will go to chiefs of all DNR divisions, requesting approval and decision on field staff recommendations. Then those final proposals coming from the chiefs will go to Director Creagh for information at the October NRC meeting. Director Creagh will make a final determination at the November NRC meeting.

Roads that are proposed opened and closed will be codified into an enforceable law and would eliminate the existing LUOD's that pertain to motorized access in various areas, and replace them with maps in the various counties that the LUOD would reference that would show the road opened or closed. (Note: Must be on roads shown on access map).

With regards to public comment regarding the PRCF, not many comments were received, however, the ones that were received were in favor of the recommendation we put forward. There was only one comment that wanted ORV's in the PRCF. The PRCF was one of the few areas where the public commented on the proposal and were in favor of the restrictions.

Paul Rose noted that in reviewing some of the language contained in the 1980 court decisions involving the PRCF, he came across some language specific to ORV use, and thinks it merits further review. With approval of the rest of the council, and if it is determined relevant and should be considered by the Director before he makes a final decision, Paul encouraged the council to allow Chairman Walters to send the information regarding the court decision to the Director to consider as part of his decision making

Don Horrocks commented on potential conflicts between horses and ORV's in the forest if ORV's are allowed. There was also discussion on Representative Tristan Cole's desires in having a possible "ORV corridor" thru the PRCF.

Chair John Walters noted that an agenda item for the October meeting should be PA 228 update. Brad Garmon also noted that it may be helpful to have input from past members of the PRCAC who can speak personally on the subject. Chair Walters stated that this is already being done.

**DISCOVERY CENTER UPDATE AND WALK THROUGH – SANDY FRANZ:**

Currently in the process of researching and writing wall exhibits, which has been a voyage of discovery of quotations and historic photos. Working on one wall and one room at a time to finish exhibits, and send them to exhibit company for fabrication. Once the back and forth of editing is finished, it will take one or two weeks for an exhibit to be fabricated and returned. At the Discovery Center, you will note a lot of work that Rudi Edel and volunteers have done in the fabricating of exhibits, saving the PRCA thousands of dollars. Hoping for a soft opening sometime in September. Chair John Walters encourages members, either individually or as part of an organization, to donate to the PRCA (501c3 organization) for this project. Many in-kind donations have been received as well. PRCA submitted a Natural Resources Trust Fund grant application for help on subsequent phases of development. Sandy led all for a walk through of the Discovery Center.

**NEW BUSINESS**

**REPLACEMENT OF TUBES AT PIGEON RIVER SFCG – LISHA RAMSDELL:**

A couple of months ago, an Otego County Road Commission engineer, Lisha Ramsdell, representing Huron Pines and a variety of DNR staff met at the Pigeon River State Forest Campground at the "Tubes" to talk about a long term plan for the crossing. The crossing is increasingly becoming a maintenance and safety issue for

the county. The hard part of the plan will be how the placement of a new bridge will impact recreational users, and keeping the recreational value, as it is an iconic spot in the PRCFS. Speaking for Tim Cwalinski, now that the SOM dam is gone, this is a Fisheries priority for the Pigeon River. Huron Pines is currently putting together a partnership agreement as to what they are hoping to accomplish at the site. Estimates, design and permitting is in process; potentially to begin fund raising at the end of the year.

People love the Tubes because of the nice plunge pool created by the river velocity, people also use it as a day use area. The purpose of taking the culverts out is to stabilize the velocity in the area. Things could be done to maintain the swimming hole. A timber bridge construction would be desirable for many reasons such as aesthetics in a natural river corridor.

#### **LEGISLATIVE ACTIVITIES – PAUL ROSE:**

At the last PRCAC meeting, Lisha presented good background information on Senate Bill 280, which seeks to amend the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund; the good news is there would be a lot of work to do before this goes anywhere. The other concern is Senate Bills 302 & 303, which are successors to Senate Bills 39 & 40, which died in committee last December. Something may happen with SB 302 & 303, this legislation will adopt the strategic land plan and will require it be redeveloped and renewed in 5 to 7 years. Land acquisitions will need to get local approval. Also anyone would have the right to make application - can propose to acquire state owned lands whether it has been designated as excess land or not.

#### **EX-OFFICIO REPORTS**

##### **WILDLIFE REPORT – BRIAN MASTENBROOK:**

Met with the Eastern Branch of the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation at a meeting at Garland about 2 weeks ago. Also met with their eastern lands man for the first time, who asked why we haven't gotten applications from Michigan. Established a good connection, will start testing it as soon as he can, there is land for sale right now that Mastenbrook wants to start talking to him about.

The Dog Lake Flooding dam removal is imminent, the flooding is drained down, hope to have pictures for the next meeting. Using interlocking mats to provide access. Mats will be pulled out when it is done. The Dog Lake Flooding will be gone; however, Dog Lake will remain.

Just passed a lot of deer regulation changes. Nothing really in the Pigeon River Country State Forest per se. The antlerless quotas went up significantly.

Lastly, 2018 celebrates one hundred years of elk in Michigan. Wildlife Division is ramping up to celebrate it, with a poster contest, judged by hunters in first elk hunt. Partnering with Montmorency County Conservation Club to produce a calendar, Wildlife Division is hosting the Eastern Elk Management workshop, and an elk license plate will be available. Trying to get the word out on what a great success story it has been. Elk orientation for September Hunt will be Aug 28<sup>th</sup> at Corwith Township Hall at 1pm.

Brad Garmon noted that 2019 is the anniversary of 100 years of state parks.

##### **RECREATION REPORT – KELLY KINSER:**

Scott Whitcomb reported for Kelly Kinser, would like to thank Standards & Limitations committee for providing comments about the support analysis. Will keep the PRCAC advised. Also PRD was successful in getting an AmeriCorps project team for the summer, an 8 member team, who will stay at staff house for 8

weeks. Will focus work on High Country Pathway trail clearing, signage, also many other projects lined up. And lastly, the PRC SF campground numbers are up from last year.

**OIL AND GAS UPDATE – ANDY STEMPKY:**

Steve Buyze, DEQ Senior Geologist is attending tonight on behalf of Andy Stempky, who could not be here. Andrea Sullivan, who is currently the geologist here is retiring and Steve hopes to take her place. Reviewed production report, which is much the same as the first quarter. There is still a groundwater clean-up going on at Charlton 4.

Bill Loney speaking with regard to the Merit sale, bids are being reviewed right now, may have decision around the first of August. Timeline is still the same, planning to have sale finalized by September 30.

**LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – NICK TORSKY, C.O.:**

Not much to update at this time, note that PRC usage is trending away from anglers and hunters, more towards camping, hiking and birdwatchers. Illegal ORV activity is up out here, as well as across the northern lower. Could be confusion over PA 288 which is leading to increased illegal use. Just started new academy on Sunday, 21 new officers hired. Means little for boots on the ground in the Pigeon, the replacements will cover retirements and promotions.

Scott Whitcomb noted that equestrian users are still going where they are not supposed to be going. Torsky said that they did get funding for equestrian patrols this season. Ball park fine for riding horses in prohibited area is about \$200.00.

There were more complaints received out here in last quarter, may be because you can now text complaints to RAP.

**FOREST RESOURCES REPORT – STEVE MILFORD, DISTRICT SUPERVISOR:**

Not present, no report.

**PRC UNIT REPORT – SCOTT WHITCOMB, UNIT MANAGER:**

PA 288 roads implementation takes 80-90% of time most weeks. Tara Buehler, AmeriCorps is working on a lot of projects, coordinating volunteer events, busy all the time. We did locate a PRCA Intern late in the process; Kris Rygiel will be here for about 6 weeks. Kris is already helping Tara with many projects. Normal forestry activities are ongoing, our open house was Tuesday, and we had 9 people attend. Improvements to staff house were funded specifically the shower. Lastly we are still pursuing land acquisitions as they become available, as funding allows. Michigan Natural Trust fund application has been turned in for Storey Lake parcel, won't know until December. With regards to the Walled Lake parcel, south of Blue Lakes, a federal grant was applied for; we don't know status at this time.

**FISHERIES DIVISION REPORT – TIM CWALINSKI:**

Not present, no report.

Chair John Walters encouraged the Education and Engagement committee to develop a tour for 2018. Chair Walters also thanked Dale Franz for providing background information on a lot of what was talked about today.

Sandy Franz commented that Greg Rekowski has been a huge help with regards to advisory council questions.

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:**

2017 PRCAC Meeting Dates:

Thursday, October 19 at 5:30 pm – PRC HQ

**ADJOURN:**

Meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.