

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
Charlton Township Event Hall, Johannesburg, MI
Friday, April 15, 2016

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Friday, April 15, 2016 at the Charlton Township Event Hall, Johannesburg, Michigan. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 6:02 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Tom Deans, Eric Ellis, Chuck Fanslow, Sandy Franz, Brad Garmon, Pete Gustafson, Kurt Jagoda, Brian McPhail, Lisha Ramsdell, Dave Smethurst, John Walters, Drew YoungeDyke.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Paul Beachnau, Rique Campa, Don Horrocks, Randy Keen, Paul Rose, Brent Shank

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:

Karen Chapman, Kelly Kinser, Andy Stempky (DEQ), Nick Torsky, Scott Whitcomb, Roxanne Merrick

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF ABSENT:

Steve Milford, Brian Mastenbrook, Tim Cwalinski

OTHERS PRESENT:

Hunter Fodor, Miranda Millikin, David Peterson, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki, Dale Franz

OPENING REMARKS – JOHN WALTERS:

Walters welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the Council members. Introductions were made by all attendees. John expressed thanks to Charlton Township for use of their event hall, and looks forward to holding the meeting at other venues near the Pigeon River Country State Forest (PRCSF) area as part of PRCAC outreach efforts.

AGENDA – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

Hunter Fodor's "Huron Pines AmeriCorps 2016" presentation will be last under Committee Reports. Brad Garmon's "Legislative Update" will be after "Oil Spill at Forest 24 CPF". Agenda approved as amended.

MINUTES:

Drew YoungeDyke made a motion to approve the minutes from the Friday, January 15, 2016 meeting. Brad Garmon seconded. With no further discussion, voice vote taken, motion carried.

EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT – BRAD GARMON:

Brad Garmon provided an update on plans being developed for the proposed July forest tour. Feedback was solicited from the Education and Engagement committee on who should be invited and sites to visit. The feedback suggested placing focus on local government officials, chambers of commerce leadership, perhaps a state legislator, highlighting the "WOW" sites in the PRCSF. Garmon encourages all council members to be front and center in this process, and asked members to put this tour on their calendar to attend. The planned date for the tour is Thursday, July 21, which coincides with the next PRCAC meeting. Please continue to direct your feedback regarding tour ideas to Brad Garmon or John Walters.

WILDLIFE – DREW YOUNGEDYKE:

Drew YoungeDyke received a request from the DNR Forest Resources Division PRCSF to review a variance to the Concept of Management on doing a clear cut of stands over 40 acres as a preventative measure against spruce budworm infestation, which is occurring in some adjacent forest management units. There was no Wildlife committee meeting, however, YoungeDyke sent emails to gather input. Most committee members concurred that due to the dangers of a spruce budworm infestation, it was an acceptable variance. Brad Garmon stated the following concerns: clear-cutting over 40 acres is contrary to the Concept of Management, is there an additional problem being created by having trees in the stand the same age, and inquired as to why the stands could not be broken up into smaller clear-cuts, which would not need a review by the PRCAC. After much discussion, Walters called for a motion. Youngedyke motioned to approve a variance from the Concept of Management for a clear-cut over 40 acres to manage spruce budworm before it starts in the PRCSF. **(Detail: Compartment 43 – stands 20, 21 and 134, adjacent to each other, for a total of 70 acres. Compartment 43 – stand 44, for a total of 45 acres. Compartment 52 – stand 17 added to Old Homestead sale for a total of 47 acres.)** Motion seconded by Eric Ellis. After an inconclusive voice vote, Walters called for a roll-call vote, 8 voted yes, 4 voted no. Motion passed.

Pete Gustafson commented that when the Concept of Management was written it was considering a healthy forest system – perhaps the council should become better informed about oak wilt and other diseases and how this new paradigm affects the Concept of Management and future decisions the PRCAC makes. Gustafson proposed that this subject should be considered as an agenda item for a future meeting.

PRC EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE – CHUCK FANSLAW:

Chuck Fanslow reported that the committee met on February 23, 2016. Dr. Rique Campa gave a presentation on the elk research project, and they voted unanimously to work with him and monitor what is going on as best they can. The spring work bee was postponed until May 20-22. The land use orders have been signed, and the new equine connectors have been approved. There was discussion on construction of a pavilion, or possibly a temporary structure at Elk Hill campground.

Dave Smethurst asked if this was the final corridor trails proposal. Scott Whitcomb stated that yes, this is it for now, however, there were a few trails on game and fish acquired land that have to go through a different approval process with the US Fish & Wildlife Service, and therefore they were not approved in the land use order.

REVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF MANAGEMENT – DREW YOUNGEDYKE:

Walters noticed this education item was inadvertently omitted from the agenda - Drew YoungeDyke has volunteered to take on the review of the Concept of Management from Pete Gustafson. YoungeDyke proceeded to review for the council pertinent sections in the Concept of Management related to hunting, trapping and fishing.

HURON PINES AMERICORPS 2016 – HUNTER FODOR:

AmeriCorps is a national service program designed to strengthen citizenship and service. It is a federal government program created under President Clinton and expanded in 2003 under President George W. Bush. AmeriCorps organizes projects that serve communities in health, education, environment and disaster services. Huron Pines AmeriCorps is focused on conservation in Michigan. Members serve various conservation organizations (DNR, land conservancies, conservation districts). The program helps develop members as leaders in the conservation field and strengthens the organizations they serve. Hunter's title is "Conservation Program Developer", he started at PRCSF in January 2016, and his service ends in November 2016. Current projects at PRCSF are assisting in the development of the Discovery Center by creating the

layout of pathway to Discovery Center, search and find native plantings to enhance pathway, vehicle monitoring using boxes placed at various entry points in the PRCSF, citizen scientist bird monitoring project using the smart phone app “e-bird”, surveying well pad sites (219 sites in total, not all are active) for invasive species and recovery of native species, working with volunteer groups like the Glen Lake Football team and RMEF on clean-up projects, and maintenance of berms to prevent illegal road access.

DIRECTOR'S CHARGES TO THE ADVISORY COUNCIL – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

The council was presented with the PRCAC self-evaluation survey results, rating their performance to the 11 Directors' Charges. Council member response rate to the survey was 67%. Eight of the charges were rated 3 and above, three were rated 3 and below. Whitcomb will provide council members with results and associated comments, to do with as they will. Whitcomb suggested that taking on all charges at one time may be too much, suggested picking one or two to focus on.

Walters requested that survey results and comments be forward to the Education and Engagement committee for review and recommendations.

PRC DISCOVERY CENTER UPDATE – SANDY FRANZ:

Exciting news - physical changes are being made at the Discovery Center. Siwecki Construction of Gaylord was contracted and began work on the project. Bill Horsell, Siwecki General Manager is the grandson of the first forester to live in the residence. The furnace has been installed and operational, bathrooms have been torn out, electrical systems upgraded with extra lines for exhibit needs. Brush and scrub trees have been cleared to allow river view – which will be incorporated into one of the exhibits. Plaster repair is being bid – need special knowledge of technique used. Wooden ADA ramp has been constructed over a portion of the flagstone porch.

May 20th is the date for the AmeriCorps Signature Service project at the PRCSF Discovery Center. We are expecting 80-100 volunteers to wash the building inside and out, wash windows, paint the interior, create a gravel trail from PRCSF HQ to the Center, and establish native plantings along pathway. Lunch and a t-shirt will be provided to all volunteers. Tours of the Discovery Center and PRCSF HQ for local leaders will be given. All council members are heartily encouraged to sign up and participate.

The Discovery Center steering committee is still refining exhibits, looking at 8 exhibit themes as follows – “The Elk of the Big Wild”, “Hemingway in the Pine Barrens”, “Managing the PRCSF”, “Experience the Big Wild”, “You’re the First Forester”, “Conflict, Compromise and Collaboration”, “Wonder and Imagination Zone” (interactive area), and “Pigeon River Country: The Movie”. Next steps are to request bids for design and fabrication of exhibits. The opening of the Discovery Center will depend upon timing required to complete design and building of exhibits.

Lisha Ramsdell commented that the Discovery Center – AmeriCorps Signature Service project is a great showcase project that ties into the AmeriCorps National Day of Service. Local business leaders, conservation groups, and other local leaders were invited to a 30 minute tour, as they may not be able to volunteer all day. This is another effort in getting the good word out about the PRCSF.

OIL SPILL AT FOREST 24 CPF – ROXANNE MERRICK:

Merrick introduced herself, and gave a brief overview of her position as the DNR FRD land use specialist for the area. She will facilitate items such as land use permits, easement applications, lease applications, utility line installations, compliance inspections and other land matters in her role as an active land use manager. Regarding the oil spill at Forest 24 CPF, which occurred on January 31, 2016 - Merrick described the oil spill as

small, they were doing some repairs and a leak occurred. This happened at a large central processing facility and was contained and cleaned up quickly. She visited the site to confirm this was the case. DEQ had already visited the site and oil cleanup tarps were down. Andy Stempky confirmed that the soil was scraped at the spill.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE – BRAD GARMON:

House Bill 5275 – sponsored by Representative Tristan Cole, has passed the house and is now in the Senate – in summary will legalize ORV use on all state forest roads, unless posted closed. Also of concern is Senate Bill 39, sponsored by Senator Casperson, combines three previous bills (39, 40 and 206) all in one bill. SB39 makes it easier to force the state to sell land, requires removal of berms, allows public hearings about individual berms, and also has non-game management implications.

After discussion, it was determined that it would be appropriate for the PRCAC to make a recommendation to the DNR Director to oppose this legislation.

WILDLIFE DIVISION REPORT – BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

No report, Mastenbrook not present.

OIL AND GAS UPDATE – ANDY STEMPKY:

Let him know if there are any questions on the oil and gas production report. Has good news to report with regards to Charlton 4, on larger clean-up, wells are progressively shrinking, so the clean-up methods are working. Walters inquired if they were using air sparging, Stempky acknowledged that they were.

LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION – NICK TORSKY:

Good news, PRCAC comments were heard - there will be another CO assigned to Cheboygan County, which will allow CO more time in the PRCFS. More good news – first winter (in eight years) since the department started stocking fish in the sinkhole lakes that there has not been visible signs of people having fished in those lakes. Pending approval, there will be slightly increased opportunity that Pickerel Lake will become a type B lake (trout) – still in planning process, more to come. Snowmobile activity this winter was as expected, legal and illegal activity for snow conditions this year. Increase in commercial guiding for bobcats in the PRC, social media cooperation between guides is the reason for this (transport client to area tracks are spotted). About 8-12 bobcats a year are harvested in Otsego County. There is a downward trend statewide in bobcat harvest, not sure why at this point. The current 2 bobcat limit may go to 1.

FOREST RESOURCES DIVISION – SCOTT WHITCOMB (on behalf of Steve Milford):

Nothing new to report at this time.

PRC UNIT – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

Don Horrocks sends his regards – he is on the mend. Started working on a statewide roads plan, in response to House Bill 5275. If that bill were to pass right now, the Department would not be able to comply. The last quarter has been filled with fire training, statewide roads plan, and coordinating the Signature service project at the Discovery Center. We have a new intern starting May 9, Krista Dickerson. Krista is a Michigan State University student, and is sponsored by the Pigeon River Country Association, also received approval to hire a STW to do janitorial work at the Headquarters. Welcome to Dave Peterson, President, Friends of the Jordan River, who is here tonight to observe how the PRCAC works and possibly use what we have here as a model.

FISHERIES DIVISION – TIM CWALINSKI:

No report, Cwalinski not present.

PARKS & RECREATION DIVISION – KELLY KINSER:

Scott Thompson reported back to work a couple of weeks ago, and the rest of the summer help will be starting soon as well. The bridge over the Black River on Chandler Dam Rd., along the High Country Pathway, has been deemed unsafe, the pathway will be rerouted, and they are waiting for engineers to assess the situation. There is no date available at this time for repairs to be completed. Copies of the press release and map of detour have been made available to the general public. Winter trail work continues to be a challenge, do not have staffing available to keep trails clear, if volunteers are asked, may run into union issues. Upper management is aware of need; there is no money in the budget to pay for staff at this time. Regarding a cabin rental program within the PRC, the revenue generated would not be enough to sustain an employee full time to maintain the cabin and reservation program over the winter. FRD is looking at some options, including disposal. Elk Hill – were presented with a plan to put up a permanent structure at Elk Hill. The department wants to get the recreation plan done before any decisions are made. If horse groups would like to put up a temporary structure, a temporary use permit could possibly be issued.

Walters and Smethhurst inquired as to the purpose of the structure at Elk Hill, Fanslow answered it would allow groups to gather for meetings, and have meals protected from weather. Smethhurst stated he was adamantly opposed to such a structure, as it goes completely against the Concept of Management. Walters asked for any proposal for a temporary or permanent structure at Elk Hill come before the PRCAC for review.

Kinser also reported that Song of the Morning has agreed to keep taking manure from Elk Hill to use as compost for their gardens. Walters noted his concern of seeds in manure taking hold along horse trails.

There being no further business, Walters closed the meeting by asking all to share the good word throughout their communities about the PRCAC and the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Future PRCAC Meeting Dates:

Thursday, July 21 at 6:00 PM – PRC HQ (Tour day - organized by the Education and Outreach Committee)

Thursday, October 20 at 6:00 PM – PRC HQ

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 9:11 p.m.