

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
Pigeon River County HQ, Vanderbilt, MI
Thursday, October 15, 2015

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Thursday October 15, 2015 at the Pigeon River County HQ, Vanderbilt, MI. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Eugene Horan, Sandy Franz, Lisha Ramsdell, Brad Garmon, Randy Keen, Mark Ennes, Pete Gustafson, John Walters, Paul Rose, Jim Supina, Paul Beachnau, Rique Campa, Kurt Jagoda

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Jason Melancon, Dave Smethurst, Kerry Mase, Arch Reeves, Don Horrocks

EX-OFFICIO PRESENT:

Scott Whitcomb, Nick Torsky, Brian Mastenbrook,

EX-OFFICIO ABSENT:

Andy Stempky, Steve Milford, Tim Cwalinski

OTHERS PRESENT:

Denise Kinsinger, Pete Datema, Dale Franz, Stewart Smith, Judi Jarecki, Kelly Kinser, Ken Martin, Jim Klooster

The meeting was started with the Pledge of Allegiance. John Walters welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the Council members. Introductions were made by attendees.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Jim Klooster inquired why the Siberian Crab Apple was being removed in the area around Cornwall Flooding.

Brian Mastenbrook explained that it was part of a project to restore the opening. That area was not Siberian Crab Apple before. There were just a couple rows of it just to the north side of the parking lot and it spread out all through that area. The Department is trying to convert that back to an opening and we are hoping to be able to burn it and get native plants back in there. There is also a bunch of Japanese Barberry and black locust that has been treated up there.

Pete Gustafson stated that the Concept has a goal on openings and we are far short of that. Brian Mastenbrook then stated that the Pigeon River Country Concept of Management prescribes 6 % of the forest be in openings and as these openings fill in, the goal is to keep them open. We have done the same sort of work on Bob Cat Trail.

Scott Whitcomb stated that our goal is high quality prairie grass that is in there now, a lot of good forbs and not many invasives. Staff did some surveys and Siberian Crab Apple has spread all through the red pines, so we think there is still a good food source there. Left alone, it will start to spread again, so we see this as more of setting back succession than a complete elimination.

OPENING REMARKS – JOHN WALTERS:

We are privileged as to where we live and spend our time recreating. We can still fish for trout, there are grouse and woodcock, deer season, and duck hunting. For outdoor enthusiasts, this is the time and the place.

DNR Fish Division announced two new aquatic invasive species over the past 30 days. One being the New Zealand Snail found in the Pere Marquette River, and the other being Didymo, which is rock snot in the St. Mary's River. The reason I bring this up is that it is highly susceptible to transfer and if we are paying attention to detail and educating ourselves and others as to washing our equipment, waders and our boats so that we don't transfer from one place to another, it will help slow that process down. For more information you can go to the DNR website.

Dave Smethurst is having health issues this week. He saw a cardiologist and had a stent put in. I spoke with him today and he is doing remarkably well after surgery two days ago. Please keep him in your thoughts and prayers.

2016 MEETING DATES, TIMES AND PLACES:

It has been suggested that we move the time up from 6:30 to an earlier time. A 6:00 PM time was proposed in hopes of ending the meeting earlier as well. There was no disagreement.

Jan. 15, Friday, Corwith Township Hall
April 15, Friday, Charleton Township Hall
July 21, Thursday, Pigeon River Headquarters
October 20, Thursday, Pigeon River Headquarters

That time change would also include moving the ending time up and requiring a motion for the meeting to extend past 10:00 PM.

AGENDA: Accepted as published

MINUTES:

Paul Rose made a motion to accept the July 2015 minutes and Jim Supina seconded. Motion carried.

WILDLIFE HABITAT TOUR: BRAD GARMON

Kudos to Huron Pines today for their partnership on our tour. We want to have more educational opportunities for ourselves as Advisory Council members and Educational Committee. We might want to think about who else might be beneficial to have on the tours. Lisha Ramsdell added that it was good to understand funding sources as well.

EQUESTRIAN WORK PLAN: SCOTT WHITCOMB

The Department adopted a work plan for examining additional proposed equestrian trails. Department staff is recommending approval all of the trails recommended by the Roads Trails and Forest Access Committee. There were about 11 trails that no consensus could be reached on so as part of the work plan, those trail proposals are going to go to a facilitated session and that session is going to meet on Tuesday, October 27, 2015. There are going to be five representatives from the Equine Committee and five representatives from the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council, the facilitator and DNR staff. DNR will just be there to answer questions. The Facilitator will be there to run the meeting. The purpose of that is to work through those proposals, look at alternatives and really examine them. There are resource concerns, user conflict concerns and safety concerns and all of those need to be vetted but the idea is to have representatives from both parties at the table putting their best effort forth. Those recommendations will then go directly to DNR staff. DNR staff will then evaluate, looking at the pros and cons and we will make a recommendation to the Director to support those or not. Those proposals would not go back to the Equine Committee or the Advisory

Council for further work, but would go directly to staff. We feel that the representatives are at the table that can make those recommendations and not have to go back and forth another time.

The proposals that you looked at the July meeting have been put into the Department's trails proposal database and some additional information has been added. Staff, at this point, are in a review period and we will make a recommendation as to if we think those should go forward to the Director.

The next step would be if the Director approves any or all of those recommendations, a new Land Use Order would be approved with an updated map.

John Walters stated that the five people appointed came from Roads Trails and Forest Access Committee and he will be sitting in for Mark Ennes.

Sandy Franz asked if the trails approved at the July meeting would go to the Director. Scott Whitcomb stated that the intention would be to accept them as proposed.

Brad Garmon stated that at the last meeting a motion was made for sustainable trail resources to be identified; has that been done? Scott Whitcomb stated that it had not been done yet.

Lisha Ramsdell stated that there were other items on the plan from the December 2014 meeting; are those issues no longer on the table as part of the work plan?

John Walters stated that there were approximately 25 total requests and only 13 or 14 were approved. Those were the only ones that came to the full Council for approval. The ones that did not get approved by the Roads, Trails and Forest Access Committee are now for the facilitated work group to work on.

Scott Whitcomb stated that was true but what Lisha Ramsdell was referring to has been tabled. The Department is now working on #2 on the Equine Work Plan which was; restore access to single track trails within the zones surrounding Elk Hill Equestrian Campground.

Blue Lakes, Inspiration Point and Green Timbers have not been addressed yet. The Department stated those needed to be tabled so we could finish the Recreation Plan with PRD. We also want to do more with the Wildlife Habitat Grant because the character that is at Inspiration Point is going to change with the Habitat Grant. At this point, Blue Lakes and Green Timbers are contrary to the Concept of Management. There will be updated equestrian trail proposals with maps provided to the five Advisory Council members before the October 27th meeting.

SONG OF THE MORNING DAM REMOVAL: LISHA RAMSDELL

Soon, Song of the Morning Dam will be gone. Since the July meeting a lot of work has taken place. Huron Pines has been able to raise and receive additional funds. The bids came back from the contractors higher than the estimates. All of the permits are in place for dam removal and bridge replacement. Utilities have been disconnected from the dam. Power has been restored and phone lines have been replaced. Equipment mobilizing should be late next week, prepping the site, getting safety things in place. Actual work will be beginning on the 26th. Elmers is doing the removal work. Three weeks ago we had the downstream sand trap put in place. J & N did a fantastic job with it. We are planning for October 28th to be the date for the actual dam removal to begin.

Huron Pines had tremendous support from our last fund raiser and we have a lot of media interest in this project. The DNR has invested very heavily in this project through their aquatic habitat grant program. The actual dam removal will take a week to 10 days. The bridge is already manufactured and is 72 feet long. The contractor is confident that everything will be wrapped up by Thanksgiving barring any weather issues. The ribbon cutting celebration will be in the spring. If anyone is interested in being there for the dam removal, please contact me.

Scott Whitcomb stated that Tim Cwalinski could not be at this meeting so he passed along a couple of items and since they both directly pertain to the project I will report them now. Tim reports that they did their fish population studies and what they found is the trout populations have rebounded to similar numbers as before the dam went out. Also there was not any temperature differences noted above or below where the impoundment used to be.

DISCOVERY CENTER UPDATE: SANDY FRANZ

The Pigeon River Country Association signed a 25 year lease in July for the manager's residence. The Pigeon River Country Association then employed an architect, Tad Latuzek, of Trinity Architecture of Gaylord, who drew up a preliminary plan which went through several revisions. The plan has since been submitted to the State Historical Preservation office in Lansing and has been approved. We are now accepting bids for a new furnace and electrical for that building and expect that the work can be done yet this fall. We have received donations from Herman Lunden for articles that were in the office when the office for the Unit Manager was located in that building. We have received a file cabinet, some of the original maps that were in that office at the time and some other things so we are well on our way to actually having some of the ingredients for displays. We are also very pleased to be selected as an AmeriCorps service project site for May of next year when AmeriCorps will provide to us 70 or 80 volunteers to do things like prepare the pathway from the parking lot to the building, power wash the outside of the building, paint the inside, clean and wash walls inside. We will be developing a work plan to allow us to use the AmeriCorps volunteers in an efficient manner. That takes place on May 20, 2016.

As far as publicity goes, we are in the process of preparing a brochure that documents progress so far for donors, public and media outlets. We are also preparing to put information on the Pigeon River Country Association Facebook page and the Pigeon River Country Facebook page. The steering committee has given a lot of thought to the exhibits that will be in the Discovery Center. Brad Garmon has been in touch with several people (DNR) who had been involved with exhibits in the Gerald Eddy Discovery Center in Chelsea and Tahquamenon Falls.

Mark Harvey from the Michigan Historical Center, who is the State Archivist, was here today to begin recording oral histories from three people who actually lived in the house as children. The interviewees were Lyle Horsell, Linda Reinhart and Sandra Boyd. We are expanding a list of people we would like him to interview.

We also expect to have in the next couple of weeks a revised version of the High Country Pathway Map that will be available for sale.

John Walters asked if the plumbing utilities were o.k. at the Discovery Center and Sandy replied that, no, they were not. It will be brought into ADA compliance. We are getting bids on the plumbing as well and the electrical.

John Walters also asked what was going to happen with the upstairs. Sandy replied that it would primarily be used for storage.

Eugene Horan stated that Rudi Edel recently mentioned the porch was going to be resurfaced. Sandy Franz replied that the SHPO would not allow the flagstone to be sealed or a clear epoxy like coating, so the flagstone will remain as it is. There will be ramps built over parts of the flagstone porch to make the building handicapped accessible pursuant to the ADA.

John Walters asked if the exhibits would be rotating and if there was a planning process to occur. Sandy Franz replied that it is anticipated the exhibits will not be static, that we may add to our exhibits over time as they become available to us. Any ideas on exhibits or information should be submitted to Brad Garmon.

NOMINATING COMMITTEE: JOHN WALTERS

Chairman and Vice Chairman – Dave Smethurst, Brad Garmon, Paul Rose.

PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY HISTORICAL RESEARCH: ANNAKATHRYN PARKER

Power Point Presentation -Focused on history of elk, P.S. Lovejoy and Aldo Leopold and photographs.

LAW ENFORCEMENT: NICK TORSKY

- Elk season was uneventful from law enforcement standpoint.
- More hikers and bikers and sightseers less poachers.
- CO vacancy in Cheboygan County.
- Another CO class starting in January.
- AC could voice need for officer in Cheboygan County.

John Walters stated he noticed an increase in ORV use in areas that are not allowed.

FOREST RESOURCE DIVISION: SCOTT WHITCOMB

- FY ended
- Completed all prescribed timber sales
- The Unit put up about 1100 acres up for sale
- Completed our compartment review
- Working on Wildlife Habitat Grant
- Discovery Center
- Land Acquisitions, exchanges, trespasses
- Invasive Species Blitz – 2nd annual. Treated as soon as possible. Keep the PRC as a high quality area as it is now.
- Building demolitions – not much money for this.
 - Acquired a modular home on Black River. Have a showing for it next week.
 - Bid out the Green Timbers demolition – bid way too high. Back to the drawing board.
- Tours – Wildlife Habitat Grant tour today, Michigan Hemingway tour next week.
- This fall has been very busy. 80 people on a particular Saturday for the RSVP volunteers.

AMERICORPS: PETE DATEMA

- Volunteer event - Ruffed Grouse Society
- Planning events for next year's AmeriCorps person.

WILDLIFE: BRIAN MASTENBROOK

- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation Group planted apple trees and fenced an area.
- Elk Season 50 hunters 43 killed animals.
- Elk Survey in January also year for elk regulations. Any suggestions get them to Brian Mastenbrook.
- 38,000 applications for hunting licenses. 50 tags fall hunt, 50 tags winter hunt.

Wildlife Division and Forest Resource Division are working together on a birch nursery. They are planting them in the ground this year. They are also trying to put Oak on the ground.

Scott Whitcomb stated that Rique Campa and MSU are starting a new elk research study and will make a presentation to the advisory council in January

Paul Beachnau stated that the moose population in UP is not going good. Estimated population is 400, very stagnant.

Eugene Horan asked about wolves. Brian Mastenbrook stated that scat had been collected and it was confirmed as wolf in the winter of 2014.

PARKS AND RECREATION DIVISION: KELLY KINSER

- Fall pretty busy. STW's are done and it is just Scott Thompson now.
- In August we completed an erosion control project at Elk Hill.
- Working on the mounting block right now.
- Attendance at Elk Hill has been busy this fall.
- Debbie Jensen is working on the research for the Recreation Planning process and it is close to being done.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: JOHN WALTERS

Rique Campa requested to be on the agenda to discuss elk research in the PRC that will be starting in 2016.

Paul Beachnau asked how we did with the goal setting exercise. Charges/priorities

Sandy Franz asked about the Poster Map. Brian Mastenbrook stated it had moved from himself to Pete Datema and Scott Whitcomb. Brad Garmon volunteered to help with the reprinting project.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45.