

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
Pigeon River Country State Forest HQ, Vanderbilt, MI
Thursday, October 20, 2016

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Thursday, October 20, 2016 at the Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters, Vanderbilt, Michigan. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., and led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

John Walters, Brad Garmon, Pete Gustafson, Sandy Franz, Lisha Ramsdell, Brent Shank, Dave Smethurst, Rique Campa, Bill Loney, Chuck Fanslow, and Paul Rose.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Don Horrocks, Tom Deans, Paul Beachnau, Drew YoungeDyke, Randy Keen, and Brian McPhail.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:

Bob Heyd, Karen Chapman, Kelly Kinser, Nick Torsky, Scott Whitcomb, and Brian Mastenbrook.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF ABSENT:

Steve Milford, Tim Cwalinski, and Andy Stempky.

OTHERS PRESENT:

Dale Franz, Stewart Smith, Eugene Horan, Lyle Horsell, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki, and Carol Rose.

OPENING REMARKS – JOHN WALTERS:

John Walters welcomed everyone to the 2016 fall meeting on behalf of the Advisory Council. Introductions were made around the room by all attendees. Walters opened the floor to public comment, Stewart Smith, President of the Pigeon River Country Association stated that the PRCA is vehemently opposed to PA 288.

Walters reflected on how gorgeous the PRCSF is during this time of year, and all the activity going on in Northern Michigan right now, trout fishing, small game hunting, bow hunting, canoeing, kayaking, camping, equestrian use – the PRCSF gets used more than many people think it does, by the "quiet user". It is important for the Advisory Council to recognize that they are not just representing their own interests, but all interests that use the PRCSF - including gas, oil, and forestry.

AGENDA:

Lisha Ramsdell requested the proposed Walled Lake purchase be added to the agenda under New Business. Rique Campa requested time to speak regarding his thoughts on fund raising efforts under Education and Engagement. Sandy Franz made the motion to approve the agenda as amended, seconded by Chuck Fanslow. All voted in favor, motion carried.

MINUTES:

Rique Campa made a motion to approve the minutes from the Thursday, July 21, 2016 meeting, with a second by Dave Smethurst. All voted in favor, motion carried.

NOMINATION COMMITTEE:

John Walters stated that a nominating committee will be appointed to seek candidates for the position of Chair and Vice-Chair for 2017. Walters appointed members Paul Rose, Brad Garmon and Pete Gustafson to the nominating committee. Motion made by Dave Smethurst to approve nominating committee, second by Sandy Franz. All voted in favor, motion carried.

PROPOSED DATES FOR 2017 PRCAC MEETINGS:

Scott Whitcomb proposed four dates for 2017 meetings - Thursday, January 12, Thursday, April 20, Thursday, July 20 and Thursday October 19, all with a start time of 5:30 P.M. Walters stated that there being no objections to the proposed dates and times, they will be adopted on a trial basis for 2017. The dates and times for the PRCAC meetings will be re-visited by the Advisory Council at the October 2017 meeting.

The locations of the January and April meetings will be in a local community, Whitcomb proposed the Wolverine Elementary or Wolverine High School – these venues bring the PRCAC into Cheboygan County. The January meeting has traditionally been held at the Corwith Township Hall in Vanderbilt, and efforts will be made to try to line-up the April meeting for Wolverine Elementary or Wolverine High School. With regards to a field trip for the July meeting - there is always somewhere new to visit in the PRCSF – Walters will keep membership posted.

ROLE OF A PRC ADVISORY COUNCIL MEMBER – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Ramsdell found this a great opportunity to go back and re-read the Concept of Management and the Directors Charges - this is a great addition to the agenda, with the Advisory Council members taking turns presenting on certain topics. Having diversity on the Advisory Council, with members feeling free to share their opinions is an important part of being a council member. Reviewed "Article III: Purpose" from the 1974 Articles of Organization - "The Advisory Council shall consider plans, programs, and activities proposed or conducted within or affecting the Pigeon River Country, including the Forest, and shall advise the Department by written reports of its views in regard to these matters" - being able to offer differing opinions to managers of the area is another important role of an Advisory Council member. Ramsdell also reviewed the 2007 version of the Concept of Management, and the role of an Advisory Council member in keeping the "Big Wild" wild. Smethurst offered that there should be a description of the Big Wild written down for future PRCAC members.

Walters noted that copies of his letter of September 30, 2016 to Director Creagh giving a summary of the PRCAC summer meeting were available for Advisory Council members to review. He has been sending these letters to the director on a regular basis, and going forward, will make sure the letters get distributed to all Advisory Council members for review.

EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE – BRAD GARMON:

The Education and Engagement committee is working on the Directors 11 charges, and how the PRCAC members ranked themselves against those charges. Garmon presented 3 of those charges that members scored themselves the lowest on - 1) "Make recommendations to director on policy and program issues that may arise" - Walters quarterly letter is a good example of that type of communication - want to make sure Advisory Council takes advantage of having the ear of the director. Advisory Council should also make and pass resolutions on key issues that impact the PRCSF and surrounding areas. 2) "Help develop and crystallize public support for all programs which the PRCAC and DNR agree to, including necessary financial support." Garmon suggests that the Advisory Council communicate issues and information from the meetings back to member constituencies. The Advisory Council should also do a better job advertising the PRCAC meeting

schedule to the public so they can take part. With regards to the financial support aspect, Rique Campa suggests that as the PRCA Discovery Center project is going to be the first teachable moment for the PRCSF, there are at least 5 sources of funding that would be worth approaching to fund the Discovery Center- first off, three smaller ones - The Michigan Chapters of the Wildlife Society, American Fisheries Society, and the Society of American Foresters. A big one worth going for is the USDA Challenge Cost Share Project. Lisha Ramsdell shared that the National Environmental Education Foundation may have funding available for this type of project. Campa - The Leopold Foundation is another good funding opportunity - given the history of PRCSF, and the P.S. Lovejoy aspect. Walters noted that the PRCAC can only suggest funding ideas, and these suggestions are directed to the Pigeon River Country Association and others to utilize funding. Campa also stated that with regards to PRCSF oral histories, Dr. Howard Tanner would be a good resource. Howard was a former director of the Michigan DNR, is 93 years young, and did his PhD work in the PRCSF, bringing his family up and camping in the PRCSF while he did his field work. Another person that should be captured is Dr. Dick Moran, former biologist in charge of the Houghton Lake Research Center, who essentially started the elk research program.

With regards to fundraising, Smethurst suggested establishing a relationship with Otsego County Community Foundation, and other community foundations. Franz stated that the PRCA needs about \$26,000 to complete the first stage of exhibits and to open the doors to the Discovery Center, that amount comes from an approximately \$120,000 operating budget (some of which was donated by the Lunden family) - other money has been set aside as an endowment to earn interest to cover operating expenses.

Garmon - 3) "Serve as a sounding-board for the public" - we should advertise these meetings, and we have to exist on the internet world. DNR should consolidate the various places where the PRCSF exists on the DNR web - we need to upgrade our web presence - looking to the DNR to help with that. Whitcomb - DNR is making efforts to upgrade - can point social media to that authoritative place to get factual information. Brian Mastenbrook recommends that the Advisory Council could pass a resolution with regards to this and it could be included in John's letter to the director. Smethurst suggests the Advisory Council also look into using Snapchat, Twitter and Instagram to reach out to young people. Paul Rose suggested that while the Advisory Council welcomes public input - must educate the public that the Advisory Council has a Concept of Management to adhere to and may not be able to do what the public requests - may have a negative reaction. Outreach must be crafted as educational, taking care to say that this is not a forum to reshape the management documents of the PRCSF.

Motion made by Brad Garmon - "The Pigeon River Country Advisory Council requests the DNR consolidates and updates our web landing sites for the Pigeon River Country State Forest, to improve transparency and communication with stakeholders, to develop a comprehensive site to consolidate all the pieces together, and to improve stakeholder engagement." Motion seconded by Rique Campa, all voted in favor, resolution carried.

AQUATICS COMMITTEE - LISHA RAMSDELL:

Ramsdell gave a presentation giving a look back on aquatic activities during the past 10 years and some upcoming projects and issues that may come in front of the Advisory Council. Some of the best water treasures in the area exist within the PRCSF and the Advisory Council should keep this in the forefront while make decisions with regards to the resource. The fundamental objective for the management of aquatic resources is to protect and enhance those aquatic species most suited to the habitat types available within the PRCSF. Reviewed a summary of water temperatures taken by DNR Fisheries Division in the Black, Pigeon and the Sturgeon. Many inventories are being done, not only by the DNR, but by Tip of the Mitt Watershed

Council, the Upper Black Council, and Huron Pines. A lot of work has been completed in the Upper Black Watershed - instream habitat projects. Pigeon and Sturgeon - has been work done over the years on those two river systems. Erosion control practices - one project completed last year at Elk Hill Campground. Sinkhole lake restoration - erosion control completed. Sanders Dam removal and river restoration, Chandler Dam removal, which was an old dam on Black River, no longer functioning, and the Song of the Morning Dam removal. Road crossing projects completed over the years - Blue Lakes Road, also a habitat site of the Hungerford's Crawling Water Beetle, which is a protected species. Most recent road crossing work has been in Cheboygan County on Little McMasters Creek / Clark Bridge Road, worked with road commission partners to improve the road. Upcoming projects - DNR Fisheries is conducting use monitoring at Cornwall, within the next couple of years repairs may have to be made on existing dam and berm structure. Mastenbrook - Dog Lake Flooding – still planning on removing the dam in 2017, did not have time this year. Ramsdell also discussed the proposed Walled Lake acquisition (Walled Lake is a twin sinkhole lake that merged together), and the Pigeon River Tubes area, which has important recreational value, the bridge crossing is not a sound structure. Whitcomb - installed a vehicle counter on the road to measure vehicle traffic. Ramsdell also discussed the New Zealand Mud Snail, an invasive species currently found in the AuSable River, it is small, easily transported, can exist out of the water, reproduces asexually, and could upset the whole food chain in the river system. Huron Pines is planning to set-up spot checks on all three rivers in the PRCSF to look for the mud snail – currently seeking funding for this project. Invasive species are a big problem on land and water. Also doing wild parsnip management, which exists all over Cheboygan County, also found at access sites now in the PRCSF - some people have severe skin reactions when they come into contact with this invasive plant.

WILDLIFE COMMITTEE - DREW YOUNGEDYKE:

Walters – while Drew YoungeDyke is not present tonight, the Wildlife Committee did submit a statement related to the PRCSF Forest Compartment Review. Whitcomb stated that he took the Wildlife Committee recommendations and did modify some treatments based on input from the Wildlife committee. Whitcomb will send a report back to the committee on how the Department responded to those concerns.

OIL AND GAS COMMITTEE - PAUL ROSE:

The Oil and Gas Committee met on September 22, 2016. The annual profitability report provided by Merit Energy was reviewed, note that the cash flow declined for the entire production unit for the PRCSF from 6 million dollars to 2.7 million dollars on a year-to-year basis. The Charlton #7 was closed in May, and about half of the remaining 18 wells are getting close to being marginally productive. Bill Loney will provide the Advisory Council with a report that includes an estimate of the wells remaining reserves and a preliminary plan for remaining production. Now that the final chapter is nearing of hydrocarbon production within the PRCSF, the focus will shift to restoration and reclamation. The committee encourages the Department to proactively come up with plans as to what will happen to the sites and facilities as they are closed.

Bill Loney – Five wells are on the report that negatively cash flowed, it's been a tough oil market this last year. Bill reviewed a couple of charts regarding recoverable reserves showing– there is a lot of oil and gas there yet. Merit estimates that there will be economical production in the PRCSF until at least 2028. Stimulation methods may consist of acid jobs in the well, or some different pump technology.

Rose - One of the challenges we have is the terminology of marginally producing wells and what that means relative to the consent agreement. Whitcomb - when all of the wells are “pooled”, when you look at the language in the consent order, as well as the successor unit operating agreement, and they talk about the definition of a marginal well, the definition in the judgement defines a marginal well as “one that no longer produces in paying quantities”, which begs the question is pooling allowed or are they being evaluated on an

individual basis. If you are looking at them as a pool – it's a different situation. Contact has been made with the department mineral section, they are aware of the situation, and are doing more research, and minerals will get back with Whitcomb once they have formulated an opinion.

Smethurst reminded newer members that when all the oil and gas issues were happening in the PRCSF, there were acts of the legislature, court settlements and agreements, and once piece of that is the PRCAC will monitor all of this and make recommendations.

LEGISLATIVE BILLS UPDATE:

Walters – Public Act 288 versus the land use orders that are in place, and how that relates to the PRCSF, discussed with Whitcomb and had Pete review PA 288 and the various land use orders that are currently established in the PRCSF. In PA 288, there is some description as to ORV and equestrian use on forest roads – this is statewide, not exclusive to PRCSF. Equestrians have use on forest roads where they are open, where they are closed, it is noted as such and bermed or gated. ORV use is not permitted in the PRCSF except in Cheboygan County on county roads. The DNR is reviewing the act as to its interpretation, and it is up to the PRCAC to help the DNR with the interpretation, it also states in PA 288, that a hunter can use an ORV or a pack and saddle animal to retrieve killed large game. There are land use orders in place that prohibit either motorized vehicles or equestrian use in both Green Timbers and Blue Lakes. The law needs to be read carefully, the land use orders need to be read carefully, it describes that there will be a review of all state forest areas for all subject activity, and shall be opened or closed based on the recommendations from the Department folks reviewing it. Walters wants to send these documents to the Standards and Limitations committee for review and bring back a recommendation for formulation of a letter to the director as to the Advisory Council opinion. Gustafson – before the Standards and Limitations committee meets to review, it would be helpful to the committee to have the Department's initial understanding of said legislation, for example, how the Department views the opportunity for continuing land use orders to effect equestrian use and ORV use in the PRCSF in light of this legislation. Whitcomb – The Department has issued some initial interpretation of the bill, however is still waiting for a final interpretation. As part of this law, the Department has been tasked to inventory the thousands of miles of state forest roads, only some of which have been mapped, not all of them have, and the quality and consistency of data is not good, the inventory process must be completed by December 2017.

Paul Rose – This is a non-stop drip that is going on, if there's an interpretation that this does not include the Pigeon, the next one will. There were modifications made to SB 39 and SB 40 that specifically exempted special management plans like the Pigeon, but now it is sounding like no one is really sure what the Department's position on these are, it is just not clear.

Motion made by Paul Rose: The Pigeon River Council Advisory Council recommends that the Department of Natural Resources oppose any legislation or elements contained within legislation, which are in conflict with the "Pigeon River Country State Forest Concept of Management" for the Pigeon River Country. Motion seconded by Sandy Franz, all voted in favor, motion carried.

Brad Garmon – Another package that in many ways is more problematic, Senate Bills 39 and 40, have been on the PRCAC radar before, they were in the last letter that John Walters submitted to the director, they have seen renewed action. They have passed both the senate committee, and the full senate, are headed to the house during the lame duck session following the election. Definitely bills for the PRCAC to keep an eye on, and possibly do a resolution specific to these bills.

Walters thinks it is important for the Standards and Limitations committee to review what has already come out of the Senate, and how it could negatively impact the PRCSF. Smethurst recommends that upon review, if there are things in particular important to us in the PRCSF, could we prepare a motion or report and handle it via email, instead of waiting until the next quarterly meeting to make a comment. Discussion ensued as to whether or not a motion could be done via email, with Whitcomb recommending approving the motion ahead of time.

Motion made by Dave Smethurst: That the Standards and Limitations Committee prepare a resolution addressing items in SB 39 and SB 40 that affect the PRCSF and forward those concerns to the DNR director through the PRCAC chair. Motion seconded by Brad Garmon, all voted in favor, motion carried.

DISCUSSION ON RECREATION PLANNING IN PRCSF – KELLY KINSER AND BRAD GARMON:

Kelly Kinser stated that the supporting analysis has been completed, and has been forwarded to other divisions for their review. Parks has already gotten a number of comments back from the divisions, and a few divisions have not forwarded their comments yet. There will be another internal meeting in December to review the comments, and incorporate into their analysis, once that is complete, it will be ready for the PRCAC review, possible by the first of the new year. Kinser assured the Advisory Council that the PRCSF Concept of Management will be used in the context of developing the recreation plan for the PRCSF.

FOREST PEST AND INVASIVE SPECIES UPDATE – BOB HEYD:

Bob Heyd, Forest Health Specialist, has been with the Forest Resources Division since 1979. The Forest Health Program reviews the vigor and health of trees in the State of Michigan. They fly approximately 20 million acres of forest looking for problems. Bob's presentation gave an overview of some of the issues on invasive species and diseases impacting Michigan forests, including Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, root rot disease (heterobasidion irregulare), oak wilt, beech bark disease, and lycaneum scale. For more information, be sure to review the DNR 2015 Forest Health Highlights Annual Report.

GOVERNOR'S VIDEO ON PRC – BRAD GARMON:

Walters - Due to time constraints, the Governor's video on the PRC is tabled until January 2017 meeting.

WALLED LAKE PURCHASE – LISHA RAMSDELL:

The Walled Lake Property, adjacent to the PRCSF is for sale, located south of Blue Lakes and north of Town Corner, consisting of 597 acres. Distributed map and project update. The landowners preference is to sell to the state, they would like to see it protected, and to continue to use it like everyone else. Lisha requests a motion or a resolution from the Advisory Council that supports the state moving forward with property acquisition and to provide a letter of support to the US Forest Service recommending the Forest Legacy Program Grant be approved.

Motion made by Dave Smethurst: Moves that the PRCAC supports the purchase of the Walled Lake property and authorizes the Chair and/or Lisha Ramsdell to write an appropriate letter that reflects these values. Brad Garmon seconded, all voted in favor, motion carried.

RECREATION REPORT – KELLY KINSER:

The failed bridge over the Black River on the High Country Pathway was removed in August by FRD and PRD staff as a joint project. The site will be rehabbed and bermed off soon, at this point, PRD does not have an estimated time for replacement of the bridge. The Towerman's Watch Pathway has been completed, huge thanks to AmeriCorps and the Glen Lakes football team, Joe and Judi Jarecki and staff for their help in

completion of this project. Campgrounds are winding down for the season, our campground numbers were up again compared to last year – over all the campgrounds in the PRCSF, at 1,000 camp nights more than last year – big increase of 45%. The two summer workers are done, had a great staff this year. Scott Thompson will be on winter lay-off beginning the first week of December.

OIL AND GAS UPDATE – ANDY STEMPKY:

Andy Stempky not present tonight.

WILDLIFE UPDATE – BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

Does not have enough time for his update tonight, requested time (at least 30 minutes), on the January 2017 meeting agenda. Walters agreed. Mastenbrook noted that there were 200 total elk permits issued this year.

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – NICK TORSKY, CONSERVATION OFFICER:

Not much to report at this time. There continues to be ORV issues in Cheboygan County, less in Otsego County.

FOREST RESOURCES REPORT AND PRC UNIT REPORT – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

PRCSF interest and use is up, seeing that by numbers coming into the PRC HQ office. Have been doing many tours and outreach, interest from across the Department and outside agencies. 43 people attended the PRCSF compartment review open house. Governor Snyder returned for a second time for more elk viewing and kayaking. Forest Certification Audit – PRC came through with a clean report. Green Timbers cabins are all gone; the cost for demolition was approximately \$24,000, paid for by Forest Resources Division capital outlay funds. Krista Dickerson, PRCA intern completed her assignment in August, Hunter Fodor, AmeriCorps member is almost done. Working with Song of the Morning on developing access into the Skiba property, also working with the PRCA on hosting an “Owl Prowl” as an outreach event. Whitcomb has a full calendar with the ongoing roads project.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

2017 PRCAC Meeting Dates:

Thursday, January 12 at 5:30 pm – Corwith Township Hall

Thursday, April 20 at 5:30 pm – Tentative location – Wolverine Elementary or High School

Thursday, July 20 at 5:30 pm – PRC HQ

Thursday, October 19 at 5:30 pm – PRC HQ

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 10:00 p.m.