

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL
Corwith Township Hall, Vanderbilt, MI
Friday, January 15, 2016

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Friday, January 15, 2016 at the Corwith Township Hall, Vanderbilt, Michigan. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Paul Beachnau, Rique Campa, Tom Deans, Charles Fanslow, Sandy Franz, Brad Garmon, Pete Gustafson, Kurt Jagoda, Brian McPhail, Paul Rose, Brent Shank, Dave Smethurst, John Walters, Drew YoungeDyke

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Eric Ellis, Don Horrocks, Randy Keen, Lisha Ramsdell

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:

Tim Cwalinski, Greg Drogowski, Lindsey Henski, Kelly Kinser, Brian Mastenbrook, Paige Perry, Andy Stempky, Nick Torsky, Scott Whitcomb

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF ABSENT:

Steve Milford

OTHERS PRESENT:

Laurie Andrews, Mike Colburn, Hunter Fodor, Eugen Horan, Joe Jarecki, Judi Jarecki, Carolyn Sharkey, David Sharkey, Stewart Smith.

John Walters welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the Council members. Introductions were made by attendees.

PRESENTATION OF THE VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARD – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

The 'Witness Tree Award' is presented annually to recognize volunteers that go above and beyond the call of duty in the PRC. The RSVP Program of Otsego County stations volunteers at the PRC Visitor Center on weekends. This has been a 22 year partnership in which RSVP volunteers have made over 1,000 contacts annually with the public, making them an integral part of the visitor contact team. Two months ago, RSVP asked to extend their participation through the winter months.

Scott Whitcomb, PRC Unit Manager and John Walters, PRCAC Chair, presented Laurie Andrews, RSVP Volunteer Coordinator, and volunteers Mike Colburn, Carolyn Sharkey and David Sharkey with the Witness Tree Award.

OPENING REMARKS – JOHN WALTERS:

John Walters thanked the departing Council members for their dedication and time served: Mark Ennes, Eugene Horan, Kerry Mase, Jim Supina, Arch Reeves and Jason Melancon. He also welcomed new Council members: Brent Shank, Drew YoungeDyke, Charles Fanslow, Eric Ellis and Brian McPhail. John Walters charged the Council to share their experience and expertise with the new Council members.

Dave Smethurst moved that the Council write a formal letter to the departing Council members thanking them for their years of service. Paul Rose seconded, motion carried.

John Walters updated the council about noteworthy changes to Department staffing. Between Christmas and New Year's, DEQ Director Dan Wyant resigned; Governor Snyder appointed DNR Director Keith Creagh as interim Director of DEQ. Dr. William Moritz will be filling the DNR Director role, and William O'Neill will be filling Dr. William Moritz's position of Deputy Director.

AGENDA – WHITCOMB:

An updated agenda was provided. There is only a slight difference from what was previously emailed. The revised agenda was approved as published.

MINUTES:

Sandy Franz provided an update to the October 2015 meeting minutes. Page 4 of the minutes under Discovery Center Update, states 'Eugene Horan stated that Rudi Edel recently mentioned the porch was going to be resurfaced. Sandy Franz replied that the flagstone needs to allow for ADA access so we can build ramps over the flagstone up to the door.' This should read 'Sandy Franz replied that the SHPO would not allow the flagstone to be sealed or a clear epoxy like coating, so the flagstone will remain as it is. There will be ramps built over parts of the flagstone porch to make the building handicapped accessible pursuant to the ADA'.

Dave Smethurst noted a clarification on page 3. Where it reads, 'At this point, Blue Lakes and Green Timbers are contrary to the Concept of Management. There will be updated trail proposals with maps provided to the five Advisory Council members before the October 27th meeting'. Dave Smethurst clarified that this section should include the word 'equestrian' trail.

Rique Campa stated that on page one under Public Comment, it should be noted Siberian Crab 'Apple'.

With the above amendments, Pete Gustafson motioned to approve the minutes with amendments. Rique Campa seconded. Motion carried.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Joe Jarecki reminded Council members that the High Country Pathway map was recently revised and sells for \$9.00. The PRC book by Dale Clark Franz, was revised in 2008 and sells for \$24.95. Through tonight, you can get both for only \$30.00!

REVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF MANAGEMENT – GUSTAFSON:

Pete Gustafson provided a handout with highlighted excerpts from the Concept of Management for the Pigeon River Country. The Concept of Management should be reviewed periodically, and tonight's review will cover 'recreational use'.

Pete Gustafson summarized passages that discussed recreation from pages 1, 2, 10, 14, and 23-25.

Beginning this year, the Council will undertake a new approach and ask members to take a portion of the Concept of Management to review/revise on a regular basis. John Walters will be reaching out for volunteers.

OIL & GAS – ANDY STEMPKY, DEQ

Andy Stempky provided the most recent Oil & Gas report, which is similar to previous reports. He also reported on the ongoing clean-up at the Charlton 4 facility and a new spill report for the Charlton 7 facility.

Charlton 7 was outside the PRC, one report had the wrong description (report stated Sec. 12 instead of Sec. 7). This was a routine spill, very small in the scheme of things. It was approximately a three barrel spill of oil, and clean-up began immediately, and will be further addressed in the spring.

The Charlton 4 was a large spill, dating back to Shell Western's infrastructure and clean-up efforts are in place. They are using a system where they blow air into the contamination and clean the vapors. The process is going very well, with two "hot spots" remaining.

LAW ENFORCEMENT DIVISION – NICK TORSKY:

With so many new faces on the Council, Nick Torsky reviewed Law Enforcement Division's coverage of the PRC. Nick Torsky and Mark Depew are assigned to Otsego County. Otsego County is split north-south with Nick Torsky covering the northern portion of the county. Cheboygan County is also divided with Eric Bottorff covering the PRC.

Users of the PRC are courteous overall. They seem to recognize that the PRC is different and respect that. Last fall however, there was some blatant and widespread illegal horse activity that will be getting addressed. Nick Torsky reminded the Council that his information is on the Advisory Council Member list. If you have questions or concerns, please email or call; it's better to be informed and ahead of any developing issues.

Sgt. Greg Drogowski explained that law enforcement coverage of the PRC wasn't always assigned to certain officers. Having specific officers assigned to the PRC has really worked well, and officers are familiar with the users and the issues of the PRC.

John Walters commented that the users of the PRC are the eyes and ears. If you see something not quite right, contact law enforcement.

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

There have been shifts in personnel and staffing. William O'Neill has moved up to Deputy Director, and Debbie Begalle stepped up into the Chief's position. It is uncertain how long they will remain in these new roles.

PRC UNIT – SCOTT WHITCOMB:

Forest pests like the emerald ash borer and beech bark disease have been around for the past few years. Spruce Budworm is a native pest and outbreaks are cyclical. There is an outbreak in the U.P. and stands that have high potential of infection will be reviewed within the PRC as well. Salvage sales will be set up before damage is done and the trees die. If any clear cuts larger than 40 acres are identified, they will be brought to the Council for review.

The first phase of the Wildlife Habitat Grant work is complete. We are looking to expand with a second phase of funding to be completed next year. There will be a focus on Inspiration Point and reclaimed oil and gas sites in the forest. Huron Pines put together a handout that is available on the back table.

Staff is working on maps and a Land Use Order of the Director for the next round of equine trails that staff recommended to be opened. This includes 8.5 miles of mapped and signed, designated trail. Some proposals from the Equine Committee were passed by the Council, and some went to a facilitated session. After the facilitated session, the DNR recommended four proposals for approval. These four segments compliment what is on the ground now.

Paul Rose commented that he thought the intent of the Directors request of having a facilitated discussion represented closure on the wish list from the Equine Committee. However, it doesn't sound like closure. Scott Whitcomb replied that the Equine Committee developed a plan at the Directors request. The trails requested by the Equine Committee came through in phases. That is why it is being referenced as 'this round of requests'. But this was the final round of review of the overall equine proposal so the final recommendation can now be moved forward.

Paul Rose suggested the Council put together a recommendation to the Director that this is not an ongoing process. Sandy Franz referenced the initial draft work plan, which included requests for trails within Blue Lakes and Green Timbers. Sandy Franz asked if those requests were still pending. Scott Whitcomb confirmed that those segments are still pending; however, everything else has been addressed. Brad Garmon noted that the work plan outlines a process for the Equine Committee to continue bringing proposals forward when new parcels are acquired by the Department. Scott Whitcomb replied that that is accurate and the DNR would review what opportunities each new parcel presented.

Scott Whitcomb detailed some position changes at the PRC. Secretary Denise Kinsinger transferred to the Gaylord office, and will be replaced by a new hire, Karen Chapman. We also have a new AmeriCorps member, Hunter Fodor. Hunter will be working on some great projects and will be on staff through mid-October.

Great Lakes Relay has approached the DNR to obtain an Event Permit for a running event. Most recently, the event took place on county roads which did not allow the Department any review or oversight. This is a one day event and with Department involvement we could mitigate traffic flow on our roads. Great Lakes Relay has also offered to conduct some trail maintenance on the High Country Pathway in preparation for the event. Staff will review the request from Great Lakes Relay, Standards and Limitation committee will be notified when a proposal is received.

WILDLIFE DIVISION – BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

Deer season has come to a close since the last meeting. Preliminary check station numbers in Gaylord are similar to last season. Brian Mastenbrook conducts a Car/Camp survey every year; this year cars were up, camps were down, and shots were down.

Elk season ended in December. Of 50 permits, 33 of 35 antlerless tags were filled and 13 of 15 any elk tags were filled by state hunters. It was a standard year, with both September and December hunts right in line with what was expected.

The elk survey also started this week. The crew has flown four days so far with 5 more to go. This will set permit quotas for the next two years.

FISHERIES DIVISION – TIM CWALINSKI:

The Fisheries unit out of Gaylord encompasses six different forestry units. Tim Cwalinski provided the unit's 2016 work schedule which highlighted work within the PRC or adjacent areas.

Walled Lake, which is south of Blue Lakes is scheduled to be surveyed in May. There is a possibility the state may purchase this property in the future. If that is a possibility, it makes sense to start gathering baseline data now. The East Branch Black River and Pigeon River at Elk Hill are scheduled in July and August. Pigeon River at Elk Hill is surveyed every three years. This data is proving more and more valuable as years go by. Last August the Department went back in after the fish kill to compare data to historical data.

Tim Cwalinski also discussed temperature monitoring within the Black and Pigeon Rivers, the Foch Lake Dam replacement and invasive species including zebra mussels, quagga mussels, milfoil, didymo, New Zealand mud snail, and European frogbit.

PARKS & RECREATION DIVISION – KELLY KINSER:

Parks and Recreation have entered the slow season. Scott Thompson, Ranger, stationed in the PRC is on layoff. He will be recalled at the end of March. Two seasonal state workers will be hired for the PRC by the end of April with appointments lasting through mid-October. Kelly Kinser is the Supervisor and works out of Otsego Lake State Park, but in the busier season plans to work a day a week out of the PRC.

Rich Hill and Kelly Kinser met with Debbie Jenson on February 4 to discuss Parks and Recreation's Recreation Plan. They are identifying gaps and holes to see what else needs to be developed to move the plan along. Parks and Recreation is also seeing more illegal equine use. They will be working to improve signs and bulletin boards to help educate users. Equine groups will be conducting a work bee in April to do work on the trails. As a heads up, Parks and Recreation also just received a formal proposal to put up a pavilion at Elk Hill. The proposal will be reviewed by managers before being brought to the Council.

COMMITTEE REPORT:

Roads, Trails and Forest Access – Randy Keen

In Randy Keen's absence, Brad Garmon provided an update. Representatives from the Committee met with Equestrian Committee representatives in a facilitated session and were not able to reach resolution. Approximately 11 trails came before the committee, and no agreement with the equestrian committee could be reached, therefore the proposals were left for department staff to make recommendations to the Director.

SPECIAL COMMITTEE REPORT:

PRC Equestrian Committee – Charles Fanslow

Charles Fanslow briefly discussed a proposal on the LeeGrande property. This is outside of the PRC, but it presents an opportunity to remove some pressure from the PRC. The initial request was denied due to a GEMS (Grouse Enhanced Management Site) on the area; however, other potential trails have been identified and those proposals are routing through the DNR now.

The Committee has also been discussing how to ride and leave no trace.

Kelly Kinser has been impressed by the groups at these meetings and their desire to educate members of their groups and more. Also in 2016 a color coded tags system to display in their vehicle will be implemented. This will help identify who is with each group for identification within the group campground.

Charles Fanslow addressed Nick Torsky and said if there is blatant disregard for the rules, write the ticket. Citizens were given adequate time to learn the rules.

OLD BUSINESS

Nominating Committee – Paul Rose

In January, the Nominating Committee conducts their annual organizational meeting. Committee members reached out to the Council member in place at that time and asked for interest and nominations. John Walters and Rique Campa replied with their desire to continue in their roles.

Paul Rose motioned on behalf of the Nominating Committee's proposal to retain John Walters as Chair. Paul Beachnau seconded, motion carried. John Walters motioned to keep Rique Campa as Vice Chair; Drew YoungeDyke seconded, motion carried.

The PRCAC Member roster was passed around for Committee/information updates. Please keep your Committee commitments to three or under and return the rooster to Scott Whitcomb before the end of the meeting.

Song of the Morning Dam Removal – John Walters

John Walters provided a summary and status update on the Song of the Morning Dam Removal project. The dam was removed in late October. Sediment did move and much of it was captured by the sand trap that Golden Lotus is maintaining; in fact Golden Lotus has emptied the trap at least four times in the past 3 months. Once the dam was out slopes were reshaped and the process began to install the timber bridge. There is some site restoration work that will be completed in spring but the river is open for fish passage and the bridge is open for vehicles! There will be a ribbon cutting this spring to celebrate the success of this 8 year project.

John Walters also shared some pictures from the project: fish kill, original site, river channel after dam removal, and the new bridge. Huron Pines delivered a handout that detailed information on the dam removal project as well.

NEW BUSINESS:

Elk Research Project – Rique Campa

Professor Rique Campa discussed an elk research project that will begin in February 2016. This project is collaboration between several partners including Michigan State University and the DNR. The project was initially proposed about 10 years ago, and will finally be funded. The project will be looking at two challenging aspects of elk management in northern Michigan; how do they react to recreational users, and habitat potential.

Do recreational users impact wildlife? If so, with increased tourism, managers are faced with minimizing the potential impacts of disturbances, as disturbances can alter movement onto private land influencing forest/agriculture damage and access.

Project objectives are:

- 1) Quantify elk habitat potential in the core and peripheral regions of the elk range.
- 2) Quantify the number and relative intensity, frequency, and geographical scope of recreation users in the core and peripheral regions of the elk range (horseback riders and mountain bike riders).
- 3) Quantify temporal elk movement and habitat selection patterns in response to the number and relative intensity, frequency, and geographic scope of recreational users in the core and peripheral regions of the elk range.

4) Quantify fine scale responses (behavior, spatially, temporally) of radio-collared elk to experimentally applied recreational disturbances (doing field and computer software simulations).

Directors Charge to the Advisory Council, Review and Evaluation – Paige Perry

Paige delivered a presentation on the 11 charges to the Advisory Council that were given by Director Gene Gazlay in 1974 and remain in effect today. Advisory Council members were asked to assess their collective performance in each of the 11 charges. The assignment was given as homework and will be addressed at a future meeting.

FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:

Future PRCAC Meeting Dates:

Friday, April 15 at 6:00 PM – Charlton Township Hall in Johannesburg

Thursday, July 21 at 6:00 PM – PRC HQ (including a tour organized by the Education and Outreach Committee)

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

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 10:04 p.m.