

Official MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE
March 24, 2015

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee (PRCEC) was held on Tuesday, March 24, 2015 at the Roscommon DNR office. Chairman Dick Kleinhardt called the meeting to order at 1:00

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dick Kleinhardt, Kerry Mase, Don Horrocks, Charlotte Prochazka, Vicki Reinhardt, Carol Clute, Barb Curtis, Darlene Alexander and Carol Hyzer

MEMBERS ABSENT: John Walters, Chuck Fanslow, Norma Laine and Bonnie Cornelius

EX-OFFICIO PRESENT: Forest Division: Scott Whitcomb - PRCSF Manager
Wildlife Division: Brian Mastenbrook – Fields Operations Manager.
Parks and Recreation Division: Anna Sylvester - Northern Fields Operations Chief,
Richard Hill – Gaylord District Supervisor, Charlie Maltby – Supervisor of Otsego State Park and PRCSF Campgrounds and Trails, Scott Thompson – PRCSF Ranger
Law Enforcement Division: Nick Torsky – Corrections Officer

OTHERS PRESENT: Connie Kleinhardt

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance.

COMMENTS FROM CHAIR: Dick Kleinhardt welcomed everyone to the meeting. He commented on the improvements in equine access within the PRCSF that have occurred since the Right to Ride Legislation, the formation of our Committee and the DNR department changes. He is looking forward to seeing more access as a result of the Directors response to our requests.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES: **Motion** to approve the amended Minutes for the December 2, 2014 meeting was made by Darlene Alexander and seconded by Charlotte Prochazka. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: **Motion** to accept the Revised Agenda was made by Darlene Alexander seconded by Charlotte Prochazka. Motion carried.

OLD BUSINESS:

Final Draft of the Work Plan for Pigeon River Country State Forest

At the December 2, 2014 PRCEC meeting Anna Sylvester presented the DNR Draft Work Plan to the Committee. On January 3, 2015 PRCEC members submitted their input on the Draft Work Plan. On January 23rd the Draft Work Plan was presented to the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council. The Council requested more time to review the plan in order to provide input. Subsequently the Plan was reviewed at a special working meeting of the PRCAC on February 9, 2015. PRCAC requested, in part, that they be given an opportunity to review and provide input on any EQ proposed trails/connectors and the EQ water access improvement design.

Anna Sylvester reported that using input from the PRCEC and the PRCAC the Work Plan was Revised and submitted to the Director. The Final version was presented today (attached as an addendum).

A core process was developed in which trails proposed by the PRCEC will be submitted to the PRCAC for comment. Trail proposals that the PRCAC concurs with will go to DNR staff who will make the final determination on acceptance of the proposal(s). For proposals in which there is non-concurrence, a facilitated mediation will be arranged between representatives from PRCEC and PRCAC. The purpose would be to create a proposal that is acceptable to both groups. If concurrence still cannot be reached then the DNR will make the final decision about the trail proposal.

Once trails are approved and the Director signs the Land Use Order, the DNR will work with EQ volunteers to develop the trails. Within 30 days of trail completion the DNR will update maps and provide trail confidence markers.

After lengthy discussion a **Motion** was made by Carol Clute and seconded by Don Horrocks to accept the terms of the Final Draft Work Plan. Motion carried.

Speed Limit Reduction PRCSF

One of the items on the Work Plan was to reduce the speed limit on the unpaved County roads in the PRCSF. Anna Sylvester contacted Sgt. Jerry Hilborn of the Michigan State Police who informed her that "the State of Michigan does not write Traffic Control Orders for unpaved roadways, which are un-posted 55mph." The only way to have the speed limit reduced would be to petition the Legislature to change the speed limit on these roads.

Don Horrocks said he will contact his Representative to discuss the Legislative procedure.

Parks and Recreation Division Recreational Management Plan for PRCSF

Richard Hill reported that in April there will be an internal Department discussion about a general framework for PRD Recreational Management plan for PRCSF. Some elements that have been used in their State Park planning will work, but because this is a State Forest the Plan will by necessity be different. The Department hopes to be able to

present the general framework for a PRD Recreational Management Plan to the PRCEC and the PRCAC by July.

EQ Maps for PRCSF

Charlie Maltby presented two maps to the Committee which show the area around the two EQ campgrounds. These maps show more detail than the larger map of the PRCSF and it is much easier to read the names of roads and the forest road numbers. The color version was much preferred as the Shore to Shore Trail was shown in red, the EQ connectors were marked in yellow, the county roads were in solid black and the forest roads were gray. Only the black and white versions will be free in the campground and at the Field Office. The committee asked if it would be possible to have color copies available on line and also in the Field office for purchased. Charlie will look into both the on line availability and the cost of printing them for sale.

A **Motion** for support for these EQ maps was made by Carol Clute and supported by Barb Curtis. Motion carried.

Conceptual Plans for ADA Mounting Block and Parking Space

Charlie Maltby presented the draft of the plans for a mounting block at the Elk Hill Equestrian Campground. The design is an approved ADA ramp that will be located by the out houses. Adjacent to the ramp will be a vehicle parking area (not a camping site).

Motion made by Vicki Reinhardt and seconded by Carol Hyzer in support of the conceptual plan and location. Motion carried.

Big Oaks and Lee Grande Trails Proposal

Anna Sylvester provided the Committee members copies of the DNR Trail Review for both Big Oaks and Lee Grande. She reported that the Big Oaks Trail Proposal is almost all the way through the DNR review process and the Divisions are approving the Trails. After the Big Oaks Trails are approved the Director will sign a Land Use Order which will officially establish the Trails. Signage and maps will be the next step.

The Lee Grande Trails Proposal is also working its way through the DNR review process but this trail proposal is not meeting with support. The proposed two loop trails fall within a Grouse Enhancement Management System (GEMS). The area will be used to train hunting dogs and will be used by young, inexperienced hunters. The area is currently open to Equestrian riding. There is concern that designating EQ trails would result in increased numbers of EQ riding in the area which would lead to an increase in user conflicts and safety concerns.

A meeting will take place in early May with local DNR staff and the trail proposal initiators, Kerry Mase and Shannon Smith, to discuss alternative trail riding opportunities in the State Forest outside of the Lee Grande boundaries.

Pigeon River EQ Access Elk Hill Equestrian Campground

Charlie Maltby provided a drawing of the plan to remediate and stabilize the equine access to the Pigeon River. Chuck Fanslow provided input to the DNR staff on the design. Timbers will be placed forming steps that will be filled with limestone fines. The area where horses wait their turn will be sloped to redirect drainage away from the river. The trail leading down to the river will also receive maintenance work to better control water runoff. Fisheries Division uses this access for its vehicles and equipment and they support this plan. Natural Rivers Program does not object to the proposed improvements.

A **Motion** supporting the plan was made by Vicki Reinhardt and seconded by Darlene Alexander. Motion carried.

NEW BUSINESS

Spring Work Bee

Scott Whitcomb reported that he has a big supply of posts to be used to replace the forest road signs. The Department has a tractor with an auger but they will have to see if they can allow volunteers to use it. Scott will have maps showing the locations that need posts and he indicated that he has two part time workers that could work with the EQ volunteers.

Dick Kleinhardt said the primary focus of the spring work bee would be cleaning up the campground and to make sure the trails are open. Kerry Mase pointed out that Road 63 is an open forest road but has been filled in by Mother Nature. Cleaning this road up would give us additional riding options. Also needing attention is along the East side of Blue Lakes Road. The old fence line is still there. The posts have rotted and fallen over, but the wire is still there making it dangerous for horse and rider who needed to get out of the road due to traffic. "Caution Horseback Rider" signs are still needed at the north and south ends of Blue Lakes Road. This road is generally in good shape which allows vehicles to drive faster down this road and riders in the road are not always visible from a distance because the road rolls.

When a date is established for the Spring Work Bee Scott needs to be contacted for a Use Permit.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Richard Hill reported that a meeting has taken place between DNR staff and the head of the Cheboygan Country Road Commission. The country road leading to the Stoney Creek campground will be graded this spring and the holes filled with aggregate. A meeting on site is planned in the future.

NEXT MEETING: May 28, 2015, 10 a.m., PRCSF Field Office

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

- 1) PRCEC Trail Team's Recommendations for Connectors – Kerry Mase
- 2) DNR Criteria For Granting Landowners Request for Access to the PRCSF – Scott Whitcomb

ADJOURN: Meeting adjourned 3:37

Respectfully submitted:
Kerry Mase, Secretary

ADDENDUM

TO: Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee

FROM: Scott Whitcomb, Unit Manager, Forest Resources Division
Anna Sylvester, Northern Field Operations Chief, Parks and Recreation Division
Brian Mastenbrook, Field Operations Manager, Wildlife Division

SUBJECT: Draft work plan for Pigeon River Country

On March 3, 2014, Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Director, Keith Creagh, requested an internal team comprised of Mr. Scott Whitcomb (lead), Ms. Anna Sylvester and Mr. Brian Mastenbrook to work with the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee (PRCEC) to achieve the points of agreement. He also requested that a draft work plan be developed before the next PRCEC meeting which identified deadlines for completion of the work.

While developing the work plan, the team recognized four important facets for the Pigeon River Country State Forest (PRC):

- *Follow the guidance and intent of the Concept of Management*
- *Provide high quality experiences for equestrian riders in the Pigeon River Country*
- *Retain high quality natural resource management*
- *Continue providing high quality management of other recreational and commercial uses within the PRC*

Each specific numbered request for equestrian use proposed by the PRCEC was evaluated and a staff response was provided, which included a draft framework for an action plan to complete the work. Time lines and persons responsible for the action are provided where appropriate. **In several instances the PRCEC is tasked with making a trail proposal presentation to the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) for comment and then staff deliberates to make the final determination as to acceptance of the proposal.** We suggest when the PRCAC concurs with the PRCEC proposal the item would be moved forward immediately for the next step. In those instances of non-concurrence an alternative means of dispute resolution be used, which would involve designees from both groups come together in a facilitated session with the mandate of creating a proposal that would go to staff that both groups could live with. A Land Use Order of the Director would need to be completed and the PRC Access Map updated as a final step to any new trails being designated within the forest.

1. *Work Plan for requests from the PRCEC*

Draft work plan was completed Dec 2, 2014 by Scott Whitcomb, Brian Mastenbrook and Anna Sylvester.

Next Steps: The team will finalize the work plan before March 24, 2015 after approval by the DNR Director.

- 2. *Restore access to single track trails within the zone surrounding the Elk Hill Equestrian campground and the Group campground that is on tax reverted or exchanged acquired lands.***

Staff review of the area is complete. DNR staff agrees that additional dedicated trails or loops may be established in this area, especially in areas that cut through to other roads and other riding opportunities.

Next Steps: PRCEC marks proposed trail(s) with flagging and documents the proposal using GPS. PRCEC completes trail proposal application by June 16, 2015. PRCAC reviews and provides comments on the proposal at their July 16, 2015 meeting. Local staff reviews both inputs in areas of concurrence and makes recommendations by August 15, 2015, while areas of non-concurrence are mediated between the two groups. Included in this effort is a commitment to provide trail confidence markers and signs, per the sign policy, within 30 days of trail development.

3. ***Designate as legal the trail out of the Group campground that heads east and travels between the sunken lakes to Twin Lakes Road.***

Staff review of the area is complete. There is an old trail that runs south of RD 101 along the west side of North Twin Lake and can be extended to offer a view of South Twin Lake then proceed to the Group camp. The current trail will be re-routed slightly to maintain the integrity of the resources.

Next Steps: PRCEC marks proposed trail(s) with flagging and documents the proposal using GPS. PRCEC completes trail proposal application by June 16, 2015. PRCAC will be asked to review and provides comments on the proposal at their July 16, 2015 meeting. Local staff reviews both inputs in areas of concurrence and makes recommendations by August 15, 2015, while areas of non-concurrence are mediated between the two groups. Once approved, the DNR will collaborate with volunteers to develop the trail. Trail confidence markers and maps will be updated within 30 days of trail development.

4. ***Designate as legal the river trail between the Group campground and the Elk Hill Equestrian campground.***

DNR staff reviewed the area. Staff supports designation of the trail when the current erosion issues have been successfully restored. The restored area can be made suitable for sustained heavy horse traffic or a different route must be proposed and actions taken to ensure that there are no future erosion issues.

Next Steps: PRCEC will work with PRD staff to submit plans to address erosion on current trail. Plan may include re-route recommendation. FRD staff prepares forest treatment proposal (FTP) as necessary for forest certification. After remediation of area, PRCEC will make and flag the proposed trail, complete a trail proposal application for review by PRCAC and DNR staff. Local staff reviews both inputs in areas of concurrence and makes recommendations within a month of PRCAC review, while areas of non-concurrence are mediated between the two groups.

To utilize the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund (MNRTF) money, this erosion project must be completed by August, 2015.

5. ***Allow equestrian access to Blue Lakes, which was purchased with Natural Resources Trust Fund money.***

The Concept of Management identifies Blue Lakes as a Special Management Area (page 25) and supports current rules being maintained.

Next Steps: DNR staff is reviewing recreation management planning options and hope to have a process to present to the PRCAC and PRCEC by July, 2015. In the meantime, human foot traffic to this area is welcome.

6. ***Designate as legal the riding trail out of the Hardwood Lake off-site camp that heads east through the forest to access forest road 61.***

The DNR are ready to move forward with this trail. Charlie Maltby, Park Manager, is the responsible person to mobilize staff and equipment for this trail.

Next Steps: PRCEC completes trail proposal application by June 16, 2015. PRCAC will be asked to provide comments on the proposal at their July 16, 2015 meeting. Local staff reviews both inputs in areas of concurrence and makes recommendations by August 15, 2015, while areas of non-concurrence are mediated between the two groups.

7. ***Trail access to iconic spots such as Inspiration Point.***

A Wildlife Habitat Grant was awarded to Huron Pines for this area with work to be done prior to October 1, 2015. Some of this work will alter existing views and may provide different vantage points. Staff recommends that trail proposals for this area wait until the work is complete before addressing this request.

Next Steps: Within 60 days of completion of the Wildlife Habitat Grant project, Brian Mastenbrook will lead the effort to set up an on-site meeting with PRCEC to determine if an equestrian trail can be accommodated in this area in addition to the hiking trail that is already there. Although, the area was purchased with Game and Fish Funding and the DNR's current direction is to not put additional trails on lands with this funding source because of the potential diversion of federal funds, the Department will determine if equestrian access can be provided in this area.

8. ***Trail access to iconic spots such as the Honeymoon Cabin in Green Timbers.***

The Concept of Management identifies Green Timbers as a Special Management Area (page 25) and supports current rules being maintained.

Next Steps: DNR staff is reviewing recreation management planning options and hope to have a process to present to the PRCAC and PRCEC by July of 2015. In the meantime, human foot traffic to this area is welcome.

9. ***New lands acquired with Michigan Natural Trust Fund money within the PRC borders and also land bordering or close to the PRCSF be open to equestrians use if suitable for riding.***

The DNR supports designating and constructing trails, where appropriate. The recreation management planning process will assist in this determination.

Next Step: PRCEC will submit trail proposal application(s) as new parcels become available or from land bordering or close to the PRC as they feel necessary. PRCAC will be asked to provide input at their next regular meeting. Local staff reviews both inputs in areas of concurrence and makes recommendations on approval or denial of trail proposal within 60 days, while areas of non-concurrence are mediated between the two groups.

10. ***Have current maps available at the kiosk in the Elk Hill Equestrian and Group campgrounds and online.***

Maps were installed as recommended. An updated map is currently being developed. Charlie Maltby, Park Manager, will assure these are installed when weather and staffing permit and no later than May 15, 2015.

11. ***Establish a policy to protect the Shore-to-Shore Trail in timber management practice and wildlife habitat activities.***

A new policy has been established which also provides guidelines to timber contractors. The policy is attached.

12. ***Improve "river/fish friendly" access to river for horses to water at Elk Hill Equestrian campground.***

Funding from the MNRTF grant was provided to improve this area. Input from the equestrians will be requested as the design is drafted.

Next Steps: Rich Hill, District Supervisor, Parks and Recreation Division will initiate action to design, restore and provide environmentally sound access to the river for horses with a completion date of August, 2015.

13. ***Lower speed limit on the unpaved county roads within the PRC.***

Anna Sylvester will facilitate a conversation between the PRCEC and the Michigan State Police

who have the authority to make this decision at the next Committee meeting.

Next Step: Anna will try to have this addressed at the March 24, 2015 PRCEC meeting.

14. ***"Caution Horseback Rider" signs on the improved county roads within the PRCSF.***

This action is complete.

Next Steps: The DNR requests PRCEC and visitors to the PRC to notify the staff if they notice any damaged or removed signs to assure replacement as a timely manner.

15. **The DNR recognizes that the adjacent landowner access request was inadvertently dropped in this document.**

The DNR will establish criteria for granting access to the Pigeon River for landowners requesting such accommodation. The criteria will be presented to the PRCEC by June 1, 2015 for a 4-week review period, then to the PRCAC on July 16, 2015 for a 4-week review period. Comments will be reviewed and criteria with a process established. A mediated session may be involved to resolve areas of non-concurrence if the two groups differ widely on their approach to this issue.