

Official Minutes
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE
November 30, 2016

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee (PRCEC) was held on, November 30, 2016 at the Roscommon DNR office. Chairman Dick Kleinhardt called the meeting to order at 1:00

MEMBERS PRESENT: Dick Kleinhardt, Kerry Mase, Chuck Fanslow, Norma Laine, Carol Clute, Barb Curtis, Bonnie Cornelius, Darlene Alexander, Carol Hyzer

MEMBERS ABSENT: Don Horrocks, Charlotte Prochazka and Vicki Reinhardt

EX-OFFICIO PRESENT: Forest Division: Scott Whitcomb - PRCSF Manager
Parks and Recreation Division: Anna Sylvester - Northern Fields Operations Chief, Kelly Kinser– Supervisor of Otsego Lake State Park and PRCSF Campgrounds and Trails, Scott Thompson – PRCSF Ranger

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:

Wildlife Division: Brian Mastenbrook – Fields Operations Manager.
Parks and Recreation Division: Richard Hill – Gaylord District Supervisor
Law Enforcement Division: Nick Torsky – Corrections Officer

OTHERS PRESENT: Connie Kleinhardt, Chad Williamson and Renee Mondeve

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance followed by introduction of those present.

COMMENTS FROM CHAIR: In appreciation for the progress that has been made to increase equestrian access and the improvement of the EQ campgrounds in PRCSF a thank you letter to DNR Director Creagh was signed by all members present at today's meeting.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA: **Motion** to accept the revised agenda was made by Bonnie Cornelius, seconded by Carol Hyzer. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:

February Minutes were read by the Secretary. A **Motion** to approve the minutes for the February meeting was made by Darlene Alexander and seconded by Carol Hyzer. Motion carried.

Because a quorum was not present at the February meeting a **Motion** to approve the minutes for the December 16, 2015 meeting was made by Darlene Alexander and seconded by Carol Hyzer. Motion carried.

A **Motion** was made by Bonnie Cornelius and seconded by Darlene Alexander: for all future meetings a majority vote for all Motions will be based on those present at the meeting. Motion carried.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Elk Research in PRCSF and Camp 30 Area

Chad Williamson, MSU Department of Fisheries and Wildlife graduate student, reviewed the four objectives of the Research which are to quantify the elk habitat and potential, quantify the intensity, frequency and geographic scope of horseback and bike activity within the core and peripheral elk range, quantify the elk movement and habitat selection in response to these two recreational activities and in the last year of the study quantify elk movement to experimentally applied recreational disturbance.

The elk habitat analysis is looking at changes in elk preference for different habitat from spring to winter and changes in preference due to the need for thermal cover. Eight different types of vegetation are being quantified as to its value to the elk. The value of the vegetation to elk changes over the seasons and also as the forest matures. A certain predominant vegetation type may decrease in value as a food source but may increase in value as thermal cover. The research will identify the areas with potential for enhancing habitat to meet elk needs for food and thermal cover.

On February 15 and 16, collars were placed on seven bulls and eleven females in the PRCSF and thirteen males and nine females in the Atlanta area forest. Their movements were tracked in these two areas. Their choice of habitat can be determined from their movements. The types of food and thermal cover have been mapped and can be correlated with elk movement. From February until October 291,696 locations have been recorded. In addition forty cameras were placed in the two areas in known horseback and bike recreation areas resulting in 110,000 images of humans and animals being collected.

In the third year of the study experimentally applied recreation activity will be used to quantify in finer detail the movement of elk in the presence of horseback riding and bike use. Assistance is sought from the recreational users for this phase of the research.

At the end of the research period data for the separate objectives as well as the interaction between all four objectives will be analyzed. The final report will be completed in 2019.

Report on Spring Work Bee

Dick Kleinhardt, President of Back Country Horsemen – Pigeon River and Beyond, sponsor of the May 19 – 22 work bee, reported that there were 37 volunteers for the work bee and that 535 hours of work was completed. The donated value for labor and equipment was \$17,000. The primary focus of the equestrians was working on the EQ riding trails. Maintenance cleaning was done on the previously opened trails. Three new connectors were opened and fourteen of the previously closed connectors were re-opened. The work bee also completed the jobs requested by PRD: a fence was built, new

tether posts were installed in the dispersed campgrounds, trees were planted, picnic tables and signs were stained, and the trees that PRD had cut down in the two campgrounds were cut up and moved.

Kerry Mase reported that members of Alpena County Horsemen's Club and Tri-County Horsemen's Club completed additional small work bees over the course of the summer that primarily involved minor trail maintenance of cutting limbs and small trees within the trail path and dragging brush to block inappropriate trails.

This fall Scott Thompson, Ranger PRD developed a letter/number system for the EQ trails and attached these confidence markers on new posts. Over a two day period with the help of Kerry Mase, Carol Clute and Darlene Alexander some old posts were removed and 63 new posts were installed at the connector intersections.

Scott Thompson presented a PRCSF EQ Trail map which he updated to include the letter/numbers at the trail intersections. These maps will be available at the Field office and the kiosk in the campgrounds.

Review of December 2, 2014 DNR Work Plan

Anna Sylvester, Northern Fields Operational Chief and Scott Whitcomb, Forest Division Manager of PRCSF reviewed the December 2, 2014 DNR Work Plan for addressing PRCEC requests. Everything on the list has been address and eleven of the fifteen items have successfully been completed. Four of the request could not be completed at this time. The speed limit within the PRCSF cannot be changed by the DNR. Access to Green Timbers and Blue Lakes continues to be denied, but will be reconsidered after the PRD complete the Recreational Management Plan. Potential access to Inspiration Point cannot be explored until the Wildlife Habitat project is completed. Scheduling of an onsite meeting will take place within 60 days of completion. Scott Whitcomb reminded the group that Inspiration Point is within Game and Fish fund purchased land and any proposed EQ trail would have to be submitted to the MDNR and the USFWS for their approval.

Dick Kleinhardt said that the PRCEC would continue to be proactive in pursuing access to these areas.

PRD Recreational Management Plan update

Kelly Kinser, Supervisor of Otsego Lake State Park and recreational programs in PRCSF, reported that the DNR Divisions are reviewing the completed first phase of the planning process. The first phase was the analysis of supporting documentation. The next part of the process will be to develop a framework for what the Plan will look like. Once that is completed the actual writing of a Draft Recreational Management Plan will begin. When the Draft is completed the PRCAC and the PRCEC will have an opportunity to review and public input will be sought. Anna Sylvester indicated that an estimate for a finalized plan would be 2 to 3 years from now.

Status of Equestrian Loop Trails Stoney Creek

Anna Sylvester checked the Trail Proposal system and reported that the proposal has not been submitted for review to the DNR departments. Dick Kleinhardt directed the secretary, Kerry Mase to contact Paige Perry and Emily Meyerson to inquire about this delay.

Temporary Pavilion

Darlene Alexander reported that it was the general consensus of equestrians that she spoke to that a temporary pavilion put in place for an entire camping season was not realistic to pursue. A temporary pavilion would have to be purchased by equestrians, transported, put up, taken down and stored by them. Additionally it was felt that a temporary structure would be too vulnerable to weather damage. Darlene did report that there is still high interest from equestrians and equestrian club funds are available for a permanent pavilion structure. The procedure to get approval for a pavilion cannot begin until the PRD completes its Recreational Management Plan.

NEW BUSINESS:

Election of Officers:

Current Chair, Dick Kleinhardt spoke about the progress the committee has made over the five years and asked members to consider the position of the committee Chair. Members acknowledged the valuable leadership provided by Dick over the history of our committee, but understood his need for a break.

Officers for 2017:

Barb Curtis – Chair

Chuck Fanslow- Vice Chair

Kerry Mase- Secretary

Reservation System for Group EQ Camp

Barb Curtis asked that this topic be put on the Agenda since she had heard there were possible changes for next year. Kelly Kinser said that PRD felt that there was a need for an equestrian camping policy. Anna Sylvester said that this policy would only apply to State Parks and State Forest campgrounds and not to dispersed sites. She discussed three portions of the draft proposed policy. Generally barriers or temporary corrals are not allowed unless approved by local supervisor. The supervisor would provide guidelines as to what is acceptable. Campers without horses would not be allowed to camp in equestrian only campgrounds if a non-equestrian campground is within one mile of the equestrian only campground. If there is no non-equestrian campground within one mile then campground supervisor could allow them to camp in the equestrian campground or nearby. She thought this might apply to Elk Hill since there is a people only campground within one mile. On the Draft Policy however she did note that elk hill is listed under “preferred equestrian use” and not under the list of “equestrian only”. She will inquire about this and will communicate with the PRCEC. Another change under this new Proposed Draft Policy will be to charge a minimum fee for the group campground equal to the fee for 24 campers. Currently a reservation can be made for six campers. Kelly Kinser said that the change was felt to be needed because of a Health Department rules

that require them to mow the grass in the campgrounds and that the revenue from only six campers did not cover the cost.

PRCEC members objected to the non-horse guest rule. Norma Laine pointed out that equestrians have complained about non-horse people camping with them because these people did not always know how to conduct themselves around horses. However, equestrians did not want to exclude family and their invited guests. Several committee members supported this. Kelly Kinser said that she would like to see a provision in the policy that would allow exceptions to be made by the campground supervisor when the majority of the campers are equestrians. She did not feel it would be appropriate to have a majority of non-horse guests. PRCEC members also objected to the proposed minimum fee increase for the group campground. They felt the minimum should stay at 6 campers and that the fee for additional campers be based on the actual number of campers. Committee members felt that the increase in the minimum fee to 24 campers was totally not justified and wanted more specific information about this Health Department rule.

A **Motion** was made by Norma Laine and seconded by Barb Curtis: It is recommended by the PRCEC that the Proposed Equestrian Camping Policy be changed to:

- allow non-horse guest campers in the group equestrian campgrounds
- the minimum fee charged in the group campground be the amount for six campers and then just per person for additional campers.

Motion carried.

PRCEC Recommendations for Guidelines for Trail Maintenance in PRCSF

There was general discussion about what would be appropriate for the rustic trails in the PRCSF. Currently these trails are riding trails and not carriage trails. Some of the trails are on two track roads so a six foot wide guideline is appropriate. Others trials are single track trails that wind more and are narrow. Single track trails are highly valued by equestrians who like to ride in more primitive/rustic settings. There was no support by Committee members for requiring all trails to be six feet wide. Chuck Fanslow said that trimming 10 feet high might be desirable but not always realistic and should not be a requirement. Dick Kleinhardt felt that common sense should be the guide and not rigid rules.

Kelly Kinser said that she still felt some guidelines were needed for work bees. An annual work bee could do general clean up on all the trails with some designated sections of the trail system meeting specific guidelines with a goal of 4 to 5 years to meet the guidelines for all the trails and then general ongoing maintenance.

Scott Whitcomb felt that it was very important for large fallen trees or other obstructions in the trail to be removed to prevent riders from making a detour round the tree or obstruction changing the route of the trail. If trees are too large then the DNR should be informed and they will deal with it. Scott would like to bring some recommendations to the Committee at the next meeting.

This topic was tabled until the next meeting.

Dispersed Campground Issue:

Anna Sylvester shared pictures of the large group of campers and horse trailers that used the Hardwood Lake Dispersed camp site. She asked that members of the Committee spread the word that this type of camping is a violation of the rules and tickets could be issued. Campers using these dispersed sites need to be posting their registration on a tree near their camp site. Only four camps are allowed. A camp is defined as one camping unit and no more than six people and four horses.

Dick Kleinhardt said that he was also informed that equestrians were riding on the Shingle Mill Pathway. He asked if better signage was need there. We can try to spread the word but violators should be given tickets.

Other Business:

It is recommended that the PRCEC have at least three meetings spread out over the year with option for additional meetings if needed. If a member misses two consecutive meetings they will be contacted by the Chair. If they are unable to attend meetings a replacement will be asked for.

Charlotte Prochazka has resigned from the Committee. She has notified Roy Dodge of the Elk Hill Riders that she represents and has asked for a replacement from that group. Carol Hyzer is no longer on the MTRA board and is unsure that they would want her to continue as their representative. Scott Whitcomb said that recommendations for replacements on the Committee need to be sent to the Director for approval. Membership will be discussed at the next meeting.

Dick Kleinhardt shared information about a company that will print Trail map hankies. Darlene and Bonnie Cornelius will look in to this and will present at next meeting.

Bonnie Cornelius reminded group about an earlier discussion regarding providing 10 camping spots in the group campground for overflow when the smaller Elk Hill Trail campground is full. Anna Sylvester will look into this and will report at the next meeting.

Kelly Kinser shared an idea that was presented by Ranger Scott Thompson for having a camp host at the smaller trail campground to help educated campers to the rules and to help them with issues related to camping or riding. Different people can share the camp host responsibility with the hope of having the busy period covered.

NEXT MEETING: March 16, 2017, 1:00 p.m. at the Roscommon DNR Field Office.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Elk Research Up Date
Guidelines for Trail Maintenance
Spring Work Bee

Stoney Creek Trail Proposal
Proposed Equestrian Camping Policy
Trail Hanky
10 camping sites in group camp for overflow
Membership
Campground hosts.

ADJOURN: Meeting was adjourned at 4:22

Respectfully Submitted,
Kerry K. Mase
Secretary