

OFFICIAL MINUTES  
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE  
JUNE 17,2013

A meeting of the PRCEC was held on Monday, June 17, 2013 at the Pigeon River Country Management Unit Headquarters. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 1:00

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Walters, Dick Kleinhardt, Kerry Mase, Chuck Fanslow, Barb Curtis, Norma Laine, Don Horrocks, Bonnie Cornelius, Carol Clute, Darlene Alexander, Carol Hyzer and Vickie Reinhardt

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Charlotte Prochazka

**EX-OFFICIO PRESENT:** Scott Whitcomb, Pigeon River Country State Forest Manager

**DNR PRESENT:** Keith Creagh, Director, Ron Olson, Chief Parks and Recreation Division, Russ Mason, Chief Wildlife Division, Bill O’Niell, Chief of Forestry Division, Anna Sylvester, Northern Region Parks and Recreation, Charlie Maltby, Supervisor of Otsego State Park, Brian Mastenbrook, Wildlife Biologist.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Sandra Batie, Chair of Equine Trails Subcommittee of the MSTAC, Diane and John McConnell, local landowners, Mark Dombroski, local landowner, Jim and Shelly Sloan, local landowners, and Larry Kleinhardt, local landowner

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance.

**APPROVAL OF AGENDA:** After the Agenda was revised to add two items of business, a **Motion** to accept the agenda was made by Carol Clute and seconded by Darlene Alexander. Motion carried.

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:** A **Motion** was made by Carol Clute and seconded by Darlene Alexander to accept the January minutes. Motion carried.

**ELECTION OF OFFICERS:** For position of Chairperson, Bonnie Cornelius nominated Dick Kleinhardt , seconded by Carol Hyzer. Carol Clute nominated John Walters, seconded by Darlene Alexander. A paper ballot was counted and Dick Kleinhardt was elected as the Chairperson. John Walters was nominated as Vice-Chair by Carol Clute, seconded by Darlene Alexander. No other members were nominated and John Walters was elected. Darlene Alexander nominated Kerry Mase for secretary, seconded by Carol Clute. No other members were nominated and Kerry was elected as the Secretary.

## **OLD BUSINESS:**

### **Work Bees**

Kerry Mase reported on the three work bees that were held in the Pigeon River State Forest to clear trails that were closed by the December 22, 2012 winter storm. The work bees were all sponsored by the Back Country Horsemen, Pigeon River and Beyond. At the April work bee there were forty five volunteers (fifteen chain saw operators) who represented twenty-five different horse clubs and organizations. Over four days they cleared the group campground and approximately 50 to 60 mile of trails and forest roads. The value of this volunteer labor was \$48,000. Over the Memorial weekend, another twenty-five volunteers from BCH and the Alpena County Horsemen's Club cleared additional trails. On June 16<sup>th</sup> a four woman crew from the Alpena club cleared the remaining portion of the trail from road 62 to road 65. The value of these two additional work bees has not yet been calculated.

Scott Whitcomb, Pigeon River State Forest Manager on behalf of the DNR thanked all the volunteers for the "tremendous effort" that was put forth to clear the trails. John Walters, Chairperson of the Pigeon River Advisory Council and Co-Chair of the PRCEC "applauded" all who volunteered.

### **Signage**

Charlie Maltby of Parks and Recreation reported that all of the old berms have been removed from the newly re-opened 7 miles of trails. Posts have been installed to keep vehicle traffic off these trails. They are working on confidence markers (signage) for all these re-opened trails. Loop rides have been identified but they welcome other suggestions for loops. Additionally, DNR crews are working on replacing the missing or damaged posts that have the Forest road number signs. Norma Laine of the Shiawasee Club said that her group would soon be camping in the PRC and that they would be happy to volunteer to place posts.

Scott Whitcomb shared with the group a new map showing five loop rides that would be in addition to the four already existing loops. These new loops varied in length from six to eleven miles. The loops were color coded on the map. The map shows numbered Forest Roads and the EQ trails that are open for riding. Scott said that they were also working on GPS for all the trails so people can use their tech devices when riding. After this map is finalized printed maps will also be available both on the web and at the field office. The "no horse" signs that were put up in 2008 will be removed. Positive signage telling riders where they can ride will be used instead. There will however continue to be some signs that will tell equestrians that an area is closed to horses where riding would result in resource damage or is dangerous to ride. Dick Kleinhardt supported the closing of some areas in order to protect the resource or the recreational user and he quoted from a section of the Right to Ride Bill that supported such actions.

Berms will continue to indicate that an area is closed to both riders and vehicles.

Norma Laine commented that these new maps and signage was “exactly, precisely what we wanted and needed”. She made a **Motion** that Scott include on this map the already existing four loops. The new maps should be colored coded with the miles of each loop. A big map should be posted at the two horse campgrounds and smaller maps should be available in the campgrounds. Carol Clute seconded. Vickie Reinhardt added an amendment to the motion that the four off site camping areas be included on the maps. Carol Clute seconded. During discussion, Don Horrocks, Cheboygan County Commissioner, said that tourism was critical to the local economy and better communication about riding was a positive step. Barb Curtis gave the map an A+. Motion carried.

Norma Laine will have riders from the Shiawassee club ride all the loops and give feedback to Scott about them and whether additional signage might be needed.

### **Speed Limit Reduction**

Scott reported that at our next meeting a conference call with the State Police will be set up to discuss what the next steps would be for getting the speed limit reduced in the PRCSF.

### **Campgrounds And Trails:**

#### **Stoney Creek**

Anna Sylvester, Chief of Northern Districts of Parks and Recreation, reported that the MDNR is working with the Cheboygan County road commission to see if the county road going into Stoney Creek Trail Camp could be improved. The county does not have money but might be able to provide workers. Scott added that Cheboygan county gets \$118,000 from the DNR for county road maintenance so perhaps some of this money could be applied. There are plans for improving this trail camp but first the access in has to be solved.

#### **Elk Hill**

The construction crew is now planning on being at the Elk Hill Equestrian campground by end of July to early August. The new vault toilets have been built and need to be placed. A solar powered well is in the budget (\$65,000 to \$70,000). The planner, Keith Cheli, will be talking to some of the committee members to clarify the design of the “Buddy Site”. The group campground will be getting four new vault toilets and an additional well that will be a hand pump.

#### **Clear Lake**

Plans for building a new Equestrian campground at Clear Lake State Park will be put on hold until Equestrian trails can be identified. Kerry Mase, Darlene Alexander, Carol Clute and Bonnie Cornelius have been working with Joe Hall, Clear Lake Supervisor and Cody Stevens, Forestry Manager on potential trails in the State Forest surrounding the Park. A report had been sent to the PRCEC prior to the meeting today that reported on

their recommendations after riding two of the potential trails. They felt that while the shorter loop was suitable, the longer one was not and alternatives need to be explored. Dick Kleinhardt made a **Motion** that Kerry Mase, Darlene Alexander, Bonne Cornelius and Carol Clute continue to work on potential trails in the State Forest surrounding Clear Lake State Park.. Seconded by Don Horrocks. Motion carried.

### **MDNR Management Plan for USFWS**

Brian Mastenbrook, MDNR Wildlife Biologist, reported that the draft of the full document isn't ready for public review. The planning process now is at the work group level and DNR staff are still modifying it. The next step is for it to get broader Department review where it is likely that more changes will be made. After that Brian expects it will be brought to the PRCEC and PRAC for their comments.

Brian explained that this plan is being put together in response to a request from the USFWS. Financial grants from the USFWS to Wildlife Division are conditional on it being completed by September 31, 2013. The guidance we were given in writing the plan was that it is to ensure clear wildlife related goals and objectives and provide guidance and direction regarding appropriate use and facility development. MDNR already has three significant plans that address these things in the PRC. They are; the Concept of Management, the Regional State Forest Management Plan (which is still draft) and the Michigan Elk Plan. DNR staff is working to integrate these plans to address the needs of the USFWS. The areas to be addressed are species management, habitat management and recreational use.

### **NEW BUSINESS:**

#### **“Closed unless designated as open” policy**

John Walters asked if the PRCEC would support the lower peninsular policy of trails being “closed unless designated as open” for the PRCSF equestrian trails. Dick Kleinhardt pointed out that this is the lower peninsular policy for ORV's and Snowmobiles and not for non-motorized use. Kerry Mase commented that she did not support the PRCEC endorsing this policy. Signage is inadequate within the PRCSF to clearly communicate open trails. Several members commented that while they appreciate being given 7 more miles of trails, the efforts at more informative maps showing all the open Forest Roads and optional loop rides and improvements in the signage of open trails, equestrians who come to the Pigeon River State Forest were, as a whole, still very unhappy about the restrictions that have been placed on our riding within the PRCSF and we could not in good faith endorse this “closed unless designated as open” policy. We felt that an endorsement would imply that we agreed with the 2008 DNR's restrictions that closed so much of the forest to us.

The committee was supportive of the new DNR policy of working with equestrians and providing better mapping and signage within the forest showing all the potential riding routes that are available. The message is more positive and inviting.

**Other Comments:**

Darlene Alexander commented on the trash that was left two weekends in a row by young (non-equestrian) adults who came to the forest to “party”. Bottles, cans and other trash were left as well as broken glass bottles from target shooting. Members of Alpena County Horsemen cleaned the trash up and left a message saying “Leave No Trace...Pick up your garbage”. She asked that the DNR do more to promote the policy of Leave No Trace for all the recreational users and visitors.

Chuck Fanslow, Carol Hyzer and Sandra Batie, commented on the logging disruption to the Shore to Shore Trail ride that was encountered in other regions of the state recently. They ask that the DNR incorporate into their logging contracts for timber sales that a buffer be left around trails and that active logging not take place during scheduled group rides. Chuck emphasized that a uniform policy for the whole state is needed for all trails. DNR needs to take the lead on this so that the protection of trails does not have to be done on an individual basis by members of the public for each location of a timber sale.

**DNR Director Creagh**

At 3 p.m. John Walters welcomed Keith Creagh, Director of the MDNR, Russ Mason, Chief of Wildlife Division, Ron Olson, Chief of Parks and Recreation and Bill O’Neill, Chief of Forestry Division. Dick Kleinhardt expressed appreciation to the Director and the Division Chiefs for accepting his invitation to attend the PRCEC meeting. Director Creagh said that as a result of an opportunity made available by Dick Kleinhardt to him and other staff to ride horses in the PRCSF, he was able to see first-hand what some of the equestrian issues were.

Director Creagh is hoping to create better alignment within the MDNR Divisions. Governor Snyder wants Michigan to be a trails destination state. There needs to be more connections between existing and new trails that will have a more positive impact on local economies. Director Creagh wants to know what the collective equestrian group wants. What is our vision for trails? He is also aware of the federal oversight for lands purchased with game and fish funds and he respects the input from the local managers who provide information regarding what in their opinion is best for the resource. Director Creagh felt that there needs to be a better engagement model between the Department, users of the state lands and the surrounding municipalities.

Scott Whitcomb provided background and an update regarding what has been accomplished to date between the Department and equestrian user groups in the PRCSF. This includes the formation of the PRCEC, opening up 7 more miles of trails, mapping more loop rides, improved signage, reservation system for the equestrian campgrounds, planned improvements to both of the equestrian campgrounds, addition of four off site horse camping areas, working on speed limit reduction on the County roads in the PRCSF, and working on getting the trails on GPS. Outside of the PRCSF the Department is working on better access into Stoney Creek Trail Camp followed by improvements to

this campground. The Department is also working on the possibility of developing an equestrian campground at Clear Lake State Park and additional riding trails in that area.

Don Horrocks commented that as County Commissioner from Cheboygan County he feels that more needs to be done to attract tourists. Fifteen years ago the horse community brought a lot of money into the local area but after the riding restrictions were put in place the local economies lost significant income; some businesses closed. He feels more can be done to attract not only MI residence to the area but also out of state tourists. PRCSF should be added to the Pure MI campaign. He feels that horses have a very low impact on the environment and that there should be more trails.

Brian Mastenbrook informed us that issues have been raised by the USFWS for some portions of the Shore to Shore trail that are not on vehicle access roads within license fee purchased land in the PRCSF. As a result, he wanted to initiate a conversation exploring options for possible re-routing and changes to the Shore to Shore trail. The majority of the Shore to Shore Trail here is currently on vehicle access roads with just a few small sections that are closed to vehicles. He said that there were five areas that he would like to brainstorm with the equestrians about possible solutions. To get the conversation started, he suggested some possible re-routing of the trail and possibly re-opening some closed to vehicles roads that currently the Shore to Shore trail uses. The next step will be for Brian to meet with MTRA President, Chuck Fanslow and other MTRA board members to continue this discussion.

A discussion took place regarding who should be contacted regarding questions, or issues in the PRCSF since both Parks and Recreation and Forest Division are involved. Ron Olson, Chief of Parks and Recreation, said that within the PRCSF it is a “collaborative effort” between the Divisions but the first person to contact continues to be Scott Whitcomb who will either handle the issue or will let you know who will handle it. Scott Whitcomb will be the EQ facilitator here. Ron also pointed out that Anna Sylvester is the Regional director for 5 northern districts that includes State Parks and Forest campgrounds and trails. Anna said that each Forest Campground should have a sign that list contact information for the State Park manager that is in charge.

Dick Kleinhardt advocated for local land owners to have more direct access to the PRCSF such as they had prior to the riding restrictions. Land owners who attended today spoke about their particular access issues. They pointed out how dangerous it was to ride on busy county roads. Access for a few land owners would only involves a limited number of horseback riders. The impact would be negligible so why, they asked, couldn't special permission be granted? Larry Kleinhardt pointed out that when the forest roads were bermed years ago it was done to keep vehicles out not horses, so why can't some of these be used again for land owners to gain access to the PRCSF? Keith Creagh said that he wants the Department to develop a process by which land owners can apply for access. He said it may be possible to grant some.

In regard to the country roads, Director Creagh said he would be talking with the State Police Commander to see what the next steps would be for lowering the speed limit

within the PRCSF. Safety should be a primary concern. Requests were made for “Caution Horseback Rider” signs and the Director said “we could certainly sign it better”. Problems with enforcing the lower speed limit were raised and the Director said that more Conservation Officers are going to be hired across the state.

Dick Kleinhardt also requested that equestrians be allowed to ride to some of the iconic spots in the forest such as Inspiration Point and the Honeymoon Cabin which is in Green Timbers. He also asked if the zone around the Elk Hill horse campgrounds, which is not on license fee lands, be open to allow riding on the single track trails that had been used prior to the 2008 restrictions. Since both Blue Lakes and Green Timbers were purchased with Natural Trust Fund monies, couldn't riding also be allowed there?

Ron Olson said that the Department had contacted USFWS in response to hearing comments from the equestrian community that if a recreational activity, such as horse back riding, was included in state plans then the USFWS would allow that activity to take place on license fee lands. Chief Olson said that the Department was told by USFWS that this was not true. Not all Federal lands have been purchased with game and fish funds or license fee funds; the source of the funding used for purchase needs to be taken into consideration.

Sandra Batie, Chair of the Equine Trails Subcommittee, asked the Director if issuing Bridle Tags and limited use permits, which some other states use, would satisfy the USFWS and allow horseback riding on license fee acquired lands.

At the end of the meeting the Director summarized what comes next:

1. A small group should work with Brian Mastenbrook on the Shore to Shore trail issues.
2. The equestrian community needs to let him know what our priorities are for trails.
3. Director Creagh will speak with the State Police Commander regarding lower speed limits on County roads within the PRCSF.
4. The Department will consider possibly opening some currently closed roads to allow equestrian access.
5. Director Creagh will explore Sandra Batie's suggestions for bridle tags and limited use permits such as used in other states to allow access on license fee lands.
6. The Department will develop a process for land owners to use to apply for access into the PRCSF.
7. The Department will consider possibility of opening up more riding within the zone surrounding Elk Hill that is on non-license fee purchased lands.
8. Director Creagh will talk with USFWS regarding equestrian activity on license fee lands.

**FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:**

MDNR management plan for USFWS – Brian Mastenbrook

Update on Shore to Shore Trail – Brian Mastenbrook

Update on equestrian campgrounds and trails- Anna Sylvester

**ADJOURN:** Meeting was adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kerry K. Mase, Secretary