

**Official Minutes**  
PIGEON RIVER COUNTRY EQUESTRIAN COMMITTEE  
February 23, 2016

A meeting of the Pigeon River Country Equestrian Committee (PRCEC) was held on February 23, 2016 at the Roscommon DNR office. Chairman Dick Kleinhardt called the meeting to order at 12:34.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Dick Kleinhardt, Kerry Mase, Chuck Fanslow, Vicki Reinhardt, Bonnie Cornelius, and Darlene Alexander.

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Don Horrocks, Charlotte Prochazka, Norma Laine, Carol Clute, Barb Curtis and Carol Hyzer

**EX-OFFICIO PRESENT:** Forest Division: Scott Whitcomb - PRCSF Manager  
Wildlife Division: Brian Mastenbrook – Fields Operations Manager.  
Parks and Recreation Division: Anna Sylvester - Northern Fields Operations Chief,  
Richard Hill – Gaylord District Supervisor, Kelly Kinser – Supervisor of Otsego Lake State Park and PRCSF Campgrounds and Trails

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Connie Kleinhardt, Dr. Rique Campa and Chad Williamson

The meeting started with the Pledge of Allegiance.**COMMENTS FROM CHAIR:** Dick Kleinhardt thanked Kerry Mase for serving on the Pigeon River Country Advisory Council since April of 2011. Chuck Fanslow has recently been appointed to the Advisory Council in her place.

**APPROVAL OF MEETING MINUTES:** **Motion** to approve the amended minutes for the December 16, 2015 Meeting was made by Chuck Fanslow and seconded by Vicki Reinhardt. Motion carried.

**APPROVAL OF REVISED AGENDA:** **Motion** to accept the revised agenda was made by Darlene Alexander seconded by Vicki Reinhardt. Motion carried.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

**Elk Research in PRCSF and Camp 30 Area:**

Dr. Rique Campa, Michigan State University, Department of Fisheries and Wildlife.

Dr. Rique Campa spoke about the Elk Research that is underway in the Pigeon River Country State Forest and the Camp30 area. The three components of the research are the seasonal movement of elk, elk habitat and the effect of human activity on the movement of elk.

Dr. Campa reviewed the four objectives of the study: ( 1) Quantify elk habitat potential in the core (PRCSF) and peripheral regions (camp 30 area) (2) Quantify the number and

relative intensity, frequency and geographic scope of horseback and mountain back users within these two areas of the elk range (3) Quantify temporal elk movement and habitat selection in response to horseback riding and mountain bike use (4) Quantify the fine scale responses of elk to experimentally applied recreational disturbances.

The Elk Research will be looking at locations of vegetative types that meet elk needs over time within the PRCSF and Camp 30 areas and identify areas that have good potential for future elk habitat enhancement. The research will identify where the elk are spending their time seasonally. “Focusing habitat management practices in these selected areas may also help minimize elk dispersal reducing agricultural damage and facilitating hunting and viewing.” Dr. Campa acknowledged that quality of habitat was the primary cause of elk dispersal.

Dr. Campa acknowledged that elk like predictability. Elk’s flight behavior has been significantly affected by hunting. In fact, as a result of the elk’s flight response to hunters, researchers can no longer get close enough to the elk to use tranquilizer guns in order to collar them. When people stay on a trail the elk do not have any problem with their presence and there is a low probability of flight. If elk do move they do not go far and return to the area quickly. The equestrians at the meeting shared that this is consistent with what we have experienced. Elk just go about their business when they see horseback riders on the trail. Elk come into our camp and even lay down when we are camping with our horses.

Dr. Campa felt that because this research is looking at the habitat, seasonal elk movement patterns and elk reaction to recreational use it will give the Department additional and more complete information to be used in their elk management planning. Dr. Campa asked that the PRCEC be involved in the experimentally applied exposure of horseback riding to the elk. Anna Sylvester, Parks and Recreation Division said that it would be good to have the PRCEC involved in this research because equestrians would like to show that horseback riding is not a problem. Dr. Campa said that he would provide updates to PRCEC as the research progressed and share information regarding habitat and elk behavior.

The PRCEC went into an Executive Session to discuss this and concluded that it was important for equestrians to have representation in this study, to monitor aspects of the study first hand in order to be kept “in the loop” regarding results. Dick Kleinhardt said with our group being actively involved, we will be able to show them a positive rather than a negative interaction between the elk and horses. This will hopefully open their eyes to what we have been saying all along, that it is not the horses driving the elk out of their habitat. PRCEC members present today decided that they were in favor of participating in the research and that input would also be sought from members who were not present today.

**UNFINISHED BUSINESS:**  
**Land Owners Request for Access**

Vicki Reinhardt reported that she had not yet had an opportunity to meet with DNR about this issue. Anna Sylvester suggested that a Trail Proposal be put together. Richard Hill encouraged Vicki to get input from other land owners to see what would fit the needs of most. Dick Kleinhardt requested that Vicki work with DNR staff, Kelly Kinser and Paige Perry and report back to this group at the next meeting.

### **Spring Work Bee**

Kelly Kinser, PRD Supervisor of Otsego State Park and Campgrounds in PRCSF provided a prioritized list of the work that needed to be done in both equestrian campgrounds and on the EQ trails. The work in order of priority is: trail clean-up, tree trimming within both campgrounds, bulletin board and other signage “refreshing”, picket post replacement and fence replacement.

Brian Mastenbrook, Field Operations Manager for Wildlife Division said that the original date for the work bee is in conflict with Turkey Hunting season and the date needed to be changed to April 8 – 10. The gates to the group campground will be opening on the 7<sup>th</sup> for the volunteers who have longer travel time in order for them to be ready to work early on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Bonnie Cornelius will be providing work vests for all the volunteers.

### **Status of Connector/Trails Requests**

Scott Whitcomb, Manager PRCSF, provided a copy of the Land Use Order that will be presented as Information Only at the March Natural Resources Commission meeting by the DNR Director, Bill Moritz. The intent will be to sign the LUO at the April 14 NRC meeting. Once the LUO is signed 14 new connector/trails will be legal to ride, which will significantly increase the number of short and medium loop trails in the area close to the two equestrian campgrounds. Work on these connectors needs to wait until the LUO is signed. Another work bee will need to be scheduled.

Three additional connector/trails and portions of three of the connector/trails that are currently being approved are also being considered by the Department for approval, but input needs to first be sought from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services since license fee land is involved. Anna Sylvester said that the USFWS will be conducting a scheduled audit in Michigan later this summer. A final decision by MDNR about these additional connectors may not be made until next year.

### **PARKS AND RECREATION DIVISION -RECREATIONAL MANAGEMENT PLAN FOR PRCSF**

Richard Hill, DNR Gaylord District Supervisor, reported that the first phase of developing a recreational plan for PRCSF is almost complete. This involved the review of all relevant DNR Division Management Plans for the area and the development of a template for their own plan. State Parks have plans of this nature but this will be a first for a State Forest. There will be reviews of the Draft plan within the DNR and input sought from stakeholders and the public. The likely time line for completion of a final plan will be two years.

Richard said that it was recommended that equestrians wait until the PRD Recreational Management Plan is completed before equestrians apply for permission to build a permanent pavilion at the group horse campground.

### **Status of Equestrian loop Trails in Stoney Creek area**

Anna Sylvester, PRD Chief Northern Field Operations, reported that she checked the Department's Trail Database and was not able to find the Trail Proposal for the Stoney Creek area. She will contact Paige Perry, Recreational Trails Specialist to inquire about the status of this Trail Proposal.

### **Pavilion**

Darlene Alexander researched design and cost of a permanent pavilion for the group EQ campground. Fund raising has already begun by the Alpena Horsemen's Club. However, on recommendation of PRD a formal request for a permanent pavilion will not be made until after the PRC Recreational Management Plan is completed. In the meantime, Kelly Kinser, suggested that one or more equestrian clubs could consider the option of making a request for a temporary pavilion. If approved by the Department, the temporary structure would have to be purchased by the equestrians, put up, taken down and stored by them at the end of the season. Darlene agreed to look at different options.

### **FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS:**

Report on spring work bee  
Land owner's trail request  
PRD Recreational Management Plan update  
Equestrian loop trails in Stoney Creek area  
Temporary pavilion options

**ADJOURN:** Meeting was adjourned at 3:45

Respectfully Submitted,  
Kerry K. Mase  
Secretary