

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters, Vanderbilt, MI
July 19, 2018

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Thursday, July 19, 2018 at the Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters. Chair Paul Rose called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m., then led all in the Pledge of Allegiance.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Paul Rose, Don Horrocks, Paul Beachnau, Alex Cerveniak, Dave Smethurst, Heather Shaw, Lisha Ramsdell, Brian McPhail, Chuck Fanslow, Sandy Franz, Pete Gustafson, Brad Garmon, and Bill Loney.

MEMBERS ABSENT: Rique Campa, Randy Keen, Brent Shank and Drew YoungeDyke.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT: Assistant Chief Shannon Hanna, Scott Whitcomb, Tim Cwalinski, Kyle Cherry, Kelly Kinser, Brian Mastenbrook, Kerry Wieber, Steve Buyze, and Karen Chapman.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF ABSENT: Steve Milford, Nate Sink.

OTHERS PRESENT: Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki, Eugene Horan, Stewart Smith, Aren Calton, Doug Mummert, Judy Mummert, Carol Rose, Raymond Hoobler, and Arch Reeves.

INTRODUCTIONS - PAUL ROSE:

Chair Paul Rose opened by welcoming all to the summer meeting of the PRCAC; introductions were made around the room. Paul then opened the floor to public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Doug Mummert, former PRCAC member commented on Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) and the importance of protecting the Michigan elk herd. Doug highlighted 10 items of PRCAC history from his perspective as a past PRCAC member as it relates to CWD, and why he thinks PRCAC involvement is necessary. In summary, Doug stated that he thinks the PRCAC should make a recommendation to the NRC at their September meeting that all baiting and habituating of wildlife creatures through hand feeding should be stopped.

With no further public comment being offered, Paul announced that a tribute to Pete Petoskey at the PRCSF has been cancelled, so as not to conflict with the Petoskey family memorial service and celebration of life scheduled for July 28, 2:30pm at the Petoskey residence in Lewiston, at which all are welcome. Paul also thanked Mike Brown and Doug Mummert for bringing to his attention an interview Pete did in 2013, which Mike had on DVD. If you would like a copy, see Paul at the break.

AGENDA:

Paul asked if members reviewed the amended agenda, the motion to approve was made by Dave Smethurst, seconded by Don Horrocks, all voted in favor of agenda as amended.

MINUTES:

After review of the April 20, 2018 meeting minutes, Sandy Franz made the motion to approve, seconded by Dave Smethurst. All voted in favor of minutes as written, motion approved.

DISCOVERY CENTER UPDATE – SANDY FRANZ AND BRAD GARMON:

Sandy reported that approximately 255 people were in attendance at the Discovery Center (DC) grand opening events over Memorial Day weekend. Since then, approximately 406 visitors have come through the DC. Major plans for the DC steering committee include work bees to prepare the building for winter and on-going fundraising, including the Discovery Center 2018 Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund grant application. The grant application has been chosen by the DNR to review for accessibility. The review by the DNR's in-house accessibility team and the statewide accessibility team has resulted in meetings on how the DC can become more accessible to all visitors. The steering committee is also working to develop educational programming, along with efforts to recruit additional members to serve on the steering committee as more people are needed to assist with day-to-day operations.

Brad Garmon has resigned from the Discovery Center steering committee due to increased work commitments. Alex Cerveniak has agreed to take the position representing the PRCAC on the DC steering committee. Brad expressed great appreciation to everyone who brought the DC vision to fruition, opening the PRCSF in new ways to people.

DNR LAND STRATEGY – KERRY WIEBER:

Kerry reviewed legislation that recently passed called the "DNR Managed Public Land Strategy" (House Bill 4475). In summary, this law has many requirements for the department in matters regarding land acquisitions and divestitures.

Kerry also reviewed Senate Bill 302 (SB 302). The department shall consider selling or exchanging land that is not designated as surplus, this puts most land the state owns on the table. If there is a request made to acquire land, the department must consider the request. The legislation eliminates from consideration all state parks, state recreation areas, state fish hatcheries, state game areas, public landing access sites, which leaves state forest land. Also, to promote public enjoyment of wildlife and natural resources; the department must provide reasonable consideration for both motorized and non-motorized use. If the department receives a written resolution from a recreational user's organization or legislative body of a local unit of government requesting removal of a berm, gate or human made barrier on land under the departments control, the department must go through a review process with requestor, they must be notified if denied, requestor can request public meeting, and the department must have substantial reasons for denial. Final item in SB 302 states that the department must provide a plan that has yearly harvest objectives for all state forest land by forest region for a 10-year period and is required to prepare for sale a minimum of 90% of yearly statewide harvest objectives for timber on state forest land.

Senate Bill 303, sponsored by Senator Darwin Booher, expands the allowable use of money in a state "Land Exchange Facilitation Fund" to include activities, surveys, environmental assessments, certain administrative and transaction costs, payments for natural resources management and maintenance.

Kerry also shared that the DNR recently held a public meeting in Tawas to review the proposal submitted by US Gypsum to acquire 580 acres of state forest land in Iosco County, which is adjacent to their existing quarry,

they are also seeking 140 acres of state held mineral rights. Their proposal has been reviewed by DNR staff at the local, regional and state level, the department recommendation is to approve the proposed acquisition. At the land exchange review committee, chaired by Deputy Director Bill O'Neill, the department suggested that the proceeds from the US Gypsum purchase should go towards acquisition of the Story Lake property.

The Walled Lake property purchase by private owners was not completed, the property is back for sale. The Department is still seeking a Forest Legacy Grant to acquire it, the property made it on the list for 2019, and is being considered for funding by Congress.

Before moving on to the next agenda item, Paul Rose introduced FRD Assistant Chief Shannon Hanna. Shannon worked for the department in Wildlife for 21 years and is currently getting familiar with everyone by visiting every FRD office in the state.

AD HOC GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE – LISHA RAMSDELL:

Paul Rose opened by reminding members that this committee was formed to streamline selection of officers, election process and nomination process. Current members of the ad hoc committee are chairs of the standing committees.

Lisha Ramsdell proposed moving forward with recommendations for changes to the Articles of Organization made at the April 20, 2018 PRCAC meeting. Summary of those changes are to appoint the chair and vice-chair to two-year terms, and that the chair be limited to two terms of service consecutively, with no term limits on the vice-chair position. Another change was to update the ex-officio list, considering motions made at past meetings, and lastly to make minor clerical error corrections to the Articles of Organization. Lisha, as chair of the Governance committee, motioned to amend the Articles of Organization as introduced at the April 20, 2018 PRCAC meeting that include changes to the length and terms of service of the chair and vice-chair, update the ex-officio list, and make minor text updates. Motion supported by Don Horrocks, seconded by Pete Gustafson. With no further discussion, all present voted in favor, motion approved.

Lisha continued with regards to the Nomination Committee charge draft of changes. The PRCAC shall conduct elections of its Chair and Vice-chair in accordance with the Articles of Organization and Governance charge, as adopted by the PRCAC. Individuals considered for positions shall be members of the PRCAC whose terms of service are current or in the process of being extended as of the date of the election. It shall be the function of the Nomination Committee to identify members qualified and willing to serve as Chair or Vice-Chair and offer names to the PRCAC for consideration at the time of election. Nominations for these positions can be advanced by Nomination Committee or by members of the PRCAC at time of elections. The Nomination Committee shall be convened as necessary and be comprised of 3 individuals who serve as Chairs on one of the PRCAC standing committees and are not seeking to serve as chair and vice-chair, or who are otherwise ineligible for service. The three members of the Nomination Committee shall be appointed by the Chair of the PRCAC in accordance with governance documents. In the event that the three-member Nomination Committee cannot be fully comprised of Chairs of standing committees, the PRCAC Chair may appoint other PRCAC members willing to serve on the Nomination Committee. The Chair shall seek to alternate members of the Nomination Committee for future elections, rotating through the Chairs of the standing committees, so as not to have the same three people serve on the Nomination Committee every time. Lisha made the motion to accept the Nomination Committee charge as presented. The motion was supported and seconded, no further discussion, all voted in favor, motion approved.

Lastly, the Governance Committee reviewed the current committee structures, and how they align with the Concept of Management. The Governance Committee proposes that in order to better align with the Concept of Management, to rename certain committees, and have 5 standing committees as follows: 1) Forest Cover & Wildlife Management Committee, 2) Aquatic Resources & Fisheries Management Committee, 3) Recreation & Access Committee, 4) Resource Use & Extraction Committee and 5) Education and Engagement Committee. The expectation is that each committee would have a minimum of 5 members, member involvement on 1 to 2 committees each. Non-advisory council citizens may be appointed to committees as well. Please review, consider and be prepared to vote on these recommendations at the October 2018 PRCAC meeting.

WILDLIFE – HEATHER SHAW:

The Wildlife Committee met at the end of May to discuss Chronic Wasting Disease and discuss possible recommendations to the Director and the NRC from the PRCAC. The result of that meeting was a letter from the PRCAC (copies of which were shared with the members) dated 6/1/2018 which was sent to the NRC, Director Creagh, Deputy Director O’Neill and Wildlife Chief Mason, urging aggressive science-based and geographically expanded CWD response plan. Discussion ensued regarding a baiting ban. Further, the Wildlife Committee met just before the meeting today to review harvest treatments for stands over 40 acres. Motion made to support recommendations made by Wildlife Committee with regards to harvest treatments for stands over 40 acres, motion seconded, no further discussion, all voted in favor, motion approved.

OIL AND GAS – SANDY FRANZ:

Sandy Franz reported that Chair Paul Rose sent a letter to the Director earlier this year to ask that the PRCAC be kept updated during the sale of Merit Energy to a new operator. The PRCSF fields are older and production has declined. This means there is a greater likelihood that more of the sites will go off-line and therefore bond and surety requirements for the new operator will become very important. In June, another letter on the same subject was sent to FRD Chief Deb Begalle.

Bill Loney stated that Merit Energy has sold all its oil and gas assets in Michigan to Lambda Energy based out of Houston, Texas. There will be a transition period while Lambda gets up to speed.

Paul Rose is concerned that the wells in the PRCSF, when no longer economically viable, are properly closed and restored, and that adequate surety and bonding are in place. Discussion ensued regarding marginal wells, economic incentive, secondary recovery and extraction as it relates to the Consent Agreement in PRCSF. Paul Rose asked rhetorically if Lambda has to assume the same successor operator agreement that Merit had, an answer to that question would be good information to start with.

AQUATICS COMMITTEE – LISHA RAMSDELL:

There was good discussion at the last Aquatics Committee meeting as it relates to the sinkhole lakes in the PRCSF. For a long time, sinkhole lakes were closed to the public, as they were fisheries research lakes. The sites had some erosion issues due to steep, sandy banks and some restoration projects were completed. The committee is proposing new watercraft restrictions on each lake, which will require a new Land Use Order of the Director. The top priority is to keep erosion at a minimum. Committee recommendation is to change the existing Land Use Order of the Director, Section 4.34 Item #10 to state “only carry-in non-motorized watercraft may be used from state-owned land on to any of the following described lakes, including all 7 of the sinkhole lakes, Hemlock Lake, Ford Lake, West Lost Lake, Section 4 Lake, Lost Lake, North Twin Lake and South Twin Lake.” This change will result in uniform regulation across all sinkhole lakes, and will also remove

Item #11, which identifies a subset of that, all sinkhole lakes would then be under one Land Use Order. Motion supported by Tim Cwalinski, Fisheries Division, who also pointed out that they are getting rid of the electric motor part of the LUOD for the sinkhole lakes. Motion to support made by Pete Gustafson, seconded by Don Horrocks, after some discussion on wording, all voted in favor, motion passed.

PIGEON RIVER EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE – CHUCK FANSLAW:

The last PRCEC meeting was in March, and the next meeting will take place in August. The PRCEC has been working with Chad Williamson, MSU grad student on his elk study. The committee is working with Paige Perry on getting final trails approved at Stoney Creek, also working on a new trail camp in Cheboygan. The spring work bee at Elk Hill accomplished a great deal to get ready for the riding season. The PRCEC would like to examine the possibility of a solar pump to be installed at the river camp, and a hand pump at group camp. The Director approved installation of a pavilion at the Elk Hill group camp. Scott Whitcomb put together a committee to work on the project, includes Chuck, Scott, Paul Rose, Kelly Kinser, Rich Hill, Brian Mastenbrook, and Keith Cheli. The dimension of the pavilion will be about 30 ft X 40 ft, probably a post and timber structure with a crushed rock base. Keeping in character with the PRCSF is a primary concern of the structure. Equestrian groups are funding the project, which will be gifted to the State of Michigan.

EX-OFFICIO AND DNR STAFF REPORTS:

WILDLIFE DIVISION REPORT – BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

Wildlife completed bear hair snare collection in the northern lower peninsula, 258 sites checked 6 times, results will be available in about one year. Chronic Wasting Disease is an ongoing issue for staff. There will be a 100 Years of Elk celebration, and all PRCAC members will get an invitation to a gathering at the pavilion in downtown Gaylord, September 8th at 5:00pm. There will be a plaque unveiling to commemorate this conservation success story, which will be placed near where the first elk were released in Wolverine.

OIL AND GAS UPDATE – STEVE BUYZE:

Steve reported on the spills that happened over the winter at Forest 1-22 and 1-24 CPF, DEQ is still waiting on some test results. The Charlton 4 spill has been remediated, and no further action letter sent. There are no additional spills to date.

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE – KYLE CHERRY:

Kyle did not have a lot to report tonight, which is a good thing in law enforcement. Some complaints on ORV activity, but doesn't seem above normal. The best way to report observed ORV violations (urgent or non-urgent) is to call or text the RAP hotline. LED is currently preparing for the upcoming hunting season.

FOREST RESOURCES REPORT/PRC UNIT REPORT – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

There have been many volunteer projects in the PRSCF, which Aren Calton, our AmeriCorps member has been overseeing. The Backcountry Hunters and Anglers will be installing the NO ORV signs in the forest. Another big project was completed by Headwaters Chapter of Trout Unlimited, which involved installing erosion control on the Trowbridge Road boating access site. We have also hosted many tours in the PRCSF and the Discovery Center.

The DNR is increasingly using technology as a tool for public interaction, for example the MI-Hunt application, a Forest inventory viewer, and finally, on the PA288 Forest Roads Inventory website (www.michigan.gov/dnr/forestroads) you can drop in a public comment regarding a road for the northern lower peninsula on the forest roads viewer. Comments will be evaluated on an annual basis, if the proposed change is approved by the Director, a new map will be published.

Scott shared that there are two studies in the forest currently using trail cameras. Chad Williamson and Austin Hunt, MSU graduate students are studying the economic value of having elk in the forest. There are many trail cameras in use right now to gather data.

Paul Beachnau inquired as to how does the use of trail cameras fit in with the wild nature of the Pigeon River Country State Forest? Discussion of the use of cameras and monitoring devices in the PRCFS ensued.

FISHERIES DIVISION REPORT – TIM CWALINSKI:

Tim reported that it is time for stream survey season and noted Fisheries Division concerns on trout numbers over on north branch of the AuSable river. Angler reports on the rest of the AuSable have been good, as well as on other streams. There could be many factors to this, and they are still researching the issue. There is a lot of instream habitat work going on in concert with the Upper Black River Council (Tin Shanty reach of Black River). Tim has been having conversation with Huron Pines about Cornwall Flooding maintenance, there was a camera was there to quantify use into an economic value to obtain grant funds. This will involve a total renovation of the site and will be an expensive project. Fisheries owns the dam and can't ignore inspection reports. Stocking of sinkhole lakes was accomplished with standard yearlings being placed in all 7 lakes.

RECREATION REPORT – KELLY KINSER:

Kelly reported that there is new ranger in the PRCFS, her name is Emily Pleiness, and she is doing a great job. Camping numbers are on par with last year, staff getting ready for equestrian season.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Paul Rose will revisit the standing committee discussion, and the use of cameras and monitoring equipment in the forest.

The fall meeting of the PRCAC will take place in October, however, the date is yet to be determined. Scott will poll members in the coming weeks to find a date that works best.

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 9:55PM

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED,

SCOTT WHITCOMB, SECRETARY