

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
Corwith Township Hall, Vanderbilt, MI
Thursday, January 12, 2017

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Thursday, January 12, 2017 at the Corwith Township Hall, Vanderbilt, Michigan. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

John Walters, Bill Loney, Pete Gustafson, Lisha Ramsdell, Brad Garmon, Dave Smethurst, Don Horrocks, Brian McPhail, Paul Beachnau, Sandy Franz, Paul Rose, Tom Deans, and Brent Shank.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Rique Campa, Drew YoungeDyke, Randy Keen, Chuck Fanslow and Heather Shaw.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:

Nick Torsky, Tim Cwalinski, Brian Mastenbrook, Kelly Kinser, Steve Milford, Karen Chapman, Scott Whitcomb, and Tara Buehler, Huron Pines AmeriCorps member.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF ABSENT:

Andy Stempky.

OTHERS PRESENT:

Dale Franz, Stewart Smith, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki, Eugene Horan and Guy Lovelace.

OPENING REMARKS – JOHN WALTERS:

As the American flag is located outside, will forego the Pledge of Allegiance tonight and go right to introductions. Walters noted that Monday, January 9, 2017 was “Respect Your Law Enforcement Day” and gave a belated “thank-you” to C.O. Nick Torsky for his service. Introductions were made around the room by all attendees. New PRC AmeriCorps member Tara Buehler gave a quick overview of her planned projects in the PRCSF for 2017.

Walters welcomed everyone to the winter meeting of the PRCAC. During a winter outing in the PRCSF, he and his wife parked at the Pigeon River Bridge Campground to go snowshoeing and were alerted to an issue by their dogs finding chicken bones. John and his wife located a dump area consisting of a mattress, box springs, and other trash. After returning home, they contacted PRD at Otsego Lake State Park who arranged disposal of the garbage very quickly, and also informed law enforcement in an attempt to identify who left the trash. Walters informed the council that he was very pleased with the prompt response from PRD.

Walters extended an apology to Brian Mastenbrook because there wasn't enough time left during the October 2016 meeting to give his wildlife presentation. Walters asked all to stay on point and keep it concise to get through the meeting agenda as set.

With regards to Public Act 288, seeking clarification on how directors orders and land use orders positively or negatively influence the law - there seems to be an interpretation deviation between what the PRCAC believes the land use orders reflect and that being superseded by the law, vs. what Lansing believes. Last week,

Walters called for a meeting with the Director and Deputy Director of the DNR to discuss the PRCAC position and have them discuss their position, to hopefully find common ground. The meeting is scheduled to take place in Lansing on Monday January 23, 2017. Walters invited Brad Garmon, Paul Rose and Drew YoungeDyke to attend; also invited Pete Gustafson, however Pete is not available. Scott Whitcomb may also be joining the meeting as well. Walters has been communicating via email with the members he invited to the meeting in order to be fully prepared and lay out a very strong position on the issue. Walters wanted all council members to be aware of the meeting, and will send out a recap after the meeting occurs.

AGENDA:

Upon review of the agenda, Don Horrocks motioned to approve, seconded by Sandy Franz. All voted in favor, motion carried.

At a member request, Walters commented on issues with PA 288 as it relates to the PRCSF. Where the discrepancy occurs is that the law states that pack and saddle animals and ORVs can be used to extract a killed big game animal, and that includes Pigeon River Country, however, the law also states that if there are Land Use orders already in place before September 10, 2010, or thereabouts, then the Land Use order supersedes the law. Land Use orders that apply to the Pigeon River Country were reviewed, and those were adopted prior to the date that was listed in PA 288. The present Land Use orders state that pack and saddle animals and ORVs are not permitted to travel cross country, so it is believed that it is not permitted for pack and saddle animals and ORVs to be used in the PRCSF to extract large game animals under PA 288.

MINUTES:

Kelly Kinser and Brad Garmon noted a couple of corrections to the minutes for the October 2016 meeting. Kinser's correction is that on page 6, under discussion on recreation planning, the last line "Kinser assured the council that the PRCAC Concept of Management was used in the context of developing the plan" - the plan hasn't been written yet, so it will be considered, but it hasn't been done yet – therefore should read as "will be", not "was". Garmon's correction is on page 3 – regarding the motion captured - on the second line wants to make it clear that he wasn't asking to update the web landing sites for the PRCAC, it was for the Pigeon River Country State Forest. The PRCAC is just one of many sites that people can access and information on the DNR website regarding the PRCSF – Garmon would like to see them all consolidated in some way – strike the words "Advisory Council" in the second line of that motion. With those changes acknowledged by minute taker Chapman, the minutes were approved with a motion by Paul Beachnau, seconded by Brad Garmon. All voted in favor, motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Judi Jarecki is a forest user, and is also on the Corwith Township Planning Commission. Judi announced that the commission just received a Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund Grant to develop a Trail Town Gateway Community Park at the North Central Trailhead in Vanderbilt. Judi thanked the PRCAC for their letter of support which was submitted along with the Trust Fund grant application, also extended thanks to the Discovery Center group, who sent a letter as well.

PRESENTATION OF WITNESS TREE AWARD FOR VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

About 4 years ago, the PRCAC started this award because the PRCSF has a long history of volunteers making substantial impacts to the forest and that is really part of what makes it so special. In the past, the award has been given to individuals and groups, but not to a married couple! The Witness Tree Award for Volunteer of the Year is presented to Joe and Judi Jarecki (applause!) Joe and Judi do so much in the forest, but this year, in addition to helping with signage, water quality projects, temperature loggers, Huron Pines activities,

volunteering at the Discovery Center, and trail work –had a great start to putting in the Towerman’s Watch Trail with the AmeriCorps Volunteer Signature Service Project, but about a third of the trail was completed that day. Joe and Judi almost single handedly finished the entire 3 mile trail, installed confidence markers and other signage. It is a wonderful trail and would not have been completed without their dedication and hard work. Congratulations and thank you to Judi and Joe Jarecki!

NOMINATION COMMITTEE – PAUL ROSE:

The Nominating Committee was appointed at the October 2016 meeting. The members appointed were Paul Rose, Pete Gustafson, and Brad Garmon. Subsequent to that meeting, members of the council in place at the time were emailed seeking their nominations, recommendations for nomination or to identify parties that may be interested in the two offices which serve the council, that being Chairman and Vice-Chairman. The only responses they received were from the current officers, Chair John Walters and Vice-Chair Rique Campa, who expressed a willingness and interest in continuing to serve. Therefore, on behalf of the nomination committee, it is proposed to place their names in nomination for both of those positions, and make a motion that a unanimous ballot be cast. Motion was seconded by Sandy Franz; all voted in favor, motion carried.

After the election of officers, Walters announced his appointments for PRCAC Committee Chairs: Education & Engagement – Brad Garmon, Trail, Roads & Forest Access – Randy Keen, Wildlife – Sandy Franz, Aquatics – Lisha Ramsdell, Standards & Limitations – Pete Gustafson, and lastly, Oil & Gas – Paul Rose. If you want to continue as members on those committees, or if you would like to serve on one of those committees, notify the respective Chair.

STANDARDS AND LIMITATIONS COMMITTEE – PETE GUSTAFSON:

Gustafson commented on the two letters that the Chair sent to the DNR Director in November 2016. The letters layout the position the Committee took on Senate Bills 39 & 40 – given the fact that there was an indication that the bills might be taken up in the lame duck session immediately after the election. The bills were NOT taken up in the lame duck session, they have not been enacted. There is an indication they will be reappearing early in the current session of legislation with the new members. At least one of the key sponsors, Senator Casperson, has indicated he intends to pursue both pieces of legislation. The letters that were written expressed to the Director; after a conference call and deliberations by the committee and its members, the views that the committee have are consistent with the Concept of Management about some of the provisions in this legislation. Gustafson urged the council members to read both of the letters; they are well written and present the Committee’s position clearly. He also noted that in the minutes of the Natural Resource Commission recently that the Department does not support either of these two bills.

Walters noted that to date, have not received a response to the letters, possibly because the bills did not go forward.

Gustafson again encouraged each member of the PRCAC and department staff to read the letters, as there are critical issues presented in these two bills that bear upon the PRCSF, all should be familiar with what is going on.

PRC BUILDING REMOVAL POLICY – PAUL ROSE:

During the October 2016 meeting, Lisha Ramsdell gave a presentation on a potential grant application that Huron Pines is pursuing in partnership with the DNR for the acquisition of the Walled Lake property. As a part of the current administration’s interpretation of SB 248, Land Acquisition Strategies, there is an outreach effort with local units of government where if there is a proposed acquisition, letters of support are sought

from those units of government in conjunction with a grant application. This created an opportunity for meetings with the Montmorency County Board of Commissioners, and a subsequent meeting with Montmorency Township. After two meetings with the Montmorency County Board of Commissioners, they failed to get enough votes to agree to provide a letter of support for the grant application. One of the alternatives is to seek support from the township if the county is not supportive. In this particular case, Huron Pines was also seeking a letter of support from the Montmorency Township. The meeting with the township was far better; they have concerns regarding the potential use of the property and concerns about their understanding and interpretation of PILT payments. The township committed to revisit the subject after some further information was made available. There was a conference call this week with Kerry Wieber, Paul Rose and some folks from Lansing - Treasury and Real Estate division. Hopefully have the townships questions answered and the intention is to revisit that discussion with the Montmorency Township supervisor. At the meeting with Montmorency Township, the issue arose of the future disposition of the buildings on the Walled Lake property – the township supervisor is an assessor, and knows the property and building well. He was also in place when Blue Lakes property was acquired and remembers those buildings and their removal. The township supervisor wanted to know if the buildings would be torn down right away. First of all, this is a grant application, to date, nothing has been purchased, there is no management plan yet. The purpose of this agenda item was to share with PRCAC members the issue that the council needs to be aware of - that adherence to the current interpretation of this policy within the Concept of Management may have some future implications as it relates to current and new emerging legislation. If formal approval is sought from these local units of government, it is going to be likely to hear this question and more. Not saying the subject should be revisited, but PRCAC members need to be aware of the fact it may cause an acquisition NOT to be joined in the management unit.

Further discussion centered around Department building policy, SB 39 & 40, and the potential for an outdoor education center in NE Michigan.

UPDATE ON SENATE BILLS 39 & 40 – PAUL ROSE:

The connection to all of this is PILT payments (PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES). Everyone is expecting there will be some new iteration of Senate Bills 39 & 40 brought forward in the next legislative session. One of the problems in trying to get people interested is it's a very complex piece of legislation that touches on many things, you've usually lost people before you get into the second bullet point. But from the local unit of government standpoint, the common thread that runs through all this is the skepticism about their ability to receive PILT payments. There was one situation in the history of the state where the legislature did not fully fund PILT payments in a timely fashion to local units of government – and none of them have forgotten about it. As far as they are concerned, every public acquisition that includes a PILT payment is viewed with skepticism because they think there's a chance they won't see that money. One of the strategies that may come out of discussions on the next version of SB 39 & SB 40 is to try and address the fears associated with PILT – rather than making this land cap essentially permanent – because of the prospect of not receiving PILT payments – one idea would be to say that in the unlikely event they didn't receive PILT in a timely fashion, that would trigger perhaps a land cap. Encourage all those present tonight and the groups you represent to do the best you can to engage as many people as possible.

Most of the representatives in this area are advocates on behalf of SB 39 & SB 40 – what people are not hearing about is what is required of DNR staff in the field regarding forest management, real estate division, accelerated land sales, offering lands that are not deemed as excess – all the things that go with this package of bills that involve the cost of staff time, which is not funded. PA 288 is one example – that bill originally was earmarked for possibly costing a half-million dollars. Based upon some estimates that have been heard, doing

the mapping for one county alone cost in the area of \$60,000 and when it is considered doing that for all counties, the cost of PA 288 could be astronomical, that money is coming out of the department budget. So in response to SB 39 and SB 40, what is the cost, and who is going to pay for it? If the legislators feel strongly about this, come up with the money for it, don't expect that field staff is going to figure it out.

Walters –SB 39 and SB 40 are going to be re-introduced - Standards and Limitations Committee is tasked with keeping a close eye on it. Let's be proactive in reviewing and addressing the new proposed language.

OIL AND GAS UPDATE ON MARGINAL WELLS – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

As a requirement of the 1980 consent agreement, the current producer in the PRCSE - Merit Energy, presents a well production and profitability report each year to the PRCAC. There are provisions in the language of the consent agreement that states if wells are marginal, they are to be closed down and plugged. However, what is not clear is the timeline associated with that; without a clear timeline there are all kinds of variations in production affecting profitability. Some of those things are, for example, a well needs re-working to increase production, natural market fluctuations, etc., so when there is a policy that says "marginal wells need to be capped"– the Department needs to do homework and find the background for it, and how it is going to be applied. The Department is doing research, and will soon meet with Merit Energy to try to understand how they calculate the figures. Bill Loney has already provided the Oil and Gas Committee some production forecasts to get a feel for how long this field is going to be in play. Continuing to fact find and collect information in order to make an informed decision.

Bill Loney – In reviewing the bar graph – it's a snapshot, shows a rolling average from 2016, measured in BEQD (Barrel Equivalent per Day). Note at the bottom of the production report the verbiage that says if well production is two barrels a day, or less, it could be marginal – but it depends on pricing, etc. But as seen on the chart there are a couple of wells that are down, in fact, Charlton 2-5, there is a rig on it today –going to do some stimulation and get the production up on that well. Each well is looked at individually, but Merit also looks at it as a whole – all but the last two wells on the right of the chart go into one facility, so all those wells, even the ones that are producing low are still contributing to the overall operation of that facility and the profitability of that facility. Merit Energy is not quick to call something marginal if it hits two or below for a period of time. For example, last year when oil was \$25/per barrel, Merit didn't do a lot out there, or anywhere! This year's prices are up, and quite a bit of work is planned, including in the Pigeon later in the year. The whole business is looked at; no one watches the prices or profitability on these wells closer than Merit Energy. No one has as much stake in them as Merit Energy; management and engineering staff are on this all the time. Merit Energy's stand is just because something dips down, they are not ready to go out and plug it tomorrow.

Measured in Barrel Equivalent – takes the oil and gas and puts into one common denominator which is "barrel equivalent". About 5, almost 6 MCF (Thousand Cubic Feet per Day) of gas equals a barrel of oil – looked at on a BTU basis. It's one common denominator to measure oil and gas together because some are more gas wells than oil, some more oil wells than gas – so to try to get everything on one level playing field – it's a common industry standard.

Whitcomb – Merit has capped two wells in the last 18 months – one was outside the boundaries of the PRC but within the consent area, the bottom hole was under the forest. Another one was outside the consent area, but within the boundary of the forest and both of those wells were closed. Also, there was an antifreeze spill at Forest 24 CPF –it has been cleaned up. The spill was confined within the CPF facility – about a barrel of antifreeze spilled.

Loney – We removed about two yards of dirt, Merit just got the samples back and there is still a trace of glycol left so more dirt will be removed. The perimeter is contained, it just seeped in the ground a little bit farther. Have pictures if anyone would like to see the site.

UPDATE ON EQUESTRIAN ISSUES – CHUCK FANSLAW:

Chuck Fanslow is not present, move AGENDA ITEM TO April 2017 Meeting.

WILDLIFE DIVISION UPDATE – BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

Brian showed some before and after photos of Hardwood Creek – the culvert was pulled out in about 2000–drives by every year while completing deer camp survey and always takes a picture–shows what a wonderful change has occurred. Flew over this fall and took some more pictures – showed Green Timbers – the parking lot and showed some of their opening work. Also showed a truck with a horse trailer – reported to conservation officer! Showed Song of the Morning dam area – in 5, 8 or 10 years a lot of it should look like the Hardwood Creek area does now.

Bear regulations and deer regulations are coming up for changes this year. Bear have been a huge part of his time this last year because of the number of aggressive bear incidents in the northern lower. Especially in the western and southern part of the northern lower, the Baldwin unit, Manistee, Mason, and Lake. Have three sets of bear information that he will show you tonight, one is based on statistical model that is new, basically it takes all the animals that have been killed by hunting, their age and sex are known, and it rebuilds the population going backwards, then it builds it forward. This model shows in the Lower Peninsula bear population is up 47% since 2000. Met with the lieutenant in Cadillac today - Baldwin Mgmt. unit, there were 55 bear killed by hunters last year – can account for 40 killed by cars, 4 were euthanized by dept., a couple killed by hunters, one bear killed by a hunter when it came up the tree at him.

Have a lot of aggressive bear incidents going on, and a lot of bear problems, this population uptick is just part of this. Another piece of data comes from the bear survey that is mailed to every bear hunter – one of the questions asked is how long did it take to get a bear? The trend is that hunters are getting more effective getting bears. You don't want to base what you do on just one thing, the success rate of bear hunters is going up and up. Success and effort is flat in the Upper Peninsula, it is in the lower that these steep curves are seen.

The third piece of information is the “bear hair snare”. Barb wire with bacon is placed in the woods, the bears hair gets caught, and the hair is taken as a sample. Can tell genetically which bear it is, and when hunters check their bear in, they can be matched – and X percent of the bears that are marked, you can get a population inference – that model shows the population being flat, it does not show it increasing or decreasing, shows it to be steady. 2013 was the last time this study was done, to be completed again in 2019. So two out of three sets of information are showing an increase in population, have had an increase in aggressive bears, and an increase in problem bears, and then the incident in Cadillac where a woman was attacked by a bear. This has really turned the corner for a lot of people on bear, people used to tolerate bear and treat them like big raccoons. You can take your bird feeders down and some of them go away, but some don't – some get aggressive. Also had an incident in Montmorency County where a bear broke into 4 cars. That bear was trapped and euthanized.

Wildlife is recommending an increase in the bear quota. Wanted to present this data three months ago, however we have already submitted our recommendations for quotas. Wildlife has recommended an increase in quotas especially in the Baldwin Mgmt Unit, hoping to double the harvest. In the Red Oak area, Wildlife is

also going to recommend an increase in harvest. This is going to meet with opposition from bear hunter groups and tribes, both of whom like to have a lot of bear, but they don't have to deal with these problems. The concern is that people are not going to value bears as wild creatures anymore, instead, they are going to value them as a nuisance, and there was legislation introduced two years ago that required Wildlife give depredation permits if bear were damaging crops. Met with a representative of the Michigan Bear Hunters, and they did not want an increase in the quotas, as Michigan bear hunters are mainly dog hunters, and they want opportunities for their dogs to find bears.

Wildlife moved four problem bears to the PRCSF last year. The Pigeon gets pounded with bear hunters— it is a big area, where people can turn dogs out without fear of them getting hit by cars. The Red Oak is such a big unit, people disproportionately come to the Pigeon, bear numbers are lower than they have to be here, because they are pursued a lot. There are high numbers in the club country, Alcona, Montmorency, there are lower numbers here and in northern Cheboygan and Emmet, but they are getting a little higher in Emmett/Charlevoix where there is that public private land mix, where those bears can find shelter.

A problem bear is one that gets into your bird feeder – an aggressive bear is one that comes on your deck and pounds on the window - it does not show a normal fear of humans. Research shows that this is a learned behavior. Wildlife may start microchipping problem bears when they are moved. They usually put a lip tattoo on them so they can tell if they get them in the check station.

Wildlife had to place people on call during the weekends all last summer that could sedate and move bears. That was at a cost of about \$15,000.00 in staff time, so there is a cost to this. Wildlife would rather spend that money on habitat or on other improvements. Increasing the quota is only going to be part of the solution. Must educate people to not feed the bears, so bears don't get used to people –and do a lot of other things to address this problem.

Not sure what is driving the population increase, maybe because the harvest was backed of 10 years ago, or it could be that sows are having 4 or 5 cubs now. Bears are adaptive animals getting into food rich environments and doing well. Bear can do well in a variety of habitats.

It is also a deer regulation cycle – Wildlife does these every three years for deer, and are looking at potential changes this year, most of the concern has been with the TB country. A big driver for people right now are APR's – Antler Point Restrictions, people like those quite a bit. A 12 county area to the west started an antler point restriction and are into the fourth year of it –survey showed it had 66% approval to start it – doing a survey to see if interest is still that high – to see whether it will be kept or not. The TB counties had an antler point restriction but it also had a hunters choice outlet where if you had a combination tag you could shoot a buck with 3 points or 4 points on one side, but if you bought just a firearm or a bow tag you could shoot any buck. There is a desire to simplify regulations across the region– and want to drive the deer population down for TB. Deer management is the most political of all species management there is. PRCSF is right up there and this has been an area without antler point restrictions – it was surveyed four years ago, and only 62% of people were in favor of it – it did not meet that 66% threshold so there was no APR put in place, but it may be a target – you have APR here, you have APR there – to try to simplify things you might see an APR across the board. The APR was put on in the TB area with the idea it would encourage people to shoot more antlerless deer, and over the 6 years it has been in place –there hasn't really been a change in the harvest of antlerless deer – and yet people like the APR – so let's keep it and do a better job of educating people that you've got to shoot more antlerless deer if you want to keep it. We are in a state of flux here, and you should expect some

change. If you or your organization has strong feelings in this matter, make sure your Natural Resource Commissioner knows. There is still time to bring forth ideas to the Department.

CWD (Chronic Wasting Disease) is driving the discussion on baiting in that there may be no baiting. If a deer gets it they die. Wildlife doesn't want it to spread. Another idea that is being discussed is opening day - our polls show that 66% or so like November 15 as opening day.

AmeriCorps Members projects – One of the questions often asked is how many people use the forest, where are they at, what are they doing, and when are they doing it! We were able to acquire road counters from FRD and last year received permission from the road commission and trenched in these counters. They are electrical lines that measure a change in the inductive / magnetic field as a car goes across the line, it communicates the hit on a reader over at the side of the road. Attempting to install them at every place people come into the forest, so Tin Shanty Rd., Blue Lakes Rd., Osmun Rd., Montgomery Rd., and Webb Rd. Sturgeon Valley Rd. is paved, but we were able to obtain a beam road counter which is not working right yet. Started the project in August 2016 – so this is use over time. Tin Shanty Rd. has the most use, already getting relative use over time. Not sure what the data means yet or what is going to be done with it. The current PRCFS AmeriCorps Member Tara Buehler is going to help with that analysis. The next step is - what are they doing while in the forest?? Do we put post card questionnaires on their windshield?? – our next AmeriCorps Member will start that project.

E-bird – You may have seen E-bird signs around the forest. E-bird is an international program where birders have an E-bird app on their smart phone, and when they see a bird, they can open the app and indicate they have seen that bird. This is a way to measure bird species, and as the habitat changes around this sight one can look at changes in bird species use in relation to the habitat changes. People can report on E-bird whether they are at one of these spots or not. Have not been able to get the data to a point where it could be shown to you, but there are thousands of points already with all these different species. Going to be looking at how this data can be used to help us manage better, what's going on with bird use, as a measure of wildlife habitat or wildlife use out in the forest. The application geo-references – GPS coordinates – georeferenced by the phone – it records coordinates, then when you get phone service, the coordinates are downloaded. This is a continuation of what was started three years ago with the first AmeriCorps Member Kyle, he tried to get birders to come out to the forest and hit points, as some of the featured species we manage for in the Pigeon are birds, and Wildlife needed a way to determine if management was affecting them positively or negatively. Will continue to evaluate E-bird and see how it goes, will bring back information to the PRCAC.

Well Pad Restoration - Wildlife Habitat grants are used for well pad restoration – the abandoned well pads are generally full of spotted knapweed and we are trying to turn it into productive forest land. Treated some with annuals already to try to build up the soil productivity – plan to try to plant perennials this year – see if we can get them to take, and be in a stable, non-invasive state. Mastenbrook showed pictures taken during his flight of some of the well pads.

Wildlife Habitat Grant – Working with Huron Pines not just to work on well pads in the Pigeon, but to expand this beyond the Pigeon to that range of area effected by Antrim gas – tens of thousands of acres of well pads, if they can restore all that ground and make it productive, we are trying to learn how in the Pigeon and apply in other places.

Part of the Wildlife Habitat grant that Huron Pines had – Osmun Road – Inspiration Point site – (shows before and after pictures) burn will be done to stimulate native grasses. This is just part of that complex of openings that they are working on. Elk were in the openings all fall.

Wildlife Habitat Project for this year is on Hare Rd., off Sturgeon Valley Road, at the old gravel pit, this area is succeeding to a brushy state and we'll be working to set this area back into a more semi-open state, again, to improve this area as a center of elk management. Trying to, with help of this wildlife habitat grant, to create big chunks of elk habitat within the forest that animals and people can use.

Lastly – in the past couple of years, has been looking at a road right off Sturgeon Valley extension –There's a road that goes south for about a mile, it's the only road (Road 86 & 87) in that 4 sections of ground - what would happen if that road was closed?? Asking for feedback from PRCAC members – don't have to answer tonight, but think about and let Brian know –what do you feel is an appropriate amount of roads or roadless access in this forest? What values is the forest being managed for?

Walters – That question needs to go to Trails, Roads and Forest Access Committee – will have Randy Keen get with you, and have a sub-committee meeting.

Garmon - Noted that back in the 1973 Concept of Management, it has a map with a plan for the road system in the forest.

Whitcomb – This is an outstanding issue that was identified in the 2007 Concept of Management. The annexed areas of the forest, those areas down at Johnsons Crossing and up by Crockett Rapids that were annexed into the forest in 2005, don't have a road access plan. Remember we are the only state forest with a vehicle access plan that designates these roads as open and has a land use order to support them. The roads in those annexed areas have never been included as part of the vehicle access plan, so in 2007 when this was re-written it says the DNR – you need to include those areas in the vehicle access plan – so this needs to be done. If we are going to take the time to do it then we should do the evaluation that Brian is recommending, if we going to have a vehicle access plan, let's have it be a meaningful vehicle access plan – we can tie it to habitat requirements of animals, tie it to recreationalists desire for seclusion, so that fosters the questions of how much is the right amount, so that's really the deeper question. Regardless of whether it stays the same, increases, or decreases, we still should finish the job that we started when we created this plan.

Rose urged caution – please don't leave here or create the suggestion that there was a discussion that the people of the Pigeon were getting ready to close more roads, don't want that message out there.

Horrocks stated that his position is that he was informed by the new Chair of the Cheboygan County Board of Commissioners that if tourism is affected in Cheboygan County, they want a voice. Would like Scott Whitcomb to come to address the county board and explain what is going on in the Pigeon.

Dave Smethurst made a motion that the PRCAC support the department recommended increased bear harvest in the Red Oaks section, which includes the Pigeon River Country State Forest. Motion seconded by Don Horrocks. Discussion ensued.

Paul Rose – Prefer to offer a motion that supports the bear management recommendations from the Wildlife Division, and not recommend an increase or decrease – if you are saying you want to support the science, lets support the science. What may come out of this may not be exactly what Brian is recommending, and this

way we are supporting Wildlife Division. Paul Rose proposes a friendly amendment to the motion made by Smethurst to read that the PRCAC supports the Wildlife Division bear management recommendations as they propose. Dave Smethurst supported the motion as amended by Paul Rose, with Pete Gustafson seconding. Vote – AYES were the majority, with two members voting NO. Motion carried.

RECREATION REPORT – KELLY KINSER:

Update on the recreation plan- internal staff had a meeting in mid-December, with the last couple of divisions bringing comments and those were incorporated. During discussions at that meeting a few more gaps in the supporting analysis were identified - still filling those in right now, have another meeting scheduled for the first week of February to go through it again. As soon as PRD gets that wrapped up will get it to you. Lastly, we had some discussions on what can be done to help promote legal equestrian riding within the PRCSF. Looking at during the month September at Elk Hill having a few of the regular equestrians come out and camp for a weekend or maybe a week to act as a campground host to help with those education efforts - will have information out there for them, they can help greet other groups that come in. Thinks they will see good effects from this. Will communicate this to equestrian groups to help get the word out, may use PRD marketing team to see if they can help with outreach efforts on this.

OIL AND GAS UPDATE – ANDY STEMPKY:

Andy Stempky not present – see Whitcomb’s Oil and Gas Update on Marginal Wells

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – NICK TORSKY, C.O.:

General trends over last 6 months – Equestrian violations last fall were better than the year before, as far as compliance, but not what he would consider good, worse in Cheboygan County area of forest. Deer season was relatively uneventful, Brian Mastenbrooks’ deer camp survey continued its downward trend. The number of camps is as low as he’s ever seen it, vehicles parked is about the same. The trend of “non-consumptive users” sight-seers, quiet sports enthusiasts, non-hunters, non-anglers, that number rises, while the number of deer hunters seems to be on a downward trend. Even though we had twice as many permits during elk season – this fall compared to last previous couple of falls – from a law enforcement standpoint – not very many instances as far as multiple kills or illegal kills - just a couple of instances in the two hunts combined, and they were outside the forest. That’s it from a boots on the ground perspective – the Sgt Greg Drogowski vacancy is being filled in the very near future, certainly by the next meeting – as well as a vacancy in Montmorency, Alpena and Presque Isle counties, as Joe Molnar was promoted to Lieutenant in Detroit. There is another vacancy in the Roscommon district – which could affect the overall number of officers in the district.

FOREST RESOURCES REPORT – STEVE MILFORD:

Scott Whitcomb will cover under PRC Unit Report

PRC UNIT REPORT – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

Staffing – welcomed Tara Buehler to the team as our newest AmeriCorps Member, as Brian outlined earlier – we have lots of projects lined up for her, she’s only been here three or four days and she’s fitting great so far. We’ve had 4 AmeriCorps Members now, and Tara is our second member from Wisconsin! PRCSF HQ is also staffed on the weekends with the RSVP program on Saturdays and Sundays in the winter. Set through the end of March with volunteers. We have a photographer named Misty Silba who comes up every year and takes pictures, a couple of years ago she surprised us by sending pictures we have on display. She surprised us again, we got a package in the mail filled with more photos from this fall. We may share the photos back and forth with the Discovery Center. Song of the Morning easement that was talked about at last meeting was

approved – it was an exchange of easements that was approved at the Directors level recently. Now have to negotiate with Song of the Morning to make sure conditions of easements are mutually acceptable between the two parties. We're doing another spruce budworm evaluation, looking at stands that have been identified at high risk for spruce budworm. Our staff will be looking at those and if it needs treatment to prevent future problems – we may be looking at accelerating treatment on those and if a variance is required we will notify everyone on our contact list, including the PRCAC, about the need for a variance. With regards to recreational planning, we have an emerging issue that was identified last year at Cornwall Flooding, with people disbursed camping improperly disposing of their own human waste. When April comes around we can start really looking at what we can do to mitigate this. It's to the point that there are health department implications. When a defacto campground forms, and there are homemade outhouses out there it has a negative impact on human health. Lastly, the statewide roads inventory that's been precipitated by the passage of PA 288 is really taking a lot of my time – that is on forefront right now.

Brad Garmon – Discuss guidelines for timber harvest with regards to recreation trails. Would like to see a short presentation on it.

Steve Milford – FRD helped develop the guidelines, a lot of it came about from trying to do a better job of incorporating the recreation aspect with timber sales. There are a lot of things we can do to help mitigate some of the negative aspects, so we tried to put a bunch of those things together and compile it into one spot, worked with Parks, Trails section, equestrian concerns –we put it together and the Director signed off on it – and its something we are trying to implement now with some of our sales. Can get PRCAC copies of the guidelines, and you can decide if you want a presentation.

Whitcomb – We do have one new PRCAC member, who could not make it tonight, her name is Heather Shaw, will be replacing Eric Ellis and is representing the Ruffed Grouse Society. We will send out an updated contact list, so let us know if anybody has new contact information.

FISHERIES DIVISION REPORT – TIM CWALINSKI:

Within the Pigeon River Country – reviewing the 2016 work– some of the surveys we did in the general area – we did our Elk Hill trout pond estimates our third year of rotation, we'll be off for three years now – we did do the Walled Lake survey – we were able to get permission from the current landowners and go in and survey it with various methods and I did write up a report. 0 and was just in consideration – someday if we own it – it can fall under two regulation categories – I know its early to talk about it, but not really if you want to make it a quality lake, you could make it like any other like, like Cornwall – just take the statewide standard fishing regulations, or if you make it a special fishing designation – restricted use, restricted bag limits – then it has to go thru a formal Fish Div process – the cool thing is we were able to get data on something we don't own yet, but could own. Still doing quite a lot of large woody debris work in reaches of the Black River in conjunction with the Upper Black River Council – stretch that we are going to be finishing up on is the Blue Lake - we went out and got a permit for a new stretch which is upstream of Blue Lakes road, partially in the Gaylord Fishing Club, partially in the Blue Lakes reach. We were involved in one pretty major beaver dam removal on the Black River up by Beaver Dam club. We are already hearing about other beaver dams in that general area. We did do the Cornwall Flooding temperature estimates. Thanks to Joe and Judi Jarecki for putting out temperature meters in stretches of the Black and Pigeon . We have a big dataset on temps in the Black – and Pigeon – hourly temps thru the summer. One of the things we did notice last year in fishing and catch reports – steelhead production already upstream of Song of the Morning. Looking ahead to 2017, already working on our 2018 work plans, we are getting back into doing one of our population estimates on brook trout in the

Springs reach, near Tubbs Creek, also one on Pickerel Creek, Green Timbers, we have same stocking plan for trout lakes next year, and temp loggers on the Pigeon and the Black.

Some general things going on in Fish Division, the Arctic Grayling initiative is gaining a lot of steam, within Fish Div – making another attempt at raising arctic grayling in the state, there has been some tribal units and some universities doing work – and looked at how they are doing it in Montana – this is still a controversial topic interesting to see where this goes. We are in a two year fishing guide, the fishing guide is good for 2016 and 2017, right now we are starting to plan for anything that we want to see in the 2018-109 guide – has to start moving thru Fish Div. right now. We are preparing for sturgeon season, and our Fisheries div strategic plan, which you can view online at our fish div website – it's a 5 year plan, already into next update of that plan.

Showed signage for the New Zealand Mudsnaills– invasive snail that lives in trout streams, so the DNR has gone out and made some signs in conjunction with other agencies. These signs are t being placed across the Michigan trout stream landscape, and especially in the AuSable, Manistee, those kinds of rivers. Know we don't have signage in the PRC – Trout Unlimited is going to be getting a bunch of signs from DNR and they are and there is going to be this sign blitz thru the Sturgeon, Pigeon, and Black, the New Zealand Mudsnaills are not found in these waters yet, it doesn't mean they won't get there. Think it's important to put them out at some spots, but Scott and I were talking about getting some guidance on where we put them – and what we want to put them on.

Whitcomb – We have to balance between educating folks to protect the resource and sign saturation in the PRCFS. Discussion ensued on the appropriate placing of signage in the PRCAC.

Walters – For those that are interested in providing input, see Tim Cwalinski after the meeting.

Cwalinski – Lastly, the trail camera that was placed at Cornwall Flooding – to study pressure, angler use at one of our fisheries DNR dams – we've been given the warning about some of the problems with the structure at Cornwall Flooding. There is no money sitting around to fix the bad culvert under the levee, and at Tomahawk Flooding, so Fish Division is going to be challenged with some big projects in the next two years or so – we wanted to start capturing data on the use at Cornwall Flooding, as we need to quantify data so we experimented by setting up a camera up with assistance from a Lake State student (Cwalinski shows usage in one day on July 15, 2016 – shows speeded up view). Also did Roberts Lake, west of M68 at a dam the Department owns, almost no use.

The trail camera worked really good at that sight, it's the main primary access site to Cornwall Flooding, showed estimated anglers – you can see that's 3367 total hours fished May 10 – Aug 27, as a conservative estimate. Estimated 129 overnight camping excursions of various lengths – bottom line is 14 angler hours per acre for that period of May 10 – Aug 27, which is extremely high usage. This is the data we will be putting into a grant application.

Walters – Wanted to share that back in October, was with a group collecting data from the Pigeon River, and Joe Jarecki can give a brief summary.

Jarecki - With the dam draw down one of the things we are doing is monitoring how the river is developing and responding to that change – we have cross sections established for little over a mile upstream of the dam and one downstream that we monitor, but they are only points about 700 feet apart – and so we've got this 700 foot stretch where we don't know what is happening. Patrick Hertel, Fisheries Biologist DNR, is really

interested in what is happening on the Pigeon as it recovers, and one way to learn that is to measure how the stream is developing as it changes over time through its entire length. Patrick borrowed some high tech equipment from DEQ that allows survey grade type of measurements, of elevation and location based on satellite data that was taken by setting up a base piece of equipment by the dam, then we were able to move upstream and measure the longitudinal profile of the stream bed – started a little over $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile upstream of the dam and every change of that elevation has now been logged. Patrick is putting the data together and that gave us a base, and we will have a chance to measure it again, (if we can borrow the equipment) and see how the river changes over time. We can also start to characterize some of the habitat that’s developing over time. Surprising even though there are significant stretches in the old pond area where the organic material – there is enough woody material mixed in with it and some new sand moving down with it that they were able to walk the whole length of the river in the water – would not advise anyone do this as they were sinking in some sections.

Walters – This concludes our meeting –see you in April, meeting adjourned.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

2017 PRCAC Meeting Dates:

Thursday, April 20 at 5:30 pm – PRC HQ

Thursday, July 20 at 5:30 pm – PRC HQ

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

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 9:40 p.m.