

OFFICIAL MINUTES
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters, Vanderbilt, Michigan
Thursday, July 21,2016

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council (PRCAC) was held on Thursday, July 21, 2016 at the Pigeon River Country State Forest Headquarters, Vanderbilt, Michigan. Chairman John Walters called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m., opening with the Pledge of Allegiance.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Paul Beachnau, Rique Campa, Tom Deans, Chuck Fanslow, Sandy Franz, Brad Garmon, Pete Gustafson, Don Horrocks, Randy Keen, Bill Loney, Lisha Ramsdell, Dave Smethurst, John Walters, Drew YoungeDyke.

MEMBERS ABSENT:

Eric Ellis, Brian McPhail,Paul Rose, Brent Shank.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF PRESENT:

Karen Chapman, Kelly Kinser, Rich Hill, Tim Cwalinski, Scott Whitcomb, Sandra Clark, Nick Torsky.

EX-OFFICIO & DEPARTMENT STAFF ABSENT:

Steve Milford, Brian Mastenbrook, Andy Stempky.

OTHERS PRESENT:

Judi Jarecki, Dale Franz, Ray Hoobler, Lyle Horsell, Eugene Horan, Hunter Fodor, Krista Dickerson.

OPENING REMARKS – JOHN WALTERS:

Walters welcomed everyone to the meeting on behalf of the Council members. Introductions were made around the room by all attendees. The floor was opened to public comment, no public comments made at this time. Walters introduced new PRCAC member Bill Loney of Merit Energy, who is replacing Kurt Jagoda. Walters commended Jagoda (who was not present) for a job well done, and thanked him for his service.

Walters expressed thanks and appreciation for the successful Pigeon River Country State Forest Community Leader Tour that Brad Garmon and the Education and Engagement Committee conducted today. About 23 people attended the tour. The tour gave all attendees a better appreciation of the Pigeon River Country State Forest.

Other items of note – effective 8/1/2016, Keith Creagh is back as director of the DNR. Concurrently, it was announced that effective 8/1/2016, Heidi Grether has been appointed as the new director of the DEQ. Also – when you get out and visit other state wilderness areas, you'll see that the PRCSF is special!

AGENDA:

After review of the agenda, Sandy Franz motioned to accept agenda as presented, Rique Campa seconded. With no further discussion, voice vote taken, motion carried.

MINUTES:

Paul Beachnau made a motion to approve the minutes from the Friday, April 15,2016 meeting. Don Horrocks seconded. With no further discussion, voice vote taken, motion carried.

REVIEW OF THE CONCEPT OF MANAGEMENT - BRAD GARMON:

Reviewed the role of an advisory council member by going back to the origins of the council, starting with the fight against oil and gas development in the PRCSF back in the early 60's and 70's - which was a statewide issue at the time. Noted the Michigan Legal Milestone historical landmark (at Treetops Resort) of the 1979 Michigan Supreme Court decision that led to the *extraordinary agreement between state government, oil industry and environmental groups - tightly regulated drilling in the southern one-third of the PRCSF - all under the watchful eye of the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council*. The PRCAC is the only council like it in the state - no other council in Michigan for a state forest, or special wilderness area. Its primary role - quoting from the Concept of Management is "to advise DNR director by written reports of its views in regard to these matters, to develop public support and local cooperation for programs adopted for this unit" - Garmon thinks current council could do better on both of these; also "to ensure that no single interest will gain unjustified dominance over others in the management or use of area" - this is a challenging job because of the many competing uses of the PRCSF.

Garmon then went back to 1974 DNR directors' 11 charges to PRCAC and highlighted 4 charges relating to the role of an advisory council member:

- 1) *To become familiar as maybe necessary with the physical characteristics, values of the PRCSF, including patterns of public use.* Garmon encouraged members to get out and find something new to see in the Forest.
- 6) *To identify as quickly as possible major problems which appear to be endangering the wildlife - species of elk, bobcat and bear, and to assist the department in finding solutions to control these problems.* Garmon recommends that the council expands more to forestry issues and diseases which endanger the forest today - how do we get up to speed on those diseases and how to assist the DNR in management.
- 9) *Help develop and crystallize public support for all programs which the council and department agree to, including financial support.* For example, the PRCSF Community Leader Tour held today.
- 11) *Make recommendations to the directors on policy and program issues that may arise.* The DNR Director and staff is interested in what this group is doing and talking about - if we don't tell them - they don't know, we can focus more on this.

STANDARDS AND LIMITATIONS - PETE GUSTAFSON:

The Committee met on May 12, 2016 to consider the application made by the Great Lakes Relay 2016 Event for use of portions of the PRCSF. Chairman Walters asked the committee to review and make recommendations to PRCSF Unit Manager Whitcomb. The race has taken place in portions of the PRCSF previously, and new ideas were explored to minimize impact. Whitcomb came up with a new and improved plan that minimized vehicle traffic (kept vehicles at the periphery), and other impacts on the PRCSF. Committee recommendation as follows:

- 1 The event will be conducted in accordance with the vehicle use plan proposed by the Unit Manager to limit traffic.
- 2 The Fisherman Road segment will be eliminated from vehicle use, with a different county road route to be used in this area.
- 3 The event planners will be advised that the race may take place in the PRC not more frequently than every three years, with a suggestion that the organizers consider a weekday rather than weekend segment in the PRC for future events. (Whitcomb commented that this option doesn't work for the race schedule).
- 4 The event planner will be required to provide volunteers to perform improvements and maintenance in connection with the year's race.

- 5 The event should be used as an education and outreach opportunity to provide race participants and supporters with information on the special values of the Big Wild. (Sandy Franz indicated the new Discovery Center may have an information piece that could be distributed with race materials, in coordination with the Advisory Council's Education and Engagement Committee).

Kinser – 80 plus teams participated, which equates to about 800 runners. The plan Scott Whitcomb came up with was great, and was well received by event planners. One runner got lost, other than that, no major issues. Positive item – event organizers came in and did a lot of trail work to prepare for event, and donated supplies. After the event, the race organizer reached out to us and asked how the race went from our perspective.

Whitcomb – Scott Thompson went above & beyond to work with the group on improvement of the trails, the end results were very beneficial for the forest.

Motion made by Drew YoungeDyke to accept recommendations of Standards & Limitations Committee, seconded by Paul Beachnau, voice vote taken, motion passed.

EDUCATION AND ENGAGEMENT COMMITTEE - BRAD GARMON:

The committee has been working on the PRCSF Community Leaders Tour - Garmon passed around the itinerary from the tour today. Thanks to the committee for all their work, and thanks especially to Whitcomb and his team, and of note, FRO picked up the tab for food and bus services. Tour was a great success, would have liked to get more community leaders to attend (about 10) – but they were hard to get.

Walters encouraged critique of tour, think about how we can make it better and start planning for next year. Using a bus for transportation, instead of carpooling was a great idea, allowed everyone to inter-mingle and get to know one-another.

Garmon - The next item the Education & Engagement Committee will work on are the Directors' 11Charges to the PRCAC. In addition, another item we will explore is helping the PRCSF find funding to do some of the work that needs to be done, i.e. opportunities with Great Lakes Fisheries Trust, etc.

Walters – Clarification to all, the council can recommend funding opportunities to the Department or other organizations, however, NOT directly to the PRCAC, as the council does not hold funds.

AQUATICS COMMITTEE - LISHA RAMSDELL:

With regards to conservation partner updates, Ramsdell reviewed some current projects – the road stream crossing projects in Cheboygan, Montmorency and Presque Isle Counties, the streambank erosion control project on Canada Creek, and on the Black River (at Town Corner Stairs), McMasters Creek and in stream habitat. The latter two projects are located just outside of the PRCSF boundaries.

Ramsdell also reminded everyone about the Ribbon Cutting ceremony and celebration on Wednesday, August 31, 2016, at the Song of the Morning dam removal and river restoration site. Celebrating the Pigeon River – A River Made Whole!

Next steps for the Aquatics Committee, with inspiration from the work done by the Education and Engagement Committee, would like to become more proactive and determine what are the priorities in the PRCSF. Committee members will be contacted to work on drafting a committee charge and to establish priorities.

Walters – The New Zealand Mud snail is an emerging invasive, already in our waters; we need to be proactive on cleaning boats, paddles, etc. Also "rock snot" a/k/a didymo algae – attaches to rocky surfaces. Get familiar and educate yourselves on these invasives, we CANNOT do nothing.

Cwalinski - Invasive species will outcompete native species for food, entire system gets out of balance.

Ramsdell – These invasive species are hard to kill, we must educate and inform on this subject.

DISCOVERY CENTER UPDATE - SANDY FRANZ:

To date, approximately \$47,000 has been spent on improvements to the physical plant of the Discovery Center. Reminded all of the May 20th work day, The AmeriCorps Russ Mawby Signature Day of Service, coordinated by Huron Pines – 131 volunteers participated, power washed the exterior of the building, washed all windows, washed wood walls in living room and dining room, painted kitchen and bedrooms, constructed a (313 ft.) ADA compliant gravel pathway, which was a huge job – laid down 7 beds of native plants, flowers and shrubs, and started clearing work on a proposed 3 mile loop trail connecting the Discovery Center with the Witness Tree and the P.S. Lovejoy monument. Several PRCA members deserve special mention, including Joe Jarecki, Eugene Horan, Ray Hoobler and Rudi Edel, among others, who worked hard after the event to complete the gravel pathway.

To design the center exhibits, we hired the "Good Design Group" with offices located in Midland and Ypsilanti. They were the cheapest of four companies solicited, will design exhibits and help us find vendors for fabrication of exhibits. Major fund raising efforts are beginning, having pursued and already gotten grants from Great Lakes Energy, the Otsego County Community Foundation, also most recently from the Community Financial Credit Union. Exhibits developed will be rotating, including elk of the Big Wild, Hemingway and the Pine Barrens, managing the Pigeon River Country State Forest, history of P.S. Lovejoy and Herman Lunden, the Civilian Conservation Corps., and development of the Concept of Management, educate people and develop the next generation of stewards – conflict, compromise and collaboration, the 1970s oil and gas controversy, . The establishment of the Michigan Natural Resources Trust Fund, the Pigeon River Dam removal, and the science and current management challenges of the PRCSF. Planning on an interactive area for kids that will have hands-on activities. Also want to incorporate a lot of the oral histories we have from Lyle Horsell (son of the first forester who lived in the building), Dave Smethurst, Ned Caveny and Arch Reeves.

EASEMENT EXCHANGE - SCOTT WHITCOMB:

A couple of years ago, the Department purchased the 148 acre Skiba parcel, south of SOM containing 1.2 miles of Pigeon River frontage. The existing easement was geared to single family access, not really meant for public use. The Department is working with SOM to do an easement exchange. The exchange would grant them legal easement from Sturgeon Valley Rd. by their sign to the boundary of their property, which is a 600 foot section of state forest road, where their sign is alongside that road. In exchange the state would gain access through SOM to Skiba tract. This is a win-win situation for both parties. At this time, both parties have agreed to the easement exchange conceptually – hopefully the exchange will be approved by the October PRCAC Meeting. There will be about X mile of new road construction at the end of Rd. 111 that will tie into existing road system – south of Enbridge pipeline.

Smethurst – Motioned that PRCAC council approve of easement exchange in conception as outlined by Whitcomb, motion seconded by Sandy Franz. Voice vote taken, motion carried.

LEGISLATIVE BILLS UPDATE - DREW YOUNGEDYKE:

Legislature has been on break for a little over a month. Senate Bills 39 & 40 are a package of bills, briefly described, that makes it harder for the Department to acquire land, and appears to make it easier for private

entities to purchase public land and influences how the DNR manages land. Requires a public meeting prior to any berm put on a road. Committee hearings, some contentious, have been held, the bill has not moved out of committee yet, still in Senate Natural Resources Committee.

Bill 5275 passed the House, YoungeDyke thinks it passed the Senate Committee, the bill makes forest roads open unless posted closed for ORV use, and requires the state forest road inventory Whitcomb is working on. The bill was introduced by Representative Tristan Cole. Walters will review the letter of PRCAC general concern with regards to this bill drafted by Garmon to the Department and will forward to all council members for review and discussion.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS IN THE PRC - SCOTT WHITCOMB:

Governor Snyder & Mrs. Snyder and their family visited the PRCSF on July 7, 2016, PRC staff took the group elk viewing (elk did not cooperate), had lunch at the PRC HQ and enjoyed a 1 Yi hour kayak float on the Black River.

AQUATICS PROGRAM OVERVIEW/FISHERIES - TIM CWALINSKI:

Cwalinski outlined Fisheries projects within the PRCSF, on the Pigeon River, Sturgeon River, Black River, 7 sinkhole lakes and Pickerel Lake. Described a project evaluating the use of state owned structures using trail cameras at the Cornwall Flooding launch site. Discussion ensued regarding the competing interests of individual privacy and the gathering of useful research data using trail cams. Cwalinski also reviewed the 2016 sea lamprey treatment schedule, starts in August and September. Using chemical treatments in the water to mitigate sea lampreys is for the greater good. Looking to use sterile male lamprey release program as a mitigation tool instead of putting chemicals in the rivers. Also talked about gill lice on brook trout – look for white specks on gills. Trout Trails is an online navigation and informational tool for anglers.

WILDLIFE DIVISION REPORT - BRIAN MASTENBROOK:

No report, Mastenbrook not present.

OIL AND GAS UPDATE - ANDY STEMPKY:

No report, Stempky not present.

LAW ENFORCEMENT UPDATE - NICK TORSKY:

Short update tonight, not a lot to report. Fishing has been good, and we have had a few campground issues. The January 2017 academy is on hold, to start again in July 2017. Walters thanked Torsky for his service.

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

Due to the success of the Huron Pines AmeriCorps program at the PRCSF, the program will be expanded to 10 more DNR sites in 2017.

PRC UNIT REPORT- SCOTT WHITCOMB:

We've had a lot going on this summer, from the Governors visit, to the external Forest Certification audit, and Forestry open house. We must be dual certified through the Forest Stewardship Council and the Sustainable Forest Initiative. There is a HUGE economic consequence if we do not pass the audit. We have hosted a lot of volunteer efforts, and had a presence again this year at Yogafest. We have a good partner in the Song of the Morning. Hunter & Krista have been doing a great job, accomplishing, among other thing, an e-bird hotspot, and invasive plant survey. With regards to timber sales, if the foresters are suggesting treatments over 40 acres, we'll get those packaged up and to the wildlife committee for review. The Open House will be on

Wednesday, August 31 from 2pm – 6pm. We will have a formal program, and Sandy and Rudi will be available to give tours of the Discovery Center.

RECREATION REPORT - KELLY KINSER:

Camping numbers are up this year, seems that trail use is down, may be due to hot weather. We have had a lot of positive volunteer work completed. The High Country Pathway Bridge on the Black River will be removed shortly, waiting for engineering review. Have re-issued a press release regarding the High Country Pathway detour around bridge. Regarding a forest-wide recreation plan, staff is reviewing and planning next steps on creating a plan.

FUTUREAGENDA ITEMS:

Future PRCAC Meeting Dates:

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

ADJOURN:

Meeting adjourned at 9:35 p.m.