

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
Pigeon River Country Headquarters, Vanderbilt, MI
October 19, 2017

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Thursday, October 19, 2017 at the Pigeon River County Headquarters, Vanderbilt, Michigan. Chair John Walters called the meeting to order at 5:34 p.m. followed by the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

MEMBERS ABSENT: Tom Deans, Randy Keen, Brent Shank.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT: Deb Begalle, Steve Milford, Scott Whitcomb, Nick Torsky, Tim Cwalinski, Kerry Wieber, Kelly Kinser, Debbie Jensen, Brian Mastenbrook, Scott Thompson, and Karen Chapman.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF ABSENT: Andy Stempky.

OTHERS PRESENT: Charlie Davis, Karen Holman, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki, Eugene Horan, Stewart Smith, Tara Buehler, Beverly Schuster, Ernie Schuster, Andrea Bozeman, Robert Bozeman, Jamison Bozeman and Jayden Bozeman.

OPENING REMARKS – JOHN WALTERS:

Chair John Walters welcomed everyone to the fall meeting; introductions were made around the room.

AGENDA:

Chair John Walters added three items to this evening's agenda: introduction of Deb Begalle, the newly appointed Forest Resources Division Chief, 2017 Volunteer of the Year award presentation during the public comment period, and lastly, there will be discussion and scheduling of meeting dates for 2018.

MINUTES:

After review of the July 20, 2017 meeting minutes, Drew YoungeDyke made the motion to approve, seconded by Paul Rose. All voted in favor, minutes approved.

NOMINATION COMMITTEE:

Chair John Walters will not be running again for Chair in 2018. He has been honored to serve as Chair for the last eight years, however, he has submitted an application to serve on the Natural Resources Commission. If Walters does not get appointed to the NRC, he would like to remain as a PRCAC member. Chair Walters appointed Pete Gustafson, Lisha Ramsdell, and Sandy Franz as the nominating committee. Paul Beachnau made the motion to approve nominating committee as appointed, Dave Smethurst seconded. All voted in favor, nominating committee approved.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Stewart Smith, President of the Pigeon River Country Association, thanked the parties responsible for the new Pigeon River Country sign on Sturgeon Valley Road.

2017 VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD:

Scott Whitcomb stated that this is the 5th year for the Pigeon River Country Volunteer of the Year Award. Volunteering has a special importance to the PRCSF, and the purpose of the award is to make sure to memorialize the names of people who make significant contributions to the forest. Scott Thompson then presented the 2017 Volunteer of the Year Award to Beverly and Ernie Schuster, campground hosts for Pickerel Lake Campground. Beverly and Ernie acted as campground hosts for the 2015 and 2017 season. They were there every day during the season and made sure the campground and users were well taken care of, always going above and beyond the call of duty. Chair John Walters also thanked Beverly and Ernie on behalf of the entire council for their volunteerism.

OLD BUSINESS:**PA 288 UPDATE – JOHN WALTERS:**

Although there was no committee meeting this quarter, actions were taken on PA 288 by individual members of the council. Chair Walters went to the September NRC meeting to testify in support of department recommendations in the Pigeon River Country. Walters asked council members to keep in mind the 2 different aspects to PA 288, one is ORV use on state forest roads, the other is retrieval of big game on horseback or with ORV's. The department's recommendation in the PRCSF boundaries is that the forest roads are to remain closed.

Chair Walters also spoke briefly with Trevor VanDyke, legal advisor to DNR Director Creagh. Walters met with VanDyke the following week, and discussed concerns and issues related to retrieval of game in the PRCSF only. Horseback will be allowed to retrieve bear, deer and elk. As far as ORV use, the only animal that can be retrieved in the PRCSF are elk, the hunter must be accompanied by DNR staff, at a speed no faster than 5 mph. They cannot go into Green Timbers, which is an area designated as no motorized vehicle use. Written public comment period is ending November 16, this is still a draft version of the Land Use Order of the Director. The final opportunity for public comment in front of the NRC is scheduled for their December 2017 meeting.

Chair Walters thanked Paul Rose, Pete Gustafson, Sandy Franz, and Dale Franz who provided information and background on this subject. Council discussed contacting past PRCAC chairs to support recommendation before the NRC. If council members have contacts with NRC, now is the time to make them. Brad Garmon reminded everyone that PA 288 was enacted without any resources for signage, enforcement or implementation. Perhaps it's time for additional ORV license fees (SB 552); call your representatives and senators.

2017 HURON PINES AMERICORPS MEMBER UPDATE – TARA BUEHLER:

Tara presented the preliminary results on the Forest Use Survey she conducted between May - October 2017. The last time a similar survey was conducted was in 1997. Tara described to members the questions on the surveys issued to 1,914 people, 635 surveys were returned representing a return rate of about 30%. This survey was conducted in conjunction with traffic monitors that were installed last year. Tara then presented traffic monitor vehicle data; there were 68,000 hits on vehicle monitors, which represent "vehicle events" not total numbers of vehicle. The busiest roads were Sturgeon Valley, Tin Shanty and Webb. She reviewed and described highest reported activities during each month of the survey. Discussion ensued as to best

methodology for future surveys. This was best described as an “opportunistic survey”. Tara displayed a couple of impressive graphics of zip code representation for visitors to the PRC, indicating the various points of the U.S. the PRCSF gets visitors from.

INTRODUCTION OF DEB BEGALLE, FOREST RESOURCES DIVISION CHIEF – JOHN WALTERS:

Deb Begalle began by giving a brief history of her career, has 32 years in the DNR, started in the western U.P. as a field forester, then Unit Manager, promoted to District Manager, took the opportunity of a temporary position in Lansing for the experience, enjoyed it and decided to stay. Begalle grew up enjoying the outdoors, and is passionate about the resource. She then opened up the floor to questions, Dave Smethurst discussed the PRCSF Concept of Management, and how it is the foundation of the PRCAC.

Brad Garmon asked Begalle for any updates on where the state is with regards to the threat of invasive species. Invasive species can be introduced into the forest on our shoes, etc. She talked about getting 5 million dollars in general funding to fight the threat. She also described the decontamination policy used by DNR staff – cleaning shoes, vehicles and trying to expand on those practices. Fighting invasive species starts with education, the DNR has a very aggressive education campaign. The key is prevention - trying to prevent invasive species from entering the state, such as Asian Carp in the Great Lakes, on firewood brought into a campground. Asian Longhorn Beetle is going to be bad; it could wipe out maples, poplars, pretty much what we have left in the forest. Hemlock Woolly Adelgid is also a big concern.

Begalle wrapped up by thanking members for their service to the PRCAC.

NEW BUSINESS

LAND ACQUISITION IN THE PRC - KERRY WIEBER:

There is nothing active right now within the boundaries of the PRCSF, there are a couple fairly large projects at the periphery of the PRCSF, the first being the McIntyre property (597 acres) south of Blue Lakes property. The department applied for federal grant (fiscal year 2018) funding to purchase. The status of the application is not known at this time. The funding status should be determined in the next couple of months, hopefully the department will be granted funding. The other project is the Storey Lake property (2100 acres) – application submitted for a Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant. Storey Lake is west of Green Timbers property at the corner of Fontinalis Rd. and Alexander Rd. This property offers great opportunities for elk management. Property also includes Storey Lake, which has unique fishing opportunities. There were two prior opportunities (2001 and 2010) to acquire the Storey Lake property, but the DNR could not come to agreement with landowners at the time. Now there is only one landowner, and the price is reduced. The department will find out if funding has been granted in December 2017.

RECREATION PLANNING IN PRC - DEB JENSEN/KELLY KINSER:

Department staff has been gathering background information for the Recreation Plan supporting analysis, which is then gathered into one document. Some PRCAC members have reviewed the supporting analysis, the department appreciates the input. The supporting analysis is not a decision making document, just a list of facts. Walters asked if the court decision of the 1980's case is in the supporting analysis; Jensen acknowledged that it is. Jensen distributed the tentative proposed planning process. At the meeting Jensen asked for input from PRCAC on developing a “significance statement”. Significance Statements - PRCSF is unique and different - but what makes it different? Seeking input from PRCAC members on traits and values of the PRCSF that PRCAC members hold as unique and dear about the Pigeon to develop the significance statements. Gustafson recommended getting the results of the strategic planning session with Jordan

Burroughs, also urged PRD to recognize and embrace the Concept of Management in the process, because it lays out priorities, also Gustafson was not clear yet as to how PRD and FRD fit together within the framework of the PRCSF.

Kinser assured the council that a recreation plan is simply to help PRD manage the recreation programs that currently exist in the forest, for example, the campgrounds. What PRD is looking for right now is what each of council members personally hold as special about the Pigeon. Kinser also assured the council that the PRD planning process is in collaboration with all divisions of the DNR, and meant to be a department-wide plan.

Council members took 5 minutes to note what makes the PRCSF special to them for Kinser and Jensen. Kinser will update members of the results at the January 2018 meeting.

CAPPING FOREST 1-22 WELL AND OIL SPILL – BILL LONEY:

In early September, Merit moved to cap Forest 1-22 well, and in the process, some of the well fluid burped out and spilled on the ground. Total amount of spill was a couple of barrels, and the dirt was cleaned up with a vacuum truck. As they dug down, they did find some historical contamination from a prior spill. They have to do some more clean-up and make sure it's all clean. Spills don't happen often, but they do happen. With regards to Merit Energy sale, Merit is negotiating with a company to buy all of their Michigan assets. There is no sale agreement signed yet, Merit may know something in a couple of weeks. With regards to the cleanup, the spill will be cleaned up before the snow flies. Smethurst asked if there is a log kept by the DNR of spills and was informed that DEQ keeps track of spill reports. Merit is required to report oil spills to DEQ. Rose reminded members that a letter was written to the director when the last sale of an oil company occurred. Perhaps it would be a good time to send another letter to Bill O'Neill on items to consider in the PRCSF for the transfer of unit operator agreement.

EX-OFFICIO REPORTS

WILDLIFE REPORT - BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

Mastenbrook showed before and after removal of Dog Lake Dam; noted an old railroad grade the water draw down revealed. Temporary interlocking road bed for access placed on the wet part of access road, which will be used for a timber sale as well. When complete, the temporary road material will be pulled out and the road will remain closed.

The fall elk hunt took place on Aug 29- September 1, September 15-18, and September 29 - October 2. 100 permits were issued, 74 elk killed by state hunters, 44 antlerless (7 calves), 30 bulls. It was an average hunt; tribal hunters took a total of 6 elk, 4 antlerless and 2 bulls. The 2nd elk hunt will have 100 permits. There will be another aerial survey of elk completed. In 2018, the most recent elk population estimate by the department is 1100. The 100 years of elk anniversary in Michigan is coming in 2018 and the DNR has many events going on to celebrate.

RECREATION REPORT - KELLY KINSER:

Kinser stated the PRD is making progress on the recreation plan (as already discussed). PRD was successful in getting an AmeriCorps team at the PRCSF for 5 weeks; however, due to flooding in Midland, MI, they were pulled to assist in disaster relief. The team ended up working at the PRCSF for three weeks. They spent the majority of time doing trail clearing on High Country Pathway, and a lot of signage upgrades and repairs, also accomplished some projects at the Discovery Center and other minor projects. PRD intends on putting in for another AmeriCorps team for next year, the primary focus will be trail maintenance. Camping numbers are

down slightly overall from last year. Summer staff – PRD had 3 summer employees at PRCSF this year. Scott Thompson will be present for another 6 weeks until his winter lay-off begins. Funding is just not available for Scott Thompson to work year round.

OIL AND GAS UPDATE - ANDY STEMPKY:

No update - Stempky not present.

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE - NICK TORSKY, CO:

ORV activity is up in the PRC, complaints, warnings are up, tickets are up. Enforcement is going to be a challenge - proportional to what is happening on state land in general. Surmise that it is all related to PA 288. There is no funding for enforcement. Discussion ensued as to confirming where ORVs are currently allowed in the PRCSF. With regards to tracking tickets, Law Enforcement Division implemented a new records management system but it's not user friendly. Statistics are hard to obtain from the new system; difficult to answer the question if tickets are up or down from last year. Equestrian use in the PRCSF - compliance is way up this year. There were some complaints, fewer than in past years. Thanks to Chuck Fanslow for getting the word out - horse riders are policing their own. Anecdotal, there were a lot of people in the PRCSF in August which is usually a slow time, but it was really busy this year. Please note – conservation officers are on the Outdoor channel, in a show called "Wardens". Rose noted an episode that indicated the high amount of illegal carcasses in southern part of state being brought in from states that have chronic wasting disease.

Graduating conservation officer class update -23 people remaining, graduation is right before Christmas. Will deploy to the field in May or June of 2018- hiring another class of 25-30 people in the July 2018 timeframe.

Torsky has accepted a lateral transfer to Emmet County. The department will backfill his spot and Torsky will bring two new officers, Nate Sink and Kyle Cherry, to introduce at the January 2018 PRCAC meeting. Walters thanked Torsky for all his work in the PRCSF.

FOREST RESOURCES REPORT / PRC UNIT REPORT – WHITCOMB:

No update given due to time constraints.

FISHERIES DIVISION REPORT – TIM CWALINSKI:

Cwalinski distributed a draft hand-out for the Michigan Management Plan for inland trout which provides the foundation for trout management. Contains goals, key issues, and is used as a guidance document and summarizes many of the past management practices, current state of inland lakes and streams, and provides a roadmap for the future. Projects in PRCSF: population estimate on the Black River, survey done in August at Tubbs Creek. Since the 1991 survey, the Black is running right on average and consistently has good catch reports. Temperature loggers have been placed in the Pigeon and Black rivers to measure hourly temperatures during the summer. Cwalinski passed out this year's Pigeon River data, temperatures fluctuate from year to year, this year was an average year. Tim thanked Joe Jarecki for putting the temperature loggers in the rivers every year.

This year's data from the Black River was obtained with temperature loggers purchased by the Upper Black River Council (UBRC). Paul and Carol Rose placed these temperature loggers. Black River has data available from 2004 - 2017, the Black is in good shape from a fish perspective and a water temperature perspective. Paul Rose mentioned the UBRC meeting and discussed options for habitat work on the Black. The UBRC hired an individual to do some stream enhancement – will brainstorm some more ideas for work on Black.

Tim plans on walking the Black River in the next month and mapping out a stretch for some stream enhancement, for example tag alder brush bundles, with Paul Rose organizing.

The Fishing Guide will go back to one year publishing cycles, which will allow changes to be published quickly. Tim may recommend loosening of boating regulations on PRCSF sinkhole lakes where erosion work was completed. For example, going back to kayaks instead of float tubes. He will send draft to PRCAC Aquatics Committee for review.

PROPOSED PRCAC MEETING DATES FOR 2018:

Scott Whitcomb proposed meeting dates for 2018, with a 5:30pm start - those dates are January 18, April 19, July 19, and October 11, which are all Thursdays. Should the meeting continued to be held at the PRCSF HQ, considering the space constraints for council members and audience? Maybe it should be held at a township hall for comfort of seating.

As it was 9:30pm, Whitcomb reminded members that a motion was needed to extend meeting beyond 9:30pm. Motion was made by Don Horrocks, seconded by Drew YoungeDyke to extend the meeting in order to allow discussion on setting of dates for the 2018 PRCAC Meetings. All voted in favor, motion passed.

Brad Garmon said it would be difficult logistically for him to remain a council member if the meetings continued on Thursdays. YoungeDyke and Campa stated Fridays are better for them as well. Ramsdell suggested that the January, April and October meetings be held on a Friday, and July stay as a Thursday meeting. Whitcomb noted that attendance is important - please make this meeting a priority to attend because when people are at the table is when the group is most effective.

Walters proposed Friday, January 19, 5pm, Friday, April 20, 5pm, Thursday July 19, 5pm, and Friday, October 12, 5pm. Council members were in concurrence. General consensus from the council was with the exception of the January meeting at Corwith Township Hall, the rest of the meetings were to remain at the PRC HQ. Whitcomb noted that it is a public meeting so having adequate space for the public should be considered. Sandy Franz suggested that the tables were too big for the room and could the room be reconfigured to allow for more space. Whitcomb said that the forestry open house was scheduled for July 19, perhaps a PRCAC field trip could be in concert with the forestry open house. Council members indicated interest in this idea.

Walters thanked Pete Gustafson for writing a letter of recommendation on behalf of his NRC application and forwarding it to the Governor's appointment office.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Next meeting is Friday, January 19, 2018 at 5:00 pm – Corwith Township Hall

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.